



SMALL SPACES, BIG LOOKS

Design ideas and inspiration from three Milwaukee area experts

BY JOAN ELOVITZ KAZAN

HOMEOWNERS WITH SMALL-SPACE DILEMMAS NEED NOT FRET: You don't have to give up on aesthetics to achieve functionality. Here three industry professionals share recent, smaller-scale projects, plus tips that can work for everyone.

HIRE A SKILLED PROFESSIONAL YOU TRUST

At the risk of disappointing DIY enthusiasts, the best advice for dealing with a small space is to hire a professional. "You want to use the space to its highest function to get what you

want from that space, and a professional designer is knowledgeable about scale and fixtures and design elements," says Robin Swernoff, president and owner of Lakeside Stoneworks.

Maximizing a small space is a skill many professional designers have developed over time, and they bring that skill to any room in the house. Remodeling a small bathroom, for example, and still wanting to fit a vanity, tub, shower and toilet into the space is not an easy task, says Swernoff, but a feasible one — with the right help.

Bathrooms aren't the only small spaces transformed by a pro's magic touch. "We just

completed a kitchen project in Wauwatosa where we provided the countertops," Swernoff says, adding that the designer knocked down a wall to accommodate the needs of a family of five. "They wanted a big island (that) they could pull stools up to in an older home, and they wanted a bigger, more functional kitchen."

Professional designers are also trained to keep budget constraints in mind. "Designers plan the space accordingly. They pick materials and colors that enlarge the feeling of the space, and pick products that enlarge the feeling of the space," Swernoff adds. "(They) help people stay within their budget to accomplish the look they want."



A Bartelt — The Remodeling Resource project / Photo by David Bader

EMBRACE CREATIVE SPACE-SAVING IDEAS

Since the kitchen is arguably the busiest room in the home, every component should have a purpose and a place. Interior designer Mary Sweet from Bartelt — The Remodeling Resource recently completed a kitchen renovation in Wauwatosa that challenged this theory, but was ultimately achieved. “This Victorian home is on the historic register, but the family of five that lives there wanted commercial-grade appliances,” Sweet recalls. The narrow, galley-style kitchen had to be



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A McNabb & Risley project /
Photo by David Szymanski

reconfigured for both the family's needs and to meet design codes. "The minimum requirements for walking space and the size of the appliances made things a challenge," says Sweet. "The client wanted an island, and with an island, we had to maintain 36 inches of walkway in every direction around it."

Using vertical space is another great way to maximize a small space, Sweet adds. "We were landlocked," she says. "It wasn't an option to add onto the house, so we went up to the ceiling for storage."

When dealing with small spaces, just say "no" to soffits, the designer recommends. "If you have soffits, get rid of them so you can take your cabinets all the way up," she continues. "Even if they're too high to reach on a daily basis, it's a great place to put seasonal things like platters and dishes you don't use every day."

The Wauwatosa family wasn't about to give up the latest bells and whistles because of space restraints, so Sweet found additional storage space in an unusual spot. "We recessed bookshelves and put a TV under a service staircase leading up to the second floor," she explains. "When you're designing a small space, you have to find creative ways to gain storage."



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Kitchen organization also plays a key role in utilizing space, and one word sums up the hottest organizational trend: built-ins. “We included a roll-out spice drawer, cutlery dividers and roll-out trays,” Sweet says. “We have the garbage and recycle bin tucked into a cabinet. We even put a recessed niche in the backsplash to house oil and seasonings. Every square inch of the space was used and thoughtfully planned. Every pot, pan and lid had a home.”

ENSURE EACH PIECE SERVES A PURPOSE

The challenge of maximizing a small space isn’t limited to bathrooms and kitchens. When a Cedarburg family of four hoped to update their living area, they turned to Krystle Nusslock, an interior designer with McNabb & Risley Fine Furniture and Interior Design, for help. “This client had (received) ideas from other places, but she came in looking for a little more guidance and direction. She wanted the space to be comfortable, inviting and relaxing,” Nusslock says.

The client’s two young daughters are horse enthusiasts, so Nusslock used that anecdote as inspiration. “We went with a modern-farm-house style for their family room, which measures 12 feet by 10 1/2 feet, so our focus was getting the most out of that space,” Nusslock recalls. The design started from the bottom — and with a gorgeous area rug. “I definitely wanted an area rug to give separation, since it’s an open concept,” the designer explains. “I found a rug that would bring in the colors and tones of the fireplace.”

For a family gathering space, seating is also an important element. “We decided to go with a sofa with a chaise lounge, and an accent chair to give symmetry and extra seating,” Nusslock says, adding that she selected a distressed leather accent chair for some much-needed contrast. “The distressed leather gives a different texture and provides a darker tone to our palette.”

The final pieces — an accent table and an ottoman — are the perfect blend of form and function. “The nesting accent table features a smaller table that pulls out, which makes it very functional,” adds Nusslock. “The 36-inch, round cocktail ottoman is in caramel leather. ... The round shape centers the space; the family can put their feet up, or they can put a tray on it for drinks.”

The designer kept the overall theme of functionality in mind throughout the process. “When you have limited square footage, it’s important that each piece serves a purpose, and that you keep asking, ‘What function is this piece going to offer for the space?’” she says. **M**

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—Mary Gronnert Kollross

Mary and Henry Kollross of Green Bay, stayed at Kathy's House for three months in 2016. Henry Kollross received a bone marrow transplant at Froedtert Hospital.



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