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# *in praise of* **SMALL SPACES**

Designer Melissa Davis debunks small-space design myths

BY MELISSA DAVIS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHANI BUCHMAN



**"I DECIDED TO MOVE FROM MY LARGER HOME TO A SMALL SPACE THAT OFFERED A BIT LESS CLUTTER IN MY LIFE."**



**H**ello my name is Melissa and I used to be a condo snob. Admittedly, I judged condos unfairly. So how is it then that I came to live...quite comfortably...in one?

I used to picture condo-living as a suffocating experience; trapped with no fresh air and certainly no room to live the kind of life I do. Growing up in a small town, away from a major city, my views on what defined a home were set long before I had an opportunity to form an educated opinion.

At a time when I wanted to make a lifestyle change, I decided to move from my larger home to a small space that offered a bit less clutter in my life. I wanted a streamlined space with only the necessities that could be locked away on weekends if I decided to hop on a plane or escape the city.

Although I'd always been a Queen West girl, I was the mother of a four-year-old and thought that living slightly outside the city-core would inspire me to maternal domestication. I chose a 560-square-foot condo in High Park and looked forward to more home-cooked dinners and evening walks in the nearby greenspace.

Up to that point, my sweet boy thought The Drake Café made everyone's breakfast and Terroni was the only place for pizza dinner.

## NOT ALL SMALL SPACES ARE CREATED EQUALLY

I settled on this particular condo because the use of space added 100 square feet in perceived area. The plan is an O-shaped, circular layout that consists of the kitchen, living and dining rooms in one large open rectangle. The kitchen is situated in the middle and







behind it with the two bedrooms and shared washroom in the middle.

The layout offers a continuous flow where we can travel from room to room in either direction. The shared central washroom, although seemingly not ideal, actually conserved significant space that would otherwise be eroded by separate halls and corridors. I love that my son can sneak through the washroom in the morning for our early cuddles in the “big bed.”

Because I’m no stranger to a good dinner party, I was concerned that I’d be confined by the typical condo layout—teeny, tiny glass kitchen table—which is not always conducive to filling the place with friends and empty wine bottles.

I made it my mission to break all the condo design rules and have a table that could seat 10 to 12 people. Instead of the tiny island, as per the builder’s plan, I ran an 8x3-foot table the length of the room, opposite the kitchen.

**VISUALLY EFFECTIVE STORAGE**

To offset the storage shortage, I made use of benches with pullout bins beneath them against the wall. That pulled the table tighter to the wall, keeping the space feeling more open. Additional wall-mounted shelves and cabinets installed above the benches more than made up for what little storage an island would offer.

Because the entry is open to the main living space, I

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treated it as an extension of the dining room. I added two low wardrobes in the same style as the bench seating. As much as it is visually very cohesive, I also had a practical place for shoes and blazers. A large mirror for last-minute fixes doubles as a great termination point for the dining table.

**BLENDING OLD AND NEW**

There were only a handful of pieces from the house that I could not leave behind. I had splurged on a Montauk sofa a few years prior and, if you’ve ever had a chance to rest your bottom on one, you’d understand why that big boy was coming with. It’s a massive, deep and long design with huge down-wrapped cushions; not exactly condo-sized.

I decided to keep the TV table small and tucked it beside the fridge out of sight. The sofa runs opposite, which keeps it on the long wall falling after the dining table.

Achieving elegance can be tricky in spaces like this. I placed a teak credenza in front of the windows even though it blocks a balcony access door. There is a second door from the bedroom, so it was an important compromise.

As you enter the condo, your eye is drawn to the window wall. The light linen sheers offer a soft-filtered light from behind, which perfectly contrasts with the credenza.

I love condo living. I’d yell that from my balcony but most of my neighbours are all condo converts too. What I will say is that living with an efficiency of space does not mean the creature comforts need be forgotten. Just ask anyone who has attended one of my dinner parties.◆



**SOURCES:**  
**Paint Colour:** Simply White, benjaminmoore.com **Bar Cart, Living Room Rug, Black Living Room Chair:** westelm.com **Dining Chandelier:** cb2.com **Dining Table:** spacefurniture.ca **Storage Benches and Dining Chairs:** ikea.com **Sofa:** montauksofa.com **Credenza, Coffee Table:** whatthevintage.com **Owl Paintings:** canvasgallery.com

Toronto-based designer and contractor Melissa Davis is known for her appearances, creative design and reno work produced for various HGTV shows. With almost two decades of experience, her firm continues to service clientele throughout Ontario and the GTA, specializing in value-added ROI and resale consultations. melissadavis.com @melissadavis

