

Live chat: Design ideas for small spaces



Hi everyone! I'm here with designer Linda Nolan, of Linda Nolan Interiors. We're talking about the challenges of living in small space. Welcome Linda!
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:01 PM](#)



Hi! and thanks for having me here today!
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:02 PM](#)



What is your No. 1 favourite way to make a room look bigger than it is?
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:02 PM](#)



It depends. if this is a renovation project, then the first and most important thing is to knock down some walls and open up the space. If we're dealing with a room that is already open concept, number one is colour it's the cheapest and easiest thing to do to open up a space that gives you the biggest bang for your buck.
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:04 PM](#)



Illuminating the space. Lighting is absolutely crucial for a small space. It's not as important if you've got southern exposure all day, so illuminating the space with proper lighting is absolutely crucial.
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:05 PM](#)



Hi Linda. I'm aware that wall covering can make a space look bigger or smaller or lighter or darker. What's the best color for walls in a small space?
by *Plaid wallpaper* [April 18, 2012 at 12:05 PM](#)



Hi Plaid Wallpaper; This is a great question, because wallpaper is making a huge comeback. Typically, wallpaper makes a wall advance, especially if you have a wallpaper with a dark background. So in a small space, you want to look for a wallpaper with a light background. However, you can hang a mirror or pictures with a light frame and matte or put a light piece of furniture in front of the dark wallpaper and it will make these pieces pop and visually expand the space. This is how you get drama in a room, it's the contrast between the light and dark and that can work beautifully in a small space. And by the way, I love foil wallpapers. they've come back big time. The foils are reflective, so they can make a space look bigger.
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:09 PM](#)



Any suggestions for a small office space? My home office is quite small and shared between my wife and I. A big problem is book storage. Because the layout of the room there are almost no walls to put shelves against.
by *Khendron* [April 18, 2012 at 12:09 PM](#)



Hi Khendron; Is there a closet in the room?
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:09 PM](#)



The closet is full. Literally, to the rafters.
by *Khendron* [April 18, 2012 at 12:12 PM](#)



My husband and I share a small office, and it works great, because our modular desk units have overhead storage, and storage underneath. There's a bookcase component that's built-in, and these are easily accessible at Ikea or any office furniture store. With good organization, you can fit everything you need into these small office systems. I've also made wonderful functioning offices in a closet. Just remove the closet doors and shelves with a good work surface and good lighting, and that's all you need nowadays for a good office. Since we're going paperless, we actually need less and less space all the time. But lighting is crucial in a small office space, especially what we call task lighting, which is the lighting right above the work surface.

by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:12 PM](#)



Best solution to no room for bookshelves problem is a Kindle!

by *Small space, big ideas* [April 18, 2012 at 12:13 PM](#)



Hi Khendron. I would suggest the relocation of everything in the closet and store it elsewhere. The closet is great for storing either large filing cabinets or creates space for books or any other things you might have, but this is needed for creating a really good, functioning office space.

by *Linda Nolan* edited by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:14 PM](#)



Are you aware of any contemporary takes on the old fashioned Murphy bed? Like, maybe hanging a bed from the ceiling on pulleys ... or some such? I'm looking for ideas for a guest cabin at the cottage, but find the fold down type a little underwhelming.

by *Scott Sigurdson* edited by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:14 PM](#)



Here's a photo of a more conventional Murphy bed that Scott references.

by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:15 PM](#)



Here it is as a bed.

by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:16 PM](#)



That will be difficult, since the closet is full of stuff that was relocated from elsewhere in the house. :-)

by *Khendron* [April 18, 2012 at 12:17 PM](#)



Hi, Scott. Well, one can certainly custom design anything. But a Murphy bed, to me, takes up less space than using the pulley system to haul a bed up at the ceiling. Visually I do not find that as attractive as a Murphy bed that can disappear into a wall. I have designed some very interesting storage systems for bedrooms that look amazing. One can also use a day bed or futon with storage around it so that the futon becomes a sofa during the day, and a bed at night. And that's a really practical way to solve that problem is to solve a day bed instead of a bed. Instead of going out from the wall, the length of it will sit parallel to the wall and just be a sofa. Hide-a-Bed is also great (a pull-out sofa). Very practical solution.

by *Linda Nolan* edited by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:18 PM](#)



A bed up on pulleys would make me nervous if I was sitting beneath it. I can see the headline, "Man crushed by falling bed."

by *Small space, big ideas* [April 18, 2012 at 12:20 PM](#)



Hi Khendron. If you absolutely do not have any other space to relocate these items, make sure they're behind doors. Clutter in your visual field is not conducive to concentration and focusing on the work in your office space. Your office space needs to be free of distractions. Let's just hide it away completely. The modular storage units that would cover the entire wall that would provide your storage solutions and work surface that would work wonderfully. I love IKEA for this because they have so many components that can combine to work in any small space, for little money. It's also important to note that the colours in your room will affect your productivity also, and the amount of daylight affects productivity. The colours should not be overly stimulating, such as a red or orange room. They should be very soft and neutral, and the colours that help concentration, I would recommend a soft grey, green or blue. The soft colours are very conducive to concentration. However, use yellow note pads. You're more likely to remember what you're writing on a yellow notepad than on a white notepad!

by *Linda Nolan* edited by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:23 PM](#)



Hi Small Space: Yes! I agree! It's also very distracting in a room! Your eyes will go up to the ceiling and stay there. That will become the focal point of the room, and you don't want that. You want the focal point to be the most attractive thing in a room, like a nice picture window, or a fireplace, etc.

by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:24 PM](#)



I am a born-again minimalist...with white walls, big art and modern furniture. I recently added a few large chunky Empire-period mahogany furniture pieces. What is the best size of painting to hang over that furniture? For example, a dresser that is 5 feet wide and 4 feet high.

by Terry edited by Kate Heartfield [April 18, 2012 at 12:25 PM](#)



Hi Terry; Love it. Love it, Love it. I love this look and know exactly what you're doing. I love the introduction of a traditional element into a contemporary space. I would go with a very large scale picture or a series of say, 4 pictures hung above. To continue with this eclectic feel, they could be black and white photos to add modern contrast above the contemporary piece.

by Linda Nolan [April 18, 2012 at 12:26 PM](#)



For a tiny living room what type of furniture would you recommend? Loveseat and chairs? Smaller couch?

by Cool Space [April 18, 2012 at 12:27 PM](#)



Hi Cool Space. The most important thing in a small space is scale. This is the mistake that a lot of people make is putting large-scale furniture into a small space, because you immediately feel unbalanced when you walk in. Nowadays, in almost every store, you can buy apartment-sized furniture that's made for small spaces. So you may be able to go with a sofa that will fit just fine and some other small-scale chairs to go with it. To maximize seating in a small space, I love to use small-scale sectionals.

by Linda Nolan edited by Kate Heartfield [April 18, 2012 at 12:29 PM](#)



Are there other good places, besides Ikea, to buy stuff to make better use of small spaces?

by Small space, big ideas [April 18, 2012 at 12:29 PM](#)



Hi small spaces, big ideas; For what area of the house? Because I've got a lot of favourite stores. Structube is one of my favourites, because you can get great leather furniture for very little money, and they're mostly small scale.

by Linda Nolan [April 18, 2012 at 12:30 PM](#)



Windows we have a-plenty (one reason for the lack of wall space). But, you've given me some ideas. Thanks!

by Khendron [April 18, 2012 at 12:32 PM](#)



Hi Khendron; You're very, very welcome. Glad to be of help!

by Linda Nolan [April 18, 2012 at 12:32 PM](#)



Thanks Linda

by Cool Space [April 18, 2012 at 12:32 PM](#)



Living room, kitchen and home office

by Small space, big ideas [April 18, 2012 at 12:32 PM](#)



Hi small space, big ideas; Home office I do like IKEA, and for the living room I've mentioned Structube, and Mobilia. Those are good places to try. For the kitchen, maybe a redesign is in order. If this is an existing kitchen with dark cabinets, perhaps you could consider painting the cabinet doors white and adding either stainless steel or brushed nickel hardware. That would be the biggest change for the smallest investment, which would be under \$200 (roughly)

by Linda Nolan [April 18, 2012 at 12:34 PM](#)



We hear all the time that we should declutter when selling a home. I assume that's another way to make space feel bigger?

by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:35 PM](#)



Jenn; And one of the most important things to do when reselling a home. get rid of EVERYTHING, and also the large pieces of furniture that do not fit the room. It's better to have very little furniture than furniture that is too large for a space. For resale, also keep everything as neutral as possible. All of the paint colours should be neutral and as much should be allowed in as possible. Don't keep your drapes drawn, light and bright does it. I do a lot of staging and renovations for resale, and the most important things are keep it neutral, and declutter.

by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:37 PM](#)



I like that brushed nickel idea. Thanks.

by *Small space, big ideas* [April 18, 2012 at 12:38 PM](#)



Can you talk a little bit about how to get the most light into a darker room?

by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:39 PM](#)



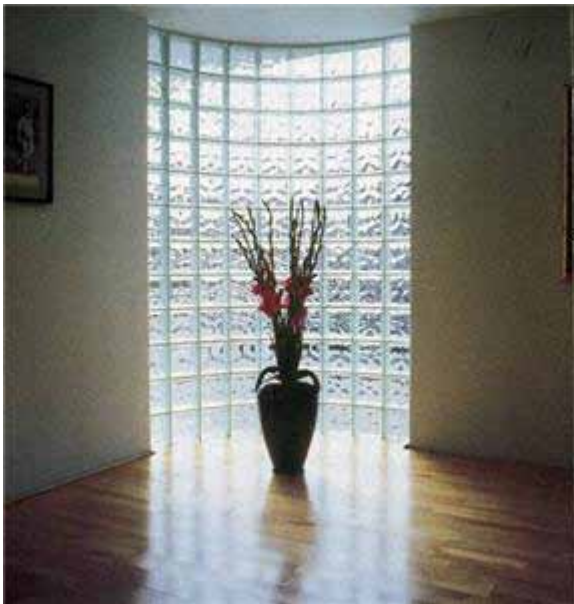
Jenn; One of the great ways to bring light into a dark room is to punch out an area and to introduce a glass block window into that space. The glass block can have a privacy pattern on it, and also soundproofing. You can also put a glazed glass panel in a wall to allow the light to come through.

by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:40 PM](#)



Hi, thanks for the info on wall covering in a small space. I wonder about flooring, does it affect how big or small a space looks?

by *Plaid wallpaper* [April 18, 2012 at 12:42 PM](#)



This is an example of how glass blocks can let the light shine in.

by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:46 PM](#)



Hi Plaid Wallpaper; I can basically make any kind of flooring work in a small space. I have used a very dark hardwood and made it look fabulous, and have used light flooring and made it look great. One of the things that will open up a room with dark flooring is top have white baseboards and trim. The largest baseboard, the better. If you've got 1 1/2 inch baseboards, take it out and put in a 4 inch. A busy pattern on the floor will tend to make a room look smaller. A plain hardwood or carpet will make a space look

larger. My favourite white for trims and doors is Benjamin Moore Cloud White, Latex Semigloss.
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:46 PM](#)



I was surprised to hear you suggest a sectional sofa for a small space. I always think of them as space hogs. Do tell how that works!
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:48 PM](#)



An apartment sized sectional is actually a great solution for a small space because it maximizes the seating and I love using a white leather in a small space. This is a great look.
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:49 PM](#)



It actually takes up less space than a sofa, end table and chair.
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:50 PM](#)



What looks are working best in small kitchens these days?
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:51 PM](#)



Here's a space-savvy white kitchen.
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:51 PM](#)



This is a small condo kitchen Linda did in Barrhaven.
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:52 PM](#)



Jenn; I think we'll see the dark espresso cabinets starting to fade. We will start to see lighter woods with more grain in them. The white kitchen is a forever look, and will never go out of style. It's perfect for a small space. The kitchen in the first photo is actually very similar to what I have at home, other than the flooring. This is what I've got, it's timeless, and I will never tire of it.
by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 12:52 PM](#)



A friend has a room that faces north but no matter what she does, she can't make it feel homey. No one wants to sit in that room. Can you help her?
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:54 PM](#)



Linda Nolan: "A room that faces due south would make a colour like red vibrate like crazy. We would want to choose colours from the cool side of the colour wheel to cool it down a bit."
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:55 PM](#)



Warm up a north-facing room with warm colours such as reds and oranges.

by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:55 PM](#)



Jenn, determining the light source is one of the very first things that I do when I enter a space. If a room is facing north, then it has what we call "cool light" and it needs to be warmed up with colours from the warm side of the colour wheel. Conversely, a room that faces due south would make a colour like red vibrate like crazy. We would want to choose colours from the cool side of the colour wheel to cool it down a bit. That said, people feel best in a room that has a good balance between warm and cool values. Don't go all warm or all cool colours, create a balance between the two.

by *Linda Nolan* edited by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 12:57 PM](#)



What is the definition of a neutral wall paint? It seems that taupe seems to be it but I am getting tired of brown.

by *WestLight* [April 18, 2012 at 12:57 PM](#)



Hi WestLight; Many colours today can be considered a neutral. I prefer using neutrals on a wall and adding pops of colour with area carpets, paintings, accessories, etc. A neutral, can accommodate many different types of looks and is changed over the years. That said, a light grey can be a neutral, light beige, and each colour can have a warm or cool value. For instance, you can get a cool grey, or a warm grey. the Cool grey will have more blue in it, and the warm grey will have more red or brown in it. The trick is to choose the neutral (warm or cool) that is best suited for the light in your room. And by the way, I love taupe. My house is layered with creams, whites a taupes, with very dark hardwood floors, and I love it. It's a timeless look. I also have a white kitchen.

by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 1:00 PM](#)



Thanks for coming Linda. It's been great! And thanks to all our questioners!

by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 1:02 PM](#)



Thanks to everybody for coming! This was fun, I enjoyed it so much!

by *Linda Nolan* [April 18, 2012 at 1:02 PM](#)



Apologies to anyone we didn't get to. Our expert is in demand and had to run off to a design meeting.
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 1:03 PM](#)



Tune in again next Wednesday when we'll be talking Fashion in this space.
by *Kate Heartfield* [April 18, 2012 at 1:03 PM](#)

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