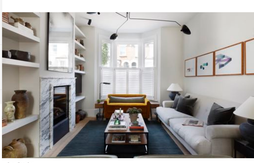
How to make small spaces look bigger

Inside Sophie Ringle's Mandalay House by Studio Dwyer and Co

Inside Ben Ashton's Jurassic Coast home by Studio Duggan

How to make small spaces look bigger

Six interior designers reveal their top tips, tricks and hacks for creating the illusion of space when it's scarce



Courtesy Christian Berger

Space is one of the most coveted luxuries, especially in crowded cities where compact living has become the norm. But small doesn't have to mean cramped. With clever design tricks and optical illusions, you can make any room feel larger, with no major building works or remodelling required. We asked six interior designers to share their top practical hacks for maximising small spaces.

Let there be (layered) light

Courtesy Pete Ashman

Light placement and style can be an extremely effective way to make a room look bigger if you know what you're doing, says Sophie Ashman, founder of Pitty Ashman Design, a London-based interior designer Pitty Ashman, is a clear view of hard-overhead lighting. Spotlights are ceiling-scary, says the founder of Pitty Ashman Design. You are seeing a spotlight right on their head. It is not flattering. Instead, use low and mid-level directional task lighting to highlight parts of the room, including corners and cornices and really push everything out to create the illusion of more space. Wall lights are also a great option, as they can be placed low and up to the edges of the room. It's all about layering light to deliberately highlight the features and areas of the room you want to make more of.

As for natural light, Ashman says that there are ways to be more into an otherwise dull or dark space. Mirrors placed opposite, or at an angle to, windows can reflect and bounce light around and bring space and texture natural light, creates a visual connection between rooms and adds depth, making the space feel larger while maintaining clear boundaries between different areas in a home.

www.pittyashman.com

Mirror, Mirror

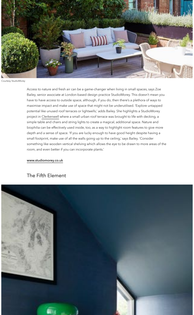
Courtesy Studio Duggan

Another trick for making a small space or room look larger, and one intrinsically linked to maximising bright placements, is the use of reflective surfaces. This is a trick that can be effectively deployed by using furniture such as tables with reflective surfaces or furniture by cleverly positioning wall-hanging mirrors to a small room for the ultimate reflective optical illusion.

Then, there are other more intricate ways of utilising reflective surfaces that are baked into the design itself. Studio Duggan's recently completed Clapham house is a prime example. To this marvellously cosy double reception room, we clad the reveal of the opening in smoked mirror panels to add a little drama and blur the separation lines a little, says founder Tiffany Duggan. It's such a cool trick.

www.studioduggan.com

Natural Beauty



Courtesy Studio Ringle

Access to nature and fresh air can be a game changer when living in small spaces, says Zoe Bailey, senior associate at London-based design practice Studio Bailey. This doesn't mean you have to have access to outside space, although, if you do, then there's a plethora of ways to maximise impact and make use of space that might not be underutilised. Explore untapped potential like unused roof terraces or lightwells, adds Bailey. She highlights a Studio Bailey project in Hampstead where the team created a lightwell garden to bring nature into the single-aspect kitchen and bring light to create a magical, additional space. Nature and biophilia can be effectively used inside, too, as a way to highlight room features to give more depth and a sense of space. If you are lucky enough to have good bright designs having a small footprint, make use of all the walls going up to the ceiling, says Bailey. Consider incorporating shelving units or bookcases that span the wall to the ceiling to make areas of the room, and even better if you can incorporate plants.

www.studiomoney.co.uk

The Fifth Element

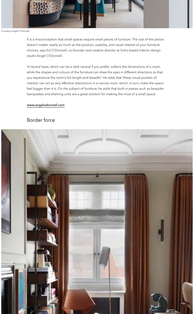
Courtesy Pringle & Pringle

It's all too easy to think of a room as having four walls. Sophie Pringle, creative director of Surrey-based interior design practice Pringle & Pringle, wholeheartedly encourages the use of the fifth element in small spaces. Ceilings are a great place to add a little extra dimension and impact depending on the feel you are trying to evoke, she says. They with stripes or a pattern to create an illusion or architectural details to add interest and give your eye another focus. Alternatively you can take the colour of the walls up and over the ceiling to avoid the room feeling too broken up. Sometimes known as colour drenching, this technique will, she says, effectively elongate the look and feel of the space.

It doesn't have to mean just using paint, however. Pringle points here to an example where she used wallpaper on the walls cons ness pain to the same shade. Proof that mixing textures and materials but sticking to colours can still have the desired effect.

www.pringleandpringle.co.uk

The art of distraction



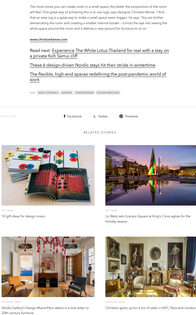
Courtesy Rajah Interiors

It is a misconception that small spaces require small pieces of furniture. The size of the pieces doesn't matter nearly as much as the position, suitability, and visual interest of your furniture choices, says Ed O'Donnell, co-founder and creative director at Sofia-based interior design studio Angel O'Donnell.

A neutral base, which can be a dark neutral if you prefer, softens the dimensions of a room, while the shapes and colours of the furniture can draw the eye in different directions so that you experience the room's full length and breadth. He adds that there visual pockets of interest can be created by using contrasting textures and materials, and that the art of space feel bigger than it is. On the subject of furniture, he adds that built-in pieces such as bespoke banquettes and shelving units are a great solution for making the most of a small space.

www.angelodonnell.com

Border force



Courtesy Christian Berger

The more zones you can create, even in a small space, the better the proportions of the room will feel, says interior designer Christian Berger. Zoning can be achieved by using furniture that will allow you to a great way to make a small space seem bigger," he says. This will further demarcating the room and creating a smaller internal border. It holds the eye into seeing the whole space around the room and it defines a new ground for furniture to sit on.

www.christianberger.com

Read next: Experience The White Lotus Thailand for real with a stay on a private Rich Senior Gift

These 6 design-driven Nordic stays hit their stride in wintertime

The flexible, high-end spaces redefining the post-pandemic world of work

TAGS: DESIGN | DESIGNERS | INTERIOR | INTERIOR DESIGN | STYLE AND INTERIORS

SHARE THIS ARTICLE: Facebook Twitter Pinterest

RELATED STORIES

LIFESTYLE
10 gift ideas for design lovers

LIFESTYLE
Liz Wheal sets Granary Square at King's Cross alpha for the holiday season

LIFESTYLE
Nicole Gallery's Design Miami/Pieces debuts a love letter to 20th century furniture

LIFESTYLE
Christie's gears up for a trio of sales in NYC, Paris and London

NEWSLETTER
SIGN UP TO THE DESIGN EDITOR'S WEEKLY NEWSLETTER
SIGN UP