

Q&A With HGTV's *Small Space Big, Style's* Expert Designer Libby Langdon

Author of Libby Langdon's Small Space Solutions: Secrets for Making Any Room Look Elegant and Feel Spacious on Any Budget

1) What is driving the statement that "Small is the new big"? Are small spaces becoming more popular? What do they offer that larger houses do not? Any stats on how this has become big? I think that "small is the new big" because people started to step back and see how big things had really gotten, whether it's a car, a couch, a cup of coffee or a cheeseburger, we got carried away with "biggie-sizing" everything. We're now facing sobering issues with the current economy and more and more people are unexpectedly needing to downsize and live in a smaller space. Another aspect that has become appealing for people choosing to live in a smaller dwelling are the positive eco-friendly effects of not needing to heat and pay for excess square footage. I think people also started to see the results of "living large"; in the cost of filling up your car, gaining weight, big mortgages and just living with STUFF everywhere! There is an underlying desire right now to simplify our lives, get back to basics, what really matters and of course that's now translating into the spaces we choose to live in, people are wanting to live with less. And less doesn't mean without luxury, people want style, elegance and comfort it's just now they are realizing they can have that in a smaller space. There are not many people I know who don't feel like a million bucks after cleaning out a closet or uncluttering your desk; small spaces give you the feeling that you are completely in control, your home isn't running you, you are running your home. When things at home are manageable and contained that's bound to manifest itself in other areas of your life.

2) What ways do you suggest to help create the ILLUSION of more space?

- In a small space use full height doors for closets and rooms; anytime you can have an element go all the way up to the ceiling (bookcase, drapes, doors) it draws your focus up and visually creates the illusion of a larger room. This is also wonderful with closet doors as you'll gain all that extra storage space that otherwise would be wasted.
- Don't "Biggie Size" it - Try to steer clear of oversized furniture, it crowds a small space and makes it seem even tinier. Look for smaller proportioned items that can create multiple conversation areas, use chairs and ottomans to provide extra seating.
- Don't be afraid of bold paint colors, if you have a small space sometimes a darker color on a wall can make it recede – don't think of it as a DARK color think of it as a RICH color!

- Lights under cabinets (in the kitchen or otherwise) illuminate a workspace but also add another layer of light and make the room look larger
- Layer your bed linens to make your bedroom seem more spacious – choose bedspread/duvet, shams and throw pillows in a mixture of patterns and colors, this adds depth and looks airier than a solid overstuffed comforter
- Eliminate knick-knacks and clutter, it's hard to do but absolutely necessary – be ruthless!
- Use mirrors! Reflective surfaces extend space and make a room feel more open and you can magnify a mirror's impact by putting it in a position where it can reflect a window or doorway, the space will feel larger and you'll be adding natural light!
- Stripes on a wall make a tall statement in a small space – they draw your eye upwards, giving the illusion of height that's so valuable when the ceilings are low.
- Stay away from big and bold patterns on sofas and chairs, it can be distracting and take up visual space
- Replace solid exterior doors with multipane glass doors to bring light into dark entries, in a matter of hours you'll completely transform the feeling you get when you walk into your home.
- If you are mixing patterns in a small room, be sure to work with limited color tones – keep them in the same family for a cohesive more open look
- Chairs and sofas without arms have slim lines; they can ease traffic flow in a small room and create a more spacious, open feel.
- Furniture that has legs rather than a skirted bottom can make a space seem more open, it lets light through and feels less bulky.
- Use glass tops on coffee tables, end tables and dining tables; being able to see through the glass creates an open, more airy feel and it doesn't chop the room up visually like a solid surface could.
- In a small space with adjoining rooms select harmonious tones and hues for paint colors, this will create a feeling of flow and continuity rather than looking chopped up and disjointed.
- Be sure to use lots of light in a small space but don't use overhead light unless it's recessed and on dimmers. 4 or 5 lamps aren't too much, be sure you are reaching the corners of your room. Since you have less space you want to avoid the chance of any of it getting lost in darkness, you want it to feel open, warm and inviting and lots of light is the best way to achieve that.

3) What concrete ways do you suggest to actually create more space? What are the most common problems and solutions dominant in small spaces? The best way to create more space other than adding an addition onto your home is to create storage. By creating places to store things you get them off the floor, tabletops, desktops, counters and that adds square footage.

Some storage ideas are:

- Display collections on walls, go up instead of using precious shelf space, it will also keep collectables looking focused and uncluttered.
- Use ottomans with storage inside, they can hold everything from paper work and files to extra bedding
- A trundle bed is great for an extra guest bed because when you don't have guests you can fill it with pillows to look like a sofa. Then you also have the drawer below that, without a mattress, can be used for storage.
- Use a medicine cabinet in a bathroom to take advantage of vertical space
- Putting a bathroom sink on top of a counter instead of sinking it inside maximizes that precious storage space inside the vanity cabinet below, not to mention the style punch it packs!
- Use a pot rack in the kitchen whenever possible, pots and pans are big and bulky and take up the majority of your cabinet space, you'll free that up with a pot rack and add some visual interest at the same time!
- If you have a really tiny space consider a Murphy bed, they now make what I call "souped up" versions that are easily accessed and can be on spinning tracks with shelving units on the backs rather than the standard look of two large cabinets. They are not like the Murphy Beds that we all remember!
- For closet storage consider taking off your closet doors and replacing them with curtains that go up to the ceiling on hospital track. You'll soften the look of a space by incorporating fabric, you'll make the space look larger by having the curtains go all the way up to the ceiling and you'll add more space to your room because you won't need to allow for the door clearance since the curtains just slide side to side.
- If you have a pedestal sink in your bathroom consider adding a sink skirt, it will give you a place to store additional toiletry items and add some style and color to your small space.

4) Some of the spaces on the series are the homes of professional interior designers. Can non-professional homeowners create high-end decor for a small space within a modest budget? Any tricks for those with a modest budget? Everyone can live in a beautiful space no matter the budget; you can absolutely create that high-end décor look without spending a fortune. I always encourage people on a budget to begin with paint, pick a bold color and begin there; it's definitely the fastest, least expensive way to transform a room. If you're not sure where to begin with color pick up some home magazines that showcase the style you're after, flip through until you find a wall color you like and 9 times out of 10 they'll list the exact paint color. The other wonderful thing about paint is it makes items you already have look completely different, it brings out the detail in your woodwork, artwork and all your furnishings. Paint helps you rethink what you already have and that's a great place to begin when you're watching what you spend. The other thing I would say that gives you the biggest bang for your buck is nice lighting,

you don't have to live with overhead lighting, it's depressing and colors the mood of a space. Even if you have a small area 4 or 5 lamps are not too much, you want to illuminate all the space you have so you can enjoy every inch of it, it changes the whole feeling of your home and makes it warm and inviting. A great idea to fluff up a bedroom on the cheap is to hang floor to ceiling drapes behind the head of your bed, even if you have a headboard. Pick a fabric you love, a crisp toile, a chocolate brown silk, rich red velvet or an airy creamy sheer; it adds a quick change in the overall look of your room and makes the room look bigger because when the drapes go all the way up to the ceiling they visually draw your eye up creating the illusion of higher ceilings and thus a larger space!

5) Anything trendy right now in small spaces? Colors? Kinds of decorations? A big trend in small spaces right now is color, people used to think everything had to be white to look larger but they are realizing that a creative layout can do the trick and they can enjoy color at the same time. Some colors I'm seeing are consistent whether you're in a small space or large – chocolate brown, caramel, aqua, bright orange, citron green, icy gray blue, and purple-gray mauve. The accessory used primarily in small spaces is artwork; it adds life and style to a room without using up valuable square footage.

6) Can you name some room-specific trends?

In kitchens I'm seeing people using 2 under the counter/drawer refrigerators rather than one large one which can visually eat up the room in a small kitchen. I'm also seeing continuity in cabinets used, it creates a uniformed, pulled together look.

I'm seeing lots of mirrored furniture, end tables, console tables, nightstands and they are wonderful pieces for small spaces because they reflect light and make a room appear larger.