

5 Tips for Designing Small Spaces

If you've ever lived in one, you know that small spaces come equipped with their own special regimen of challenges, and it's up to you to come up with crafty solutions. Because of the creative Rubik's Cube they represent, and the amazing makeovers that often result, these have long been some of my favorite spaces to design. Below, I've provided you with 5 essential guidelines to help you clear the decks, so your style will shine!

1. **Pare down on the number of furnishings, not necessarily the size.** People generally think that because they have a small space, they need to purchase small furniture. This is not exactly correct, and frequently leads to what I refer to as “dollhouse syndrome.” (Subscribe to *The Decorating Academy* for a whole article on this topic.) When you walk into a small space filled with small pieces, your brain says, “Huh, look at all these little things in this cramped little space.” When you walk into a small space with a couple of larger pieces, something interesting happens. Now your brain says, “Well! Look at these large pieces on which I can spread out! I must be in a large space!”



Of course, you can't be ridiculous about this. If you live in a studio apartment, a pit sectional with reclining ends is not the answer... sorry. DO make sure that there is plenty of breathing room between the pieces, and that traffic can move easily through the entire space. For most people, a regular sofa and one or two small club chairs will provide ample seating, and you only need enough tables to support your lighting, and be within easy reach to set things down.

2. **Light colors vs dark colors:** Would-be decorators *love* to talk about how dark colors make a room look small. *long suffering sigh* Rather than step up on my soapbox, I will simply say that this, too, is not exactly correct. For the sake of this article, I shall simply compare the two options.
 - Light colors do a wonderful job of reflecting the light, and they move easily from space to space. One way to make a small home feel larger is to paint all the connected areas the same color. This makes it feel like one room flows seamlessly into the next, creating the illusion of more space. Light colors are wonderful in rooms with plenty of natural light. They generally make a room feel cool, airy, and open.
 - Dark colors, on the other hand, make a space feel rich, cozy and intimate. Consider this: if your room is the size of a shoe box, with little to no light, it doesn't matter WHAT color you paint the walls. No one is going to walk in there and say, “Wow! This room feels huge! It must be because you painted it white!” Not gonna happen. So why not embrace a small space for what it is, and make the most of it? Your results will be dramatic.
3. **Storage:** A place for everything, and everything in its place. If it doesn't have a place, get rid of it. Can't get rid of it? Get rid of something else. Nothing, I repeat: *nothing* makes a space feel smaller than clutter. If something isn't important enough to you for it to have a proper home, it's not important enough to keep. It's that simple.

To that end, get creative with storage opportunities! Closets aren't the only answer, but we'll

start there. If your closet has a shelf on the top and one or two hanging bars, you are living in a different era. Get yourself a closet organizer, and you will, at a minimum, triple your closet's capacity. How about under the bed? How about adding bookcases with attractive baskets? A coffee table or ottoman with great storage? A nightstand with drawers? A shelf that runs around the top 12" of the room for decorative boxes or display? A chest in the entry instead of a table? You get the idea.

4. **Lighting:** Poor lighting makes a room feel like it's closing in. Everything is dim and shady. Fabrics and colors look dingy. Sounds great, right? Make sure your room has at least three light sources, which is what we call "triangulating." This generally ensures that all objects (and people) are receiving some degree of light from every side, which, unlike the scenario above, makes a space feel warm and inviting. FYI, overhead lighting alone is not generally sufficient, and causes a great deal of eye strain when reading or watching TV.
5. **Accessories:** Less is more. Please don't cover every table and shelf surface with little this's and that's. No matter how precious they may be, it looks like junk. Choose 1 or 2 large pieces, rather than a larger number of smaller ones. A great vase makes a much more attractive style statement than twelve 4x6 photos in mismatched frames. Further, when accessories are properly displayed, they can be much more appreciated by both you and your guests. If you have many things you love, feel free to rotate them in and out. Every time you bring them back into the room, they'll feel new and exciting!

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