



Living large on a small footprint

Take the time to consider these golden rules to live comfortably on a compact site, writes **Chelsea Clark**

Wouldn't it be great if we all had endless space at home for stylish storage, furniture large enough for the whole family to spread out and room for everyone to enjoy time alone as well as with family and friends?

But the fact is most of us are struggling to find room for everything at home and, as the average Aussie house decreases in size and more of us turn to apartment living, it looks as though our fight to make more room in smaller spaces will continue.

"We know from visiting the homes of Australians all over the country that the average living room is shrinking in size, so making every square metre of a space useful and multifunctional is a really important element for a happy everyday life at home," Tiffany Buckins, interior design manager for Ikea Australia, says.

According to small space experts, thinking of your compact floorplan as an advantage rather than a negative can be the first step in embracing the situation.

"Bigger homes usually cost more to rent, buy and maintain," Alice Joy, founder of sustainable property development company Living Joy, says.

"If you choose to live in a smaller space, you get your time, your money and your freedom back,

which means you are more able to design your ultimate lifestyle – and who doesn't want that?" We asked the experts for their golden rules on living well in small spaces.

Rule 1 Maximise natural light

A sunlit room feels more open and helps eliminate shadows that can make an enclosed area feel smaller. So if your space has a window, throw open the curtains and blinds and let as much natural light flood the space as possible.

"In any design of any room, if you can have windows on two walls, that really makes a small space feel bigger," Alice says.

Levi Naas, head of innovation at Rawson Homes, says maximising natural light flow is a strategy his company uses to make even the most compact designs feel much larger.

"An open floorplan teamed with easy access to

key areas such as the kitchen, laundry, family room and no dead ends within the home can definitely make a smaller space feel a lot bigger," he says.

If redesigning your home to maximise light isn't an option, employ one of the oldest tricks in the book. Place a mirror opposite a large window which will reflect plenty of light around your room. And don't forget a few strategically placed indoor plants to extend the sense of space.

"For millennia, humans have been living outside in natural spaces," Alice says.

"We're wired to be in nature on a deep, primal level, which is one of the reasons that most people feel so calm outdoors.

"If we can bring the essence of the outdoors inside, it has the same effect on a smaller scale."

Rule 2 Multi-purpose furniture at the right scale for the room

Chances are the items that are taking up most room in your small space are furniture pieces such as couches, chairs, tables and, if your small space is the bedroom, your bed. So it's important the pieces

you choose for smaller areas work to enhance the feeling of space rather than diminish it.

"Scale is very important – low and wide items with clutter-free surfaces will help create a sense of calm and the illusion of extra space," David Hardwick, global buying manager for King Living, says.

Be aware, that doesn't necessarily mean smaller pieces of furniture. Sometimes a modular lounge is the best, most efficient option in a small living space.

"Creating height with taller pieces such as a floor lamp or the interior architecture of the room will also help to enhance this further but make sure any tall items don't come too close to the ceiling – leave at least 30 to 40cm to avoid making the space feel cramped."

Multi-functional pieces are also ideal for small spaces. "Choose flexible furniture that can do more than one thing – like a couch that doubles as a bed – and use clever storage so you can find extra space in places you may not expect," says Tiffany. And try to think beyond the obvious.

"A good trick is to use levels to delineate micro spaces," Alice says. "A desk underneath an elevated bed is an effective use of space for micro apartment living."



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Page 2 of 3

Rule 3 Think before buying

We all know how easy it is to accumulate clutter, especially if you have kids.

But if you are furnishing a smaller space, experts recommend to really think about what you do – and don't – need.

"My number one tip is to take some time to consider how you actually use a space; what is

important, what makes you happy, what tasks do you usually complete in this room at what times of the day, for example," Tiffany says.

"It's really thinking about designing your interiors for how you live."

If any room in your home feels overcrowded or cluttered, chances are it's going to feel smaller than it really is. Start by thinking about what you want to achieve in a space and only keep or purchase items to help you achieve that goal.

Tiffany recommends creating zones that reflect the way you live every day and are flexible and multifunctional. "By carving out zones you can make space for everything and everyone," she says. You can further define your layout by placing a different overhead light fixture in each space.

But David warns not to rush the process or you could be disappointed with the results.

"Plan your space well, you don't have to finish it all in one weekend," he says. "It's best to wait to find just the right pieces for your home."

Rule 4 Clear it out

If rule three hasn't been as successful as you might have liked, there is still hope. A good old spring clean might be just what you need to make some much needed extra room.

"Clever storage can help cut out the clutter and furniture pieces such as footstools with built-in storage are becoming increasingly popular for this reason," Tiffany says. If your budget allows, consider investing in built-in solutions, such as

window seats or even beds, and appropriate shelving to fit your space and needs.

Custom built-ins are ideal in a small room because you can size each piece of furniture for your space while adding a feature or two that will maximise its use.

"You can save a lot of space by choosing storage solutions for your living room that go up and not out, reducing wasted space and opening up your room," Tiffany says.

"Open shelving is a good option as it makes a room feel bigger – it also means you have easy access to things you use every day."

If you're serious about decluttering, Alice suggests thinking about what you really need.

"We are in the generation of the sharing economy, and so we don't all need to have a second car, a lawnmower and a complete camping kit," she says.

"Sites such as Hipages, Gumtree and CarNextDoor make it easy to rent an item or hire a contractor to do a task rather than owning all of the things ourselves.

"Embracing the new way means that we need to own and maintain less things."

You might be surprised, she says, at just how a smaller, well-designed home frees up not just your home, but your mind as well.

More Ikea, ikea.com.au; Living Joy, livingjoy.com.au; King Living, kingliving.com.au



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Page 3 of 3

