

LIVING LARGE *in a small space*

Karen Sealy of Toronto's Sealy Design loves the challenge of cramming the most function into a small space. After all, she spent nearly two of her teenage years living aboard a 36-foot sailboat with four other people. It took creativity to organize the few possessions she had carefully selected to take along, and this kind of ingenuity is something she takes pride in when consulting clients. Who better to ask for some small-space decorating tips? **PRODUCER** MARY LEVITSKI



START WITH A PLAN

Establish what your needs are – today, next year, five years from now. Ask yourself: “How long will I be here?” and “How will my needs change?” Make decisions from there. You don’t have to design for resale or retirement, but keep the future in mind and investigate flexible solutions. Think adjustable furniture, such as cribs that convert into beds and free-standing pieces instead of built-ins.

ASSESS THE ACCESS TO YOUR SPACE

When thinking about and measuring for what you can fit in your home, be sure to also evaluate the size of the stairwell, hallway or elevator that stands between your space and the great big world. Better safe than sorry on this one.

During construction, if the windows are being replaced, take advantage of those big gaping holes as entryways for oversized items. As Karen says: "Just be sure you love the piece, because, depending on the window format, it's likely to be in there for the long haul."



**EMPHASIZE
BOTH THE
HORIZONTAL
AND THE
VERTICAL**

Get the biggest rug for your space – it will make the room appear larger. And hang drapery right to the ceiling to create the illusion of greater height. One exception: If you've got crown moulding, give it a few inches of breathing room.

Instead of including a breakfast table in the kitchen and a dining table in the living room, dedicate a single eating zone – perhaps a nook at the kitchen counter. That way, you'll get a sizable living space without compromising your need for a place to sit and enjoy meals.

MULTIPLY, DON'T DUPLICATE FUNCTION



tricks
FROM
KAREN'S
PLAYBOOK

If you have more than one seating area in a room, set them all at the same height. That way, when you need extra seating, you can pull up a chair from the other set without anyone towering or cowering.

TRY USING DARK COLOURS

In spite of what you've heard, dark colours can work quite well in a compact area. They have a receding quality that tricks the eye – that's why we love them for our clothes! They're especially great for achieving a dramatic or cozy feel. Just be mindful of oft-overlooked elements like baseboards, trim and doors – if the floors and walls are dark, consider painting these to match, unless you want them highlighted.



INFUSE WITH LIGHT

Natural and artificial light can visually expand the look of your home. (If you choose to go the dark route, this one is non-negotiable.) Keep window treatments light and airy, and avoid blocking any windows at all costs. If your small space happens to be a condo with painfully strict regulations on overhead electrical, Karen recommends getting creative with track lighting. Play with the curve of the track itself for visual interest. Also, while the quintessential, in-your-face-glare track light fixture has its role in highlighting artwork, there is a bounty of other options with a diffused light to explore.

PLAY WITH TEXTURE AND SUBTLE PRINT

To ensure a monochromatic scheme doesn't fall flat, use a variety of textures for a nuanced visual and tactile experience. If you can, splurge on a one-tone silk-and-wool rug. Wool is quite dull and silk is reflective, so the rug will catch and play with the light, energizing any room.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL GRAYDON, BARRY CALHOUN; DESIGN: THOMAS SMYTHE, KELLY DECK



If the only view you have to admire out your window is brick and mortar, use a linen drape. It will block out the view but let in the light. Best of all, this natural fabric is timeless and a great fit for any room.



DON'T BE CONFINED TO SMALL FURNITURE

One thing that makes a space visually cave in is clutter, so a degree of minimalism is necessary. If you're looking to seat four people, one long, slim sofa is better than four chairs, says Karen. Go for pieces that consume minimal visual space. Think glass tabletops and chairs with exposed legs and slim arms or an armless profile.

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To keep a kaleidoscope of book jackets from stealing the show, colour-code your books – perhaps even banishing a whole colour category, say red, to a different room altogether. For a room in a white and beige palette, turn the books around with the pages facing outward.

KEEP THE CONTRAST LOW

Keep your colour palette within the same family, as contrasting colours can cause the eye to jump around, which can make a room feel smaller. Contrast belongs on focal points like artwork – give them a monochromatic backdrop and watch them pop.

USE ALL FIVE WALLS

Thanks to a little thing called gravity, the floor is crowded enough already – remove anything that you can get off it. Consider in-ceiling speakers in place of stand-up ones and sconces instead of floor lamps.



PHOTOGRAPHY: JANIS NICOLAY, DONNA GRIFFITH; DESIGN: KARLA AWADATSU, ERIN MCLAUGHLIN

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE



Instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of a small space, design your room around its redeeming features, such as a fireplace, floor-to-ceiling windows or interesting flooring. The biggest upside to a small pad? The less space, the easier it is to afford high-end finishes. If you're head over heels for that Moroccan glass backsplash, you might be able to justify the splurge where there's only a few square feet to finish.

BUILD IN STORAGE



It provides maximum function and stylish character. Though you might not be able to afford built-ins everywhere, maximize storage where you can. Karen is big on taking kitchen cabinetry all the way to the ceiling. Even though you likely won't reach the top-most cabinets without pulling up a chair, at least rarely used or seasonal items like your grandma's china and patioware can be stored in the kitchen, where they belong.