

Downsizing done right: Expert tips for crafting compact and stylish living space



Ruth Noble
Thoroughly evaluate the new space in advance and set out a clear plan detailing how each room will be used

Making the transition from a large family home to a more modern compact abode can, for many reasons, be both daunting and overwhelming, but it's also an opportunity for a fresh start in a bright, manageable, modern and clean-lined space. Many of my clients who are downsizing from family homes generally want to achieve a completely different design aesthetic to the one they are used to. They are keen to do away with the heavier, more decorative pieces of furniture and fabric in favour of clean lines, clutter-free spaces and a stylish and modern finish to their home that requires less maintenance. Whether moving into a new building or an existing property, or designing a new home, my advice is to thoroughly evaluate the new space in advance and set out a clear plan on how each room will be used. Then you can move forward to spend time on the design of each space.

1 Multi-purpose rooms
The most productive way to plan the new spaces is to make each room a multi-tasking one, taking into consideration open plan spaces, ease of circulation and how the rooms are occupied. Whether open plan or not, spaces should be clearly allocated for dining, media, reading, exercising and relaxing and don't forget to factor in accessible storage for sports equipment and suitcases.

2 Large furniture
It is often the case that dining tables, sideboards, sofas and even beds from larger homes just do not sit well within the smaller dimensions of a new build, so avoid the urge to hold on to items for sentimental reasons – be ruthless. My suggestion is to sell or pass on the (bulkier) treasured, quality pieces and heirlooms and give them new life, to be enjoyed elsewhere. Be decisive about what is not being moved to the new house as this will make planning the new spaces far easier.

3 Keep decor simple
In terms of decor, rather than introducing a lot of patterned wallpapers or embroidered fabrics, I usually layer fresh and energetic neutral colours and combine a variety of textures to give depth to the schemes. Opt for painted walls in preference to wallpaper, engineered wood floors, lots of natural plain fabrics – linens, silks, wools, bouclés and textures to layer up the schemes – maintaining a bright palette but keeping the schemes fresh and uplifting. Colour is introduced in pops with statement pieces of art, rugs, ottomans or occasional pieces.

4 Continuity creates fluid space
Also keep the base layer of the design continuous throughout the house, carrying the same paint colour through the ground floor rooms, hall, stairs and landing, even into the first floor, if there is one. Do the same with the flooring on each floor: engineered timber throughout the ground floor and carpet to the stairs, landing and bedrooms and the same tiles in each bathroom, for example. This avoids a patchwork effect and allows for a gentle flow and transition from room to room. Keep integrated shelving and fitted wardrobes painted the same colour as the walls to allow for a simple backdrop and flow within the rooms. Decorative objects, plants and books will add colour and life to the rooms. Keep the backdrop very neutral and bright and stick with block colours rather than patterns for the cushions and the throws.

5 Lighting
Introducing as much natural light as possible and a well-considered lighting plan ensures that each room is bright and welcoming at any time of day. The clever positioning of light fittings and lamps, and also mirrors, throughout the property is key to bouncing light around smaller



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spaces and to carrying an airy and fresh feeling throughout the property. Incorporate more functional lighting for reading, preparing food and in the bathrooms, in wardrobes and storage areas in a downsizer's new home than I would in other projects. Additional lighting to the stairwells and darker utility areas is important also.

6 Window dressing
Try not to overdress the windows. Simple electronic roller blinds allow for privacy, security, are simple to use and control the light far more smoothly and effectively than heavy lined curtains and Roman blinds. Specify lightly lined linen curtains or voiles on ceiling mounted tracks in place of heavy curtain poles – again this offers a more contemporary, lighter feel to the spaces. There is not a requirement for heavily lined curtains in modern, well-insulated homes.

7 Joinery and kitchens
When it comes to the internal woodwork and the design of the kitchen, shelving and storage, try to maintain clean lines and simple designs where possible. Keep shelving and cabinets at an accessible

height. As the capacity of the appliances will be smaller than the scale of what is required in a large family home, opt for a smaller hob, smaller oven, smaller fridge and use the extra space in the kitchen for storing pots, baking equipment and delft. Consider placing the freezer in the utility room (if possible) rather than the main kitchen space.

8 Lifestyle
A 'right-sizer's' lifestyle is such that they will hopefully have a bit more time to engage in sports, leisure activities and to travel more frequently than they might have in the past. So, factor in decent storage areas for sports equipment and suitcases which are easily accessible from the house to the car. As fewer bedrooms are likely to be needed when you're downsizing, consider using any spare room as a study or reading room, a yoga and meditation space or as an extra TV room with a sofa bed rather than a bed.

Ruth Noble Interiors was established in Dublin in 2016. Noble also recently launched an online store. See: ruthnobleinteriors.com or follow her on Instagram: @ruthnobleinteriors.

Winners of the Sonas Bathrooms and TU Dublin 2024 Bathroom Design of the Year. From left: Praise Akintokun, Bianca Cirdel, (overall winner) and Ania Pop. Students of the Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree in Design, were tasked to create a luxury bathroom for a contemporary hotel and the award-winning students received a certificate along with a cash prize



Fennells

Students' creativity springs eternal in luxury bathroom design competition

TINA-MARIE O'NEILL

Sonas Bathrooms and TU Dublin (Technological University Dublin) have announced the winners of the 2024 Bathroom Design of the Year. The overall winner is Bianca Cirdel of Drumcondra, Dublin 9, followed by Praise Akintokun

of Mulhuddart, Dublin 15, and Ania Pop of Dunboyne, Co Meath.

Students of the Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree in Design, led by Dr Neville Knott, one of Ireland's best known interior designers, were tasked to create a luxury bathroom for a contemporary hotel.

Third-year award-winning students received a certificate along with a cash prize. The overall winning design will be brought to life in a Sonas Studio display at one of the Sonas retailers. Sonas also sponsored all students one year's membership of the Interiors Association of Ireland. Jackie Carton, president of

the Interiors Association of Ireland, said: "It is wonderful to see Irish companies investing in the designers of the future. I have been blown away by the talents I witnessed as part of the judging panel. "Bianca [Cirdel] took Sonas-designed products and created something unique, original and bespoke. The

soft peach colours referencing Pantone's colour of the year, the gold accessories and marble gave it a real contemporary feel. Clever details such as the lighting set into the coving and the floor-to-ceiling backdrop in the shower delivered the icing on the cake," said Carton.

See: sonasbathrooms.com



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