

Your Home

Six ways to live large and well in small spaces



Kimberley Seldon
Right at Home

Whether you're a first-time homebuyer, an empty nester, or are making the transition from suburban to city living, diminishing floor space is a modern reality. Here are six small space strategies that can help keep you livin' large.

1. Incorporate vertical elements to utilize every inch of space.

Tall bookshelves, stately armoires, and floor-to-ceiling shelving are some of the elements that take advantage of vertical space. Opt for kitchen cabinets that go all the way to the ceiling.

Consider a Murphy bed when a room is needed to accommodate an occasional overnight guest. "Its ability to disappear fully into the wall makes it ideal for occasional use and means it can sit discreetly in just about any room in the house," says Chris King, owner of The Wall Bed King.

You can visually emphasize a room's height and distract the eye from limited floor space by hanging striped wallpaper — ideal for entrance halls.

2. Emphasize negative space.

Designers and architects include negative space when possible to visually expand a room's size. (Negative space refers to the areas of emptiness that surround an item of furniture, like the underside of a coffee table.)

Select furniture with legs instead of skirts, incorporate glass

where possible, and add reflective elements such as mirror, crystal, and silver to the interior. This amplifies available light and legroom to create a feeling of vastness.

Choose furniture with narrow arms rather than over-stuffed, rolled versions and opt for a sectional sofa with no arms. It can be repositioned in the event of a move and will be easier to manoeuvre through narrow doorways and into apartment elevators.

3. Maximize storage space.

Most small rooms benefit from built-in or modular furniture to effectively utilize every inch of space vertically and horizontally.

A banquette in a diminutive kitchen provides optimum seating and hidden storage. In open-concept rooms, built-ins such as bookcases offer much-needed storage, help contain clutter (essential in small spaces), and define individual rooms without enclosing them.

Nitty Gritty Reproductions owner David Ross says his custom-designed sleigh-bed (with an under-the-bed cedar drawer) is one of his best-sellers.

4. Fool the eye with large-scale drama.

Occasionally designers will break all the rules and go for large-scale drama within a small room. An exuberant approach, such as large floral patterned walls, visually frees up space and sets a dramatic backdrop for entertaining. You can also try this technique in powder rooms.

Alternatively, opt for several larger pieces of furniture to suggest opulence and drama: expansive moods that counterbalance the narrowness of diminutive quarters.

5. Use monochromatic colour schemes.

Monochromatic colour schemes, where all colours are kept close in tone and value, visually expand a room's dimensions. Without contrast (the strong distinction between two values such as black and white), the eye is able to move through a room uninterrupted, creating an illusion of additional space. Create interest by incorporating a variety of textures within monochromatic schemes.

6. Choose flexible furnishings.

In today's modern homes, rooms are often required to provide more than one function, so multi-purpose furniture accommodates flexibility. A guest may be temporarily housed in the dining room, living room, or home office by including a built-in banquette. A large banquette provides ample seating for visitors who are looking for somewhere to curl up and read or watch TV; and once the cushions are removed, the banquette seating becomes a bed.

Select furniture that does double duty — a coffee table that rises to eating height or a pair of console tables that can be pushed together to form an impromptu dining table.

Dare to dream big, even in a small space and your rooms can be a triumph of style over size.

Sources

Nitty Gritty Reproductions — 170 King St. E., (416) 364-1393; The Wall Bed King — 248 King St. E., (416) 364-6094.

Kimberley Seldon is the host of Design for Living on Toronto One weekdays at 1:30 p.m. and decorating editor of *Style At Home* magazine. Visit her Web site at www.kimberleyseldon.com. E-mail: yourhome@thestar.ca. She cannot answer individual decorating questions.