

How to Make Small Spaces Seem Larger

Many people are opting to downsize various aspects of their lives, including their living quarters. The American Lighting Association offers tips for choosing the right kind of lighting to instantly make small rooms look more spacious.

Dallas, TX (Vocus) November 18, 2010 -- The trend of “bigger is better” has fallen, along with McMansions and the economy. Whether by choice or necessity, many people are opting to downsize across the board – from eating habits to living quarters. According to the [American Lighting Association](#) (ALA), choosing the right kind of lighting and paying attention to its placement can instantly make small rooms look more spacious.

“Overall, a dark or poorly lighted home will always feel smaller,” cautions Rick Seidman, president of [Quoizel](#), a major lighting manufacturer based in South Carolina. “If small spaces are illuminated properly, they are truly enhanced. The best result comes from incorporating accent lighting along with the functional lighting.”

When it comes to selecting fixtures for a scaled-down residence, proportion is everything. “The foyers and entryways of smaller homes and condos will likely not be able to carry a typical foyer chandelier or lantern-style light,” Seidman explains. “For this reason, we offer decorative semi-flush mounts, flush mounts, and mini-chandeliers for that area featuring materials such as agate stone, mica, shells and rattan. We find natural elements bring warmth and design to the entry point of a home.”

When it comes to illuminating a small interior room, practicing architect and lighting designer Joe Rey-Barreau, also an education consultant for the ALA and an associate professor at the University of Kentucky’s School of Interior Design, believes in the power of portables.

“The impact of portable lighting is typically little understood by consumers,” Rey-Barreau states. A multi-lamp approach is very effective in helping to visually enlarge a living room or bedroom. “I suggest placing several table lamps and small accent lamps throughout the room – for example, on bookshelves, dressers and bedside tables. Having multiple points of lighting dramatically increases the psychological perception of the space.”

The lights should not be bright, and should actually have relatively low wattage or dimmers,” Rey-Barreau says. In fact, he prefers lamps that either come equipped with built-in dimmers or that can be plugged into a product like Lutron’s tabletop dimmer, which works with almost all lamps and is sold through lighting showrooms.

Another fan of this technique is Catherine Schlawin, an ALA-Certified Lighting Consultant (CLC) and residential lighting manager at [Dominion Electric Supply](#) in Chantilly, Virginia. “Lutron’s tabletop dimmers can be used on any lamp or sconce that plugs in. When you have a small space, the rooms often have to be multi-functional. Dimmers are an easy way to help the spaces feel different for the various activities (i.e. TV watching, festive party, romantic dining) involved,” she explains.

These experts also suggest buying tall and slender torchieres, which direct light upward. “Torchieres can add dramatic, yet ambient, lighting to smaller spaces with vaulted ceilings. Plus they take up minimal floor space,” Seidman notes. When Schlawin lived in an apartment, she placed narrow torchieres – with glass diffusers that



measure no more than 12 inches in diameter – in the corners of the living room. Then she used lamp dimmers instead of pricier three-way bulbs to create various light levels.

If there is not a lot of floor space, consider a wall sconce. Sconces are a wonderful option for providing ambient light. They can be hardwired into the wall or purchased in a pin-up version that plugs into an outlet.

The technique called “wall washing” is effective in making spaces appear larger. It involves positioning the light (there are fixtures specifically made for this application) so that it grazes the wall, drawing attention outward. Visit your local [ALA](#)-member showroom to see this method demonstrated.

“I once worked on an apartment in New York City where all of the lighting was accomplished with wall washers,” Rey-Barreau says. “Every room had a series of wall washers that illuminated only one wall of the space. The effect was very dramatic and created a different awareness of the room’s scale. You can accomplish this look with either built-in wall washers or by installing a monorail system using low wattage MR16 lamps with flood beam spreads.”

Rey-Barreau often employs monorails in small kitchens. “We can install task lighting by carefully placing small MR16 or MR11 fixtures over the work surfaces adjacent to the walls,” he explains. Using only one junction box, the monorail can span across the ceiling to the area above an island or peninsula; pendants are placed along the rail for both task and ambient lighting. “The pendants can serve as major focal points depending on their style and design,” he adds.

Seidman agrees that decorative mini pendants over a kitchen island or dining area can be a terrific solution. “A heavy island light can make a small kitchen area feel crowded,” he notes. “The mini-pendants have smaller globes that aren’t as bulky as a fixture. They let you see through the space, making it appear roomier.”

According to Rey-Barreau, pendants placed over islands and work surfaces should be mounted approximately 66 inches from the floor to the bottom of the pendants. When installed above dining areas, they should be hung approximately 60 inches from the floor to the bottom of the pendants.

Homeowners who don’t like the look of pendants over their dining area might prefer a small chandelier. Many manufacturers offer small, scaled-down decorative fixtures. Mini-chandeliers or Chandelettes®, as they are called by [Kichler Lighting](#), offer a glamorous look for any room in the house.

When choosing table lamps, torchieres, floor lamps, and fixtures for a small room, scale is important. “Keep the bodies as light and airy as possible,” Schlawin cautions. “You don’t want a heavy iron or resin piece that has a lot of visual heft.”

In general, living in a small space does not mean you must sacrifice style. Visit your nearby ALA-member lighting showroom to find the many options available. A Certified Lighting Consultant or Lighting Specialist on staff will be glad to help you select the proper fixtures for visually enlarging any room. For more information or to find your local ALA showroom, visit www.AmericanLightingAssoc.com.

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