

Ask THE DESIGNER

Smaller spaces can still be bold - its all about using bold, clean pieces to add drama to a room without adding visual clutter. Think about using just a few deliberate pieces that will make small spaces shine.



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How do I downsize my furniture?

Q. *After 20 years of living in a big 6,000 SF house, we are moving into a 2,400 SF condominium. I can't afford to just buy all new furniture and besides I have several pieces that have great meaning to me. How do I know what to take and what to get rid of? These rooms are smaller and not everything will fit. Help!*

A. Congratulations on your decision to move. A new home should always be thought of as a wonderful opportunity to try new things. When downsizing, of course you can't take all your furniture and possessions with you. However, it does allow you the opportunity to simplify your life and to make the fewer, smaller spaces you have really spectacular. It is all about learning to see your existing furniture used in new areas and for new purposes. Now is the time to be bold — to try new things and to regroup and repurpose your furniture in exciting new ways. It can

be an easy step by step process.

The first step in your process is to only keep your best and favorite pieces. If you don't love it, don't keep it. If it is damaged, broken or about to fall apart, ditch it! Now is the time to take a cold hard look at your furniture, art, and accessories as stand alone pieces. As you look at each item, think to yourself, "If I saw this in a store tomorrow, would I buy it?" If the answer is no, then don't take it on to the next home. The exception to this rule is, if only the finish or the fabric is keeping you from loving it, then you may have a keeper. And remember, all you



In this small 12x14 room, drama is king by using the room's greatest asset, tall ceilings, to its best advantage by employing tall draperies. Simple clean, classic lines in the furniture keep the clutter to a minimum.

need to do is love it. Don't worry about whether it will fit or where it will go at this stage. We'll get to that part in a moment. So with this philosophy in mind you have three groups: 1) love it and keep it; 2) love it, but might need new finish or fabric; and, 3) take it to the curb, donate it and pass it on. The items that are your favorites take priority in your new space. If they are not enough to complete your new home then look at the pieces in the next group, those that need to be refinished or reupholstered.

After you have identified the pieces you would like to keep, I recommend as a next step that you photograph each item, individually, just as you would see in a catalog. This allows you to think of each item as an individual piece and not as a group of items in a certain room used in a certain way. Do it for all furniture, art, lamps and major accessory pieces, even the pieces that may need a different finish or new fabric. You have now created your own catalog to shop for pieces for your new condo — filled with wonderful pieces that you already love! This will now allow you to go room by room and “shop” for furniture in your new rooms!

As you select from your existing pieces, be creative and mix things up a bit. A chest from your old living room may be a perfect nightstand in your new bedroom. A piece of wicker furniture from your old sun-room might look great in a new guest room. Have fun with trying your old pieces in new combinations and in new areas. And for the furniture that needed a new finish or fabric, try to reinvent it in a completely different direction. An old wing back chair from the formal living room is reborn as a hip, trendy piece with vibrant geometric fabric and legs painted in yellow or blue or pink! Your friends won't even recognize it! A chest of drawers from a kid's bedroom can be reborn by repainting or restaining with a large harlequin pattern on the top and a change of hardware as a great piece in your den or kitchen area.

As you are placing furniture into new spaces here are a few suggestions to keep in mind. First, big pieces can go into smaller spaces. A large piece of furniture, art or accessory can give a small space needed drama and importance. Try to avoid the urge to use only small scale items in a small room; the result can lead to a busy, cluttered, and thus less spacious look than a few bold pieces. Second, give rooms multi-purposes. In a downsized living space, many rooms and many pieces of furniture need to do double duty to makeup for the lack of previous rooms. For example, a second bedroom may be a TV room and a guest room, just by having a sofa in that room that can convert into a sleeper. Or use a dining space during the week as a home office area by having an armoire serve as a computer center. So remember as you are placing your furniture, strive for arrangements and combinations that can serve more than one purpose, and design rooms with more than one function in mind. Third, mix casual with formal. Twenty or thirty years ago we all had the formal rooms, that everyone admired and no one used, and the casual, family areas that were functional but short on style. Today in a smaller space you can have both. Be bold and mix your more formal ornate pieces in with the casual, clean lines of the rest of your furniture. It's great to have metal mixed with mahogany; country French next to Louis XVI. A mix of materials and styles makes your space more interesting, diverse and eclectic and reflects that carefree, relaxed feeling that is the definition of condominium living!

So remember, keep only the items you love and cherish. Think of your items as individual beautiful pieces that can be used in new and different locations and combinations. Now your furniture can have a new lease on life as well. Remember, downsizing is the perfect opportunity to relax and feel pampered by enjoying and using your favorite things everyday.

Would you like to have your design dilemma considered for an upcoming issue? Just send an e-mail to: designerguy@haskellinteriors.com.

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Top: Surround yourself with only your favorite pieces when you downsize. Notice how casual pieces can co-exist with more formal items to give a room an interesting, eclectic look.

Bottom: When downsizing, furniture needs to serve more than one purpose. Here an armoire serves as a home office while saving space and looking stylish.