



BIG IDEAS FOR SMALL SPACES

CHRISTINE BRUN ABDELNOUR

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rockport
publishers

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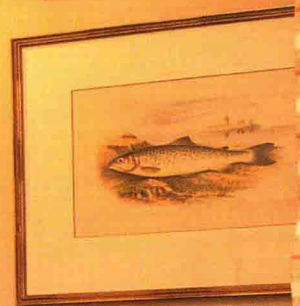
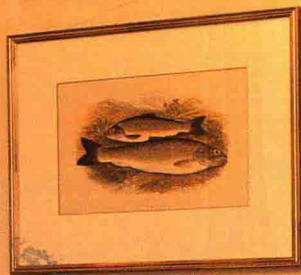
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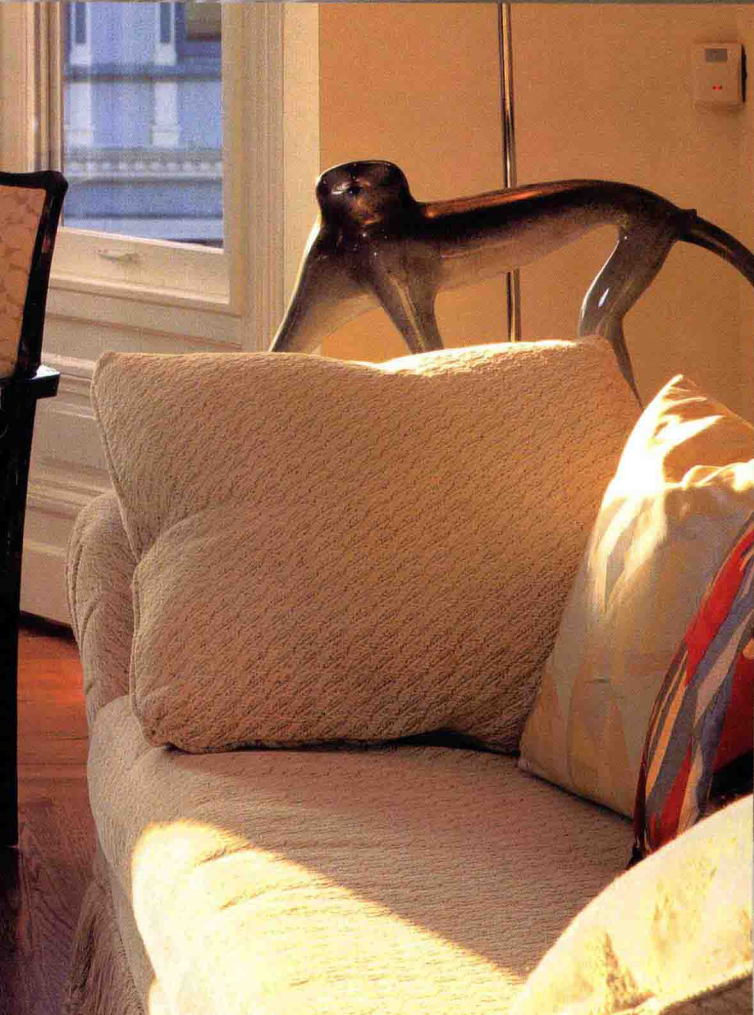
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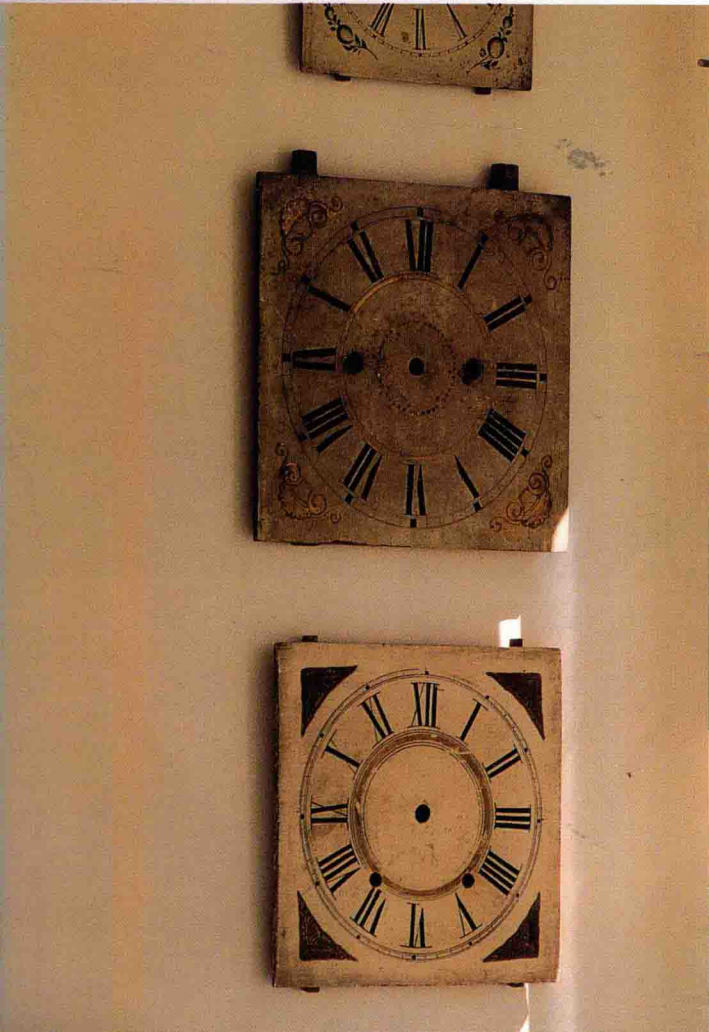




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planning

FOR SMALL SPACES

Small living spaces present big challenges. The trick is to address maintenance and function without sacrificing aesthetics. The architect Mies van der Rohe declared that “less is more.” And indeed he was known for reducing an object to its essentials and then polishing the design with attention to details—the kind of details that make a difference when space is at a premium. But you don’t have to be a famous architect to make the most of a small space.

Start by listing your specific needs; include the sizes of things you’ll need to store or accommodate. The easiest method is to grab a rigid tape measure and write down each object’s height, width, and depth. If something must open to function, allow for the space it needs, plus the area required for your hand to move. Take notes on how much space things occupy, even if they’re currently spread out over several rooms. If you have books all over, for instance, measure their total linear feet. Remember that the secret weapon of small space is vertical space. If you can make use of every inch—floor to ceiling, wall to wall, over doors, and under windows—the walls expand. Make your list very accurate and detailed, and include photos of pieces that you want to use.



Look for built-in possibilities under windows, as seen here, and over doors. While you might not have room for large bookshelves, you can sneak smaller sections into your home to produce adequate storage space.

PHOTOGRAPHY
ERIC A. ROTH

Change traditional swinging doors to sliding pocket doors, and gain 8 to 10 valuable square feet (.75 to .9 square meters) around the door for more flexible furniture placement.





Next, measure the available floor space. Professional designers always create scale floor plans, usually at 1/4-inch (.5 cm) scale. If you can, begin your actual planning on paper, either manually or with the aid of a computer program. You may need to consult with a professional designer to produce a functional furniture plan. It might cost several hundred dollars, but it can save thousands. Many clients have called me only after squandering their furnishings budget on an expensive blunder. Once you see how much floor area is available, you can establish sizes for individual pieces. Check the pieces you want to keep against the layout to see if they work well—it's certainly easier than physically moving the furniture around the house. Go shopping with your furniture layout, several copies of the blank floor plans, and a scale ruler.

Now, you can begin to utilize the vertical space that is left over. Look into the ingenious space-saving products on the home-improvement market: sliding pocket doors, retractable hardware, spiral staircase kits, refrigerated drawers, under-counter washers and dryers, collapsible outdoor furniture, compact fireplaces, and pullout kitchen tables. Investigate custom-designed, built-in features, which can have a huge impact in a tiny room. Inches make a difference, and in a compact space, built-in features can elevate the mundane to the extraordinary. Frank Lloyd Wright believed that a house should be one consistent flow of space; he used integrated storage, seating, and tables in his work, blending architecture and furniture. This continuity is easy for the eye to accept, and it gives the viewer a sense of harmony. Small spaces beg to be unified; they blossom when they're designed to be tight, precise, and well integrated.