



by Catherine Fantauzzi
First Impressions Décor

Give me more living space

Small space decorating is an intense topic. These smaller and sometimes oddly shaped spaces offer unique challenges in decorating.

Whether you are a young professional or an empty-nester, follow the rules of smart interior design when decorating smaller size spaces. Throw in a little creativity and flexibility and break some of the small space rules regarding colour, room functions and other decorating elements. Think priorities. How do you want to use your space? Do you work at home? Do you like to entertain? Do you need room for exercise equipment? How many people will live in the space? Are you a collector?

Small space living is possible. It can work but it requires an understanding of the essentials of small space living to make the most of every bit of space you have. You should be able to feel there is unity to the design and that it flows between each room.

Measure Twice, Buy Once. Have your dimensions of the condo or house

in hand including door and window locations. Take inventory of the items you already own: furniture, audio/visual equipment, and appliances before you move. This will not only make the move itself easier, but it will let you see which furniture will fit best. Most home purchasers do not realize until they have



moved in, that their current belongings or new purchases do not fit in their new space. If you cannot understand floorplans or cannot visualize the scale of certain items within the new space, hire a decorating and design professional to assist you.

Think Vertical. The most under-used place in any space is the two or three feet just below the ceiling. Instead of a three- or four-foot tall bookcase, think about a seven-foot one. If you can, mount shelves high up on the walls, over windows and doors, or above kitchen cabinets.

Stretch your Small Space with Colour. Choose the colour of your hard finishes (flooring, cabinetry, trim, counters) carefully since you may be living with them for years. Wall colour can breathe life into any size space. Decorating professionals encourage experimentation with paint because it is inexpensive and easy to apply. Use accent colours to punch up neutrals such as sage, lavender, metallics, or burnt sienna whether it's on the walls

or fabrics, art and accessories. The wood trim should be the same colour throughout. Flooring colour tones should be consistent for flow and unity. Area carpets can define the different areas of a space.

Use Layered Lighting. Proper lighting is essential in any space. Layer light sources at different heights to give the illusion of a larger space. Combine natural, general, task and ambient lighting to create function and drama.

Elevate the ceiling. Hang vertical, instead of horizontal, artwork. Use tall items around a room such as a tall plant, sculpture or cabinet. Ceiling mouldings can make a ceiling seem higher if they are painted the same colour.

Create Optical Illusions. Mirrors reflect light and create a view, giving the impression that open space lies beyond. Mirrors add size to a room. Glass allows the eye to travel around a room uninterrupted and helps lighten heavy furnishings. Objects placed on glass seem to float in space.

Use Multifunctional Furniture. Any piece of furniture that can do dou-

ble duty will save space. Don't over-furnish or over-crowd a room. Mix a variety of styles and sizes. For an airier feeling, look for furniture that is in proportion to the space. Some pieces are multifunctional. Sofa beds, coffee tables/ottomans with concealed storage, tables that double for dining and work as well as armoires that can fit the TV and stereo. Look for decorative end tables that lift up to become file cabinets.

Think Scale. A few carefully chosen pieces of furniture can actually make a room seem larger. But only use big when it makes sense, and always consider traffic flow. Group furniture together if possible, it makes the space feel more connected. Generally, use pieces that are not only cohesive to your space but also fit including artwork, lighting, area carpets and accessories keeping in mind scale and proportion.

Use Textures, Shapes and Patterns. Use a consistent pattern that helps the eye travel completely around the room. Use a variety of styles, shapes and textures to give a



room personality and aesthetic interest.

Get Organized. Eliminate clutter, it takes up space, lots of it. Have a closet organizer installed to maximize the vertical space in your closets. Think of atypical storage places and buy furniture with drawers. A storage unit built beneath a window also can function as a window seat. Get space-saving items – stacking cubes, shelving, over-the-door racks.

Treat Your Windows. Simple is best. Cover a window with blinds or shades for privacy and light control. Drapery can eat up space or require space that you don't have. If you have purchased a condo, check with your builder for any restrictions to the type of window treatments you are considering. Make several clever adaptations to make the room seem larger, such as extending the window drapery beyond the window frame or building window seats if space allows.

Hire a Decorating Professional. Now that we have established what to use in small spaces, where can you find all these things? In the last couple of years, many decorating professionals, myself included, have been faced with the challenge of sourcing these items for their clients. Fortunately, trade manufacturers and suppliers have started to meet that demand by offering custom designed pieces made with these smaller environments in mind.

Decorating professionals are trained and qualified to analyze the space and formulate design concepts that are appropriate, aesthetic and functional. Hire a decorating professional to help you.

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