

Interior Design

Small footprint, big style

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Having grown up in a bungalow in Montreal, interior designer Yanic Simard has always been a fan of modest homes.

But his recent move to a compact 640-square-foot Victorian apartment – roughly half the size of his previous address – tested his ability to live large and luxuriously within a small space.

“I wanted to see how much I’d like it and now I don’t want to move,” says Mr. Simard, who is a guest expert on *CityLine* and principal designer of the Toronto Interior Design Group.

Mr. Simard transformed and expanded his space not by physically altering the existing structure, but by applying several tricks of his trade.

“Sometimes it doesn’t take much, just paint, wallpaper and proper furnishing,” says Mr. Simard, who adds that this is the smallest home he’s lived in, “yet the most functional.”

He started the design project by searching for a home with solid foundations and features that naturally made the space feel more spacious.

This led him to a two-bedroom ground-floor apartment in Bloor West Village with 10- and 11-foot vaulted ceilings, eight-foot doorways and oversized baseboards.

From there, various aesthetic design elements – like patterns and colours – were combined to create the illusion of a larger space.

This technique is immediately apparent in the three-foot-wide hall, which feels wider and brighter when outfitted with a horizontally patterned runner, an Artemide light fixture and three slim, gold-framed mirrors.

“It was a real challenge because it was a dark and narrow tunnel,” says Mr. Simard. “The hallway is the first thing you see when you walk in, so you want to make it visually appealing.”

The graphic gold wallpaper in the passageway also continues into the central living and dining area to make both spaces feel like an extension of the other.

Using the same colour palette can also strengthen the visual flow between rooms. “You want to make sure your main colour story stays throughout, then you play with the accents,” says Mr. Simard.

Grey, black and white were selected for the base colour scheme, while green, blue and brown accessories help differentiate the rooms.

Among the most striking elements are nearly identical tri-coloured silk drapes made by

Drapica and set against walls painted in Benjamin Moore's Classic Grey.

Splashes of gold and chrome details, such as chrome hardware and a polished chrome armoire in the second bedroom, are used to similar effect.

Looks aside, Mr. Simard made the small apartment work like a larger one by stocking up on versatile furniture pieces so each room could serve multiple purposes.

For instance, Mr. Simard custom-designed the sofa bed in the second bedroom, which doubles as a den, and an extra-deep couch in the principal room that he frequently uses to relax, dine and entertain, as well as nap.

"[The couch] is wider than a twin bed when you take out the cushions at the back, so it's extremely comfortable," says Mr. Simard. "And it's firm enough ... and the height is comfortable enough to eat around the table."

Guests can even join him for a meal by pulling chairs of differing styles from adjacent rooms.

"I like to get more pieces that are less expensive, yet as beautiful," Mr. Simard explains, pointing out \$250 antique chairs and a \$60 cylindrical stool currently set around his dining table. "It's not about money. It's about vision and taste."

Other portable pieces include a stainless steel bathroom cart loaded with towels and a stainless steel trolley with kitchen utensils used for meals to be transferred to the living room.

"It's a nice functional piece," says Mr. Simard. "It's more important than beauty and looks."

Mr. Simard purchased and designed all new furnishings for the space – with the exception of a Philippe Starck-inspired chair and a writing desk.

"People will force the space to accommodate their pieces, while it should be the other way around," says Mr. Simard.

"I see many clients who already start shopping and they don't even have the house yet, and it never works because the sofa is too big, too small ... not the right look."

Keeping only essential belongings and reducing clutter also freed up space so Mr. Simard could entertain 20 at a time. "Everyone was happy and ... they didn't have to stand up for too long," he says.

Items are hidden within drawers beneath the living room couch and inside armoires in each room, as well as a master closet with a foldaway ironing board, tie rack and shoe compartments by Closet and Storage Concepts of Canada Inc.

Larger possessions are tucked into the storage closet.

Or, "if you want to store four winter tires ... and they don't fit in the house, then rent out a storage space," adds Mr. Simard. "You don't have to buy a big house for that ... because then you're stuck with a high mortgage and maintenance fees."

Mr. Simard was so meticulous about planning how he would efficiently redesign and redecorate his new home that he still has empty drawers and rarely uses the second bedroom.

“It’s still too big for me, believe it or not,” Mr. Simard says.

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