

Lessons in DOWNSIZING



Moving to a smaller space doesn't mean having to compromise on your lifestyle or comfort. Here are some tips from Cape interior decorator Kimberley Richmond on making the transition as easy as possible



TEXT NATALIE BORUVKA PHOTOGRAPHS HENRIQUE WILDING



One of the biggest challenges when moving to a smaller home is what to keep and what to get rid of. "Start by making a list of must-keep items," says Kimberley Richmond of Beautiful Spaces. "If it's not an essential or something you love, let it go."

At least six months before you move, start sorting out your possessions. Divide them into four sections – keep, sell, donate and throw away. By selling items and donating others to charity, you'll have whittled down the things that have to be moved. "Place these in plastic bins or sturdy cardboard boxes and label them so they can be placed in the correct rooms in your new home on moving day," says Kimberley.

Before deciding on the furniture to take with you, draw up a floor plan of the new place on graph paper and make templates of the furniture to scale on paper and cut them out. "By moving them around on the floor plan you'll easily see whether your existing furniture will fit and how to arrange it to create the best possible flow," she says.

When her clients Terrence and Shamila Naidoo downsized from a five-bedroom house with a large garden to a compact seaside apartment in Bloubergstrand, they asked for her help. "It was quite daunting as we still wanted a smart, stylish home and to entertain large groups," they recall. "But we'd acquired so many things over the years that we had to be ruthless about anything non-essential, and we had to be clever and make the best use of the space we have."

1. A NEUTRAL PALETTE

As light colours have a space-enhancing effect, paint dark wooden furniture and dated kitchen cabinets in pale fresh colours. "In this kitchen, we replaced the wooden cabinets with those in a mix of white lacquer and frosted glass and used white Caesarstone for the countertops. This lightened the area immediately. To unify the living areas, we chose a glass splashback which reflects the grey and blue shades in the dining and living areas and we repeated the use of yellow as an accent colour," says Kimberley.

2. SMALL STRUCTURAL CHANGES

If you've got the budget, it's worth making minor structural changes to create space. For example, an open-plan kitchen, living and dining area looks bigger than three separate rooms. "In the Naidoos' apartment, a counter originally divided the kitchen and living room and access was through the hallway. We bricked up the opening, which provided space for the fridge and built-in cabinets, and replaced the counter with a peninsula so that the kitchen can be accessed from the dining room. This resulted in a much more spacious open-plan living area."



3. SUFFICIENT STORAGE SPACE

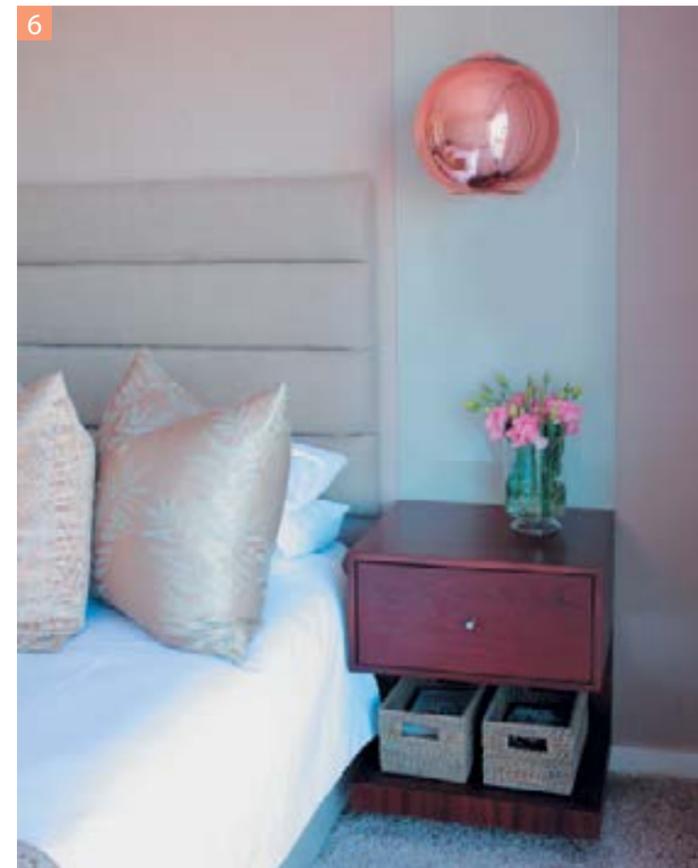
To keep the clutter to a minimum, make sure you have enough storage space. To create a place for everything including the TV, Kimberley designed a built-in wall unit for the Naidoos with soft-touch opening mechanisms. This makes excellent use of the wall space in the living room and by using the same finishes as in the kitchen, she ensured that the look and feel carries through. "We also use the unit for storing the dinnerware and glasses we use for entertaining," say the Naidoos. ▸





4. MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY INCH
 Explore the potential of small spaces like niches to serve as an office area or fit them with bookshelves. In the space between this built-in unit and the wall in the Naidoos' apartment, Kimberley fitted floating shelves to display accessories and made an ottoman that fits neatly into the space below. An identical one sits below the window on the other side of the unit. "These provide handy extra seating when we have guests," say the Naidoos.

5. MIRROR MAGIC
 "A well-placed mirror can visually double a room, especially if used to clad a wall," says Kimberley. "But you can also enhance a room with a grouping of mirrors, which introduces an interesting design element." In the Naidoos' bedroom, a mirror at the edge of a wall brings in light and views.



6. GOING UP
 Emphasising a room's height is an extremely effective way of creating the illusion of space. Hang curtains directly below the ceiling and choose tall headboards to draw the eye upwards. "In the main bedroom I used glass panels that extend from floor to ceiling on either side of the bed to do this," explains Kimberley. "These show off the pendant lights which also draw the eye upwards and free up space on the bedside tables."



7. ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS
 It helps to think beyond conventional solutions, says Kimberley. "As neither the kitchen nor the bathroom was big enough for a washing machine and tumble dryer, we housed them in a cupboard in the guest bedroom. Fortunately, it backs onto a bathroom so it was easy to connect the plumbing." **GH**

TIPS FOR A SMALLER HOME

- Blinds don't take up as much space as curtains and are often the better window treatment in a compact home.
- Don't discard larger pieces of furniture because you think they'll be overpowering. In many cases, a bold piece can make a room look bigger and looks far better than a collection of little things.
- If you need to replace furniture, look for items that do double duty, such as an ottoman that can be used as an extra seat and, with the addition of a tray, as a coffee table.

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