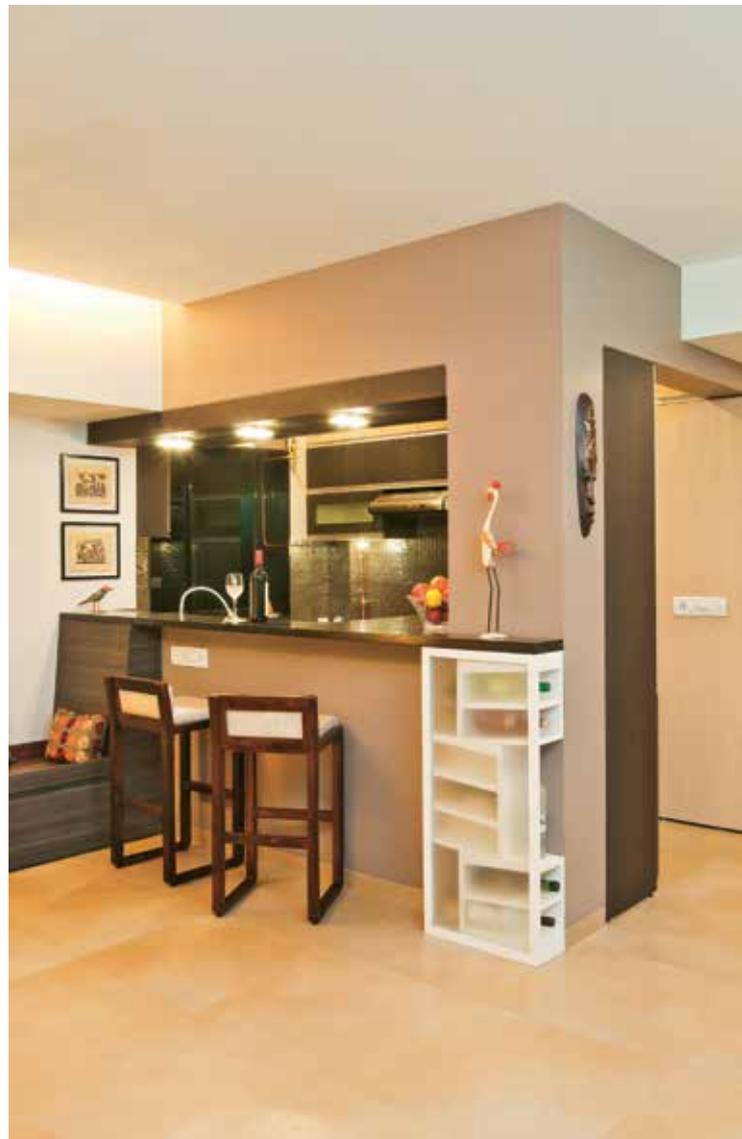


# Matchboxes made in heaven

Nobody—save perhaps the highly privileged or the highly frugal—has ever lived free of space issues. Here are a few useful ways to stretch your space without stretching your means.

TEXT JASEM PIRANI

Courtesy Sameer Tawde



Left: The idea behind this dining area by (de)CoDe architecture was to conceal the MDB and services and use it as a display unit.

Right: Architects at (de)CoDe broke down one wall to create an open kitchen with a breakfast/bar table. The partial walls at the kitchen entrance have also been demolished to create space for cabinets.



If you live in a city, it is likely that lack of space has haunted you at some point. There are countless ways to squeeze more function out of a room, no matter what the size. Flexibility and versatility are the two main components in designing for small spaces. The ability to work and play in your space effectively is important, as a usable room feels less small. Planning is always an important component in interior design, but it is particularly crucial in small spaces. Sit down with a pencil and paper, don't just draw a layout but also form a list of necessities. Scrutinise the potential uses of a room or space, the furniture requirements, storage needed and personal interests. Determine the financial means at your disposal, future changes in your life and the amount of time you plan to spend in your current home. Previewing

all this information before you start or even hiring a professional designer makes all the difference.

Once the designer is on board, he or she will respond to the natural character of a space. The designer will survey the natural light permeating window walls, and study the nooks and crannies for extra space, such as under staircases or by introducing lofts. Armed with your brief and wish list, designers begin planning, making sure that they are maximising the available space to meet both the quantitative as well as qualitative programmatic requirements of a space.

### LESS COULD BE MORE

Talented designers have turned smaller spaces into compact yet cosy homes, boutiques and offices. Here, we will look

Courtesy Sanjay Ramchandran



Clockwise from above: The view looking back at the entrance court from the living room and dining area, at a project by GSA architects; Open and connected views of the living room and entrance court through the dining area certainly make the space seem larger; The dining area as viewed along the central spine. The table and spine in a linear arrangement create a sense of continuity.

Right: With its arched ceilings and seamless flow of spaces, this wardrobe at The Organic House by White Room Studio begins to look more open and spacious.

Below: The centrepiece of The Organic House is a long, curved, contemporary sofa, that wraps around the living room and is nestled among the vaulted surfaces, leaving the central space free.



at various thoughts that epitomise the idea of doing more with less. “Why should small spaces be crammed with furniture?” asks Gaurav Panjwani, architect and partner at Studio GSA Architects based in Bengaluru. In the same breath, he says, “It may sound like a paradox, but sometimes, to make it all work, you should even lose some space.” When spaces are open and visually connected, it creates a sense of continuity. To create this continuity whilst demarcating the different zones in one of their apartment projects for a young couple, a

central spine was created—which runs along the living-dining area. Clad with textured wallpaper, this formed the backdrop for the area—tying them together. When compartmentalised, a small space begins to appear even smaller.

Studio GSA architects introduced a cove light along the central spine—the glow reflecting down the walls makes the room feel more expansive as it spans the length of the residence. “Even when you’re in these relatively tight areas, the eye doesn’t focus on the smaller moments—you’re getting borrowed views from the other rooms, making the space feel more generous,” says Panjwani.

Editing is a big part of the designing process. Architect and partner Nitin Barchha at White Room Studio in Mumbai does not allow his clients to bring home just about anything. He stresses on the process of de-cluttering, which clients first resist, but as they begin to envision his thought process, they begin to appreciate it. “I like editing as it helps keep the space light and free (of objects) and allows for light to flow through the space,” adds Barchha. Picking the things and functions that are absolutely necessary is imperative as that begins to shape the experience of the space. Barchha stresses that “it’s not about trying to have every single function. If it’s not doing anything to improve the experience, then take it away.”

### IT’S ALL IN THE FLOW

In The Organic House, a 65 sq m apartment designed for a young couple in Bandra, Barchha has created a vaulted design with arched openings





Courtesy Sanjay Ramchandran

At this house designed by CSA architects, a raised platform was created to frame the view at the entrance court to create an intimate and cozy bar setting.



that carve out spaces for the kitchen, bedroom and bathrooms. Most designers transform small spaces into larger spaces by utilising 'airspace' or creating multiple movable sections, but instead, by creating a seamless flow of spaces from one to another, the small apartment begins to feel spacious as well as luxurious.

Many designers begin by breaking non-structural walls, and prefer erecting partitions that serve a dual purpose; using hidden storage and display units as space dividers over the traditional brick wall. As Prashant Prabhu, architect and partner at (de)CoDe architecture showcases in one of his projects: "Wardrobes and bookshelves are designed to be shared between rooms and mirrors are made to disappear into nooks." With the hidden storage and movable pieces disguised and made to be an integral part of the overall composition, the apartment embraces the intrinsic nature of the shell that it is a part of.

Visual continuity through a space creates a sense of calmness. Soothing, even-toned rooms fool the eye into thinking they're more spacious than they are. Bespoke built-ins, storage nooks, and furniture tailored to your exact needs can utilise every available sliver of space. "Use of light-coloured laminates and veneers on furniture help reduce their visual weight. Glass helps to enhance transparency



**Design, especially in a small space, should feel intentional. It is all about creating cosy spaces, but deliberately so.**

and allows natural light to penetrate deep into the home. Lighting is devised to create ambience and accentuate the moods of the day, keeping the connection of the inside with the outside," Prabhu says.

### LOOKING UP

Apartments with smaller footprints need to think vertically as well. Often under-utilised space between the tops of furniture and a room's ceiling are not exploited enough. High-mounted elements such as hanging lights or artwork draw the eye upward. Bookcases and kitchen cabinets should

**Above:** The architects at (de)CoDe relocated the original door of the guest bedroom so that it gets privacy and at the same time, the living room doesn't become a passageway. The original doorway has been converted to a two-way bookshelf/display unit. The use of frosted glass has been incorporated to allow light into both spaces.

Below: This master bedroom, designed by GSA architects, is free of clutter—the more floor space you see, the larger the apartment feels.

be built all the way up. Where permitted, windows must be enlarged for more natural light. Solid doors must be swapped for glass to open up views and connect adjacent spaces. Strategically placed screens or shelving force you to take in the space slowly—suggesting that it's larger than it is. Bunk beds can be given a twist, instead of having a bed below, one can use the part underneath as storage for books, clothes or a TV unit. Alternately, instead of using an uncomfortable bed in a small apartment, the living room, kitchen and dining area can be combined into one room, and a bed area with a lower height can be built on an upper level. The stairs leading to the upper level, too, can be used for storage.

In trying to accommodate the quantitative requirements, one must not forget the qualitative needs. Whether small or big—an apartment in the city must feel like home. As Prabhu succinctly

states, “In essence, a home in the city needs to be more open-plan, giving its inhabitants a sense of context and surroundings. It needs to invite natural light in rather than shut it out. A home should be a place of calm, an oasis to deal with the stress that comes with living in a city.”

Clutter-free surfaces, bright pops of colour on neutral backgrounds and reflective surfaces that bounce back natural light all make a space appear larger than it really is. Knocking down all the walls and using multifunctional furniture to transform a space allows for maximum efficiency. Design, especially in a small space, should feel intentional. It is all about creating cosy spaces, but deliberately so. What's most important is to not over-compartmentalise and allow for flexibility. Less stuff and less space need not amount to feeling cramped. There's a way to convert your small footprint into a cosy haven. ■

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