

STARTING OVER

BY BARBARA BALLINGER
PHOTOS BY JERRY KALYNIUK

see the light
Minimalist shelving
creates much less
visual bulk than a
traditional unit

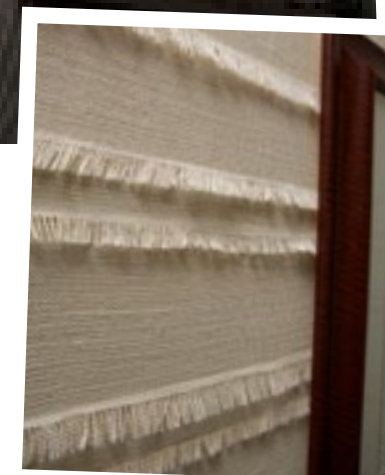
2,000-SQUARE-FOOT BUNGALOW

- **DECORATING STYLE:** Combination that designer and homeowner term “Rough Luxe,” which translates to elegant but simple
- **RENOVATIONS:** Stayed within footprint, but gutted bathroom, powder room, kitchen and lower level
- **BIGGEST DESIGN CHALLENGE:** Editing furnishings from large former home to fit into new, much smaller—almost ¼ the size—space
- **BEST SOLUTION:** Two chaises rather than one sofa for den where family spends most of its time—everyone finds this solution much cozier
- **BIGGEST ADVANTAGE TO SMALL:** You must be organized...in this homeowner’s case, downsizing brought the family closer together, since there’s no extra space in which to hide away
- **WISH LIST:** Find a way to get the laundry equipment housed somewhere on the first floor rather than on the lower level

HOME STRETCH

AN **EMPTY-NESTER** DESIGNER TAKES ON HER BIGGEST ASSIGNMENT: **DOWNSIZING** HER HOME—BY MORE THAN 5,500 SQUARE FEET!

LOUNGE DELUXE A tiny den is furnished with two inviting chaises—covered in a charcoal gray linen—instead of a traditional sofa, which would have been bulkier. Each chaise has just one arm to make getting in and out easier. For flooring, homeowner/designer Susan Brunstrum chose hardwood instead of carpeting for a more spacious feel, and she used a zebra-style rug to add interest. Along the same lines, she selected an open-backed TV storage unit with minimal sides. She painted the piece a dark color to match the oak floor’s walnut hue. Accessories here and elsewhere were kept to a minimum.



When you're a designer who loves collecting and has filled a 7,500-square-foot home from top to bottom, downsizing to almost one-quarter the size could be a gut-wrenching challenge. But Susan Brunstrum, owner of Sweet Peas Design in the Chicago area, was up to the task when her son and daughter headed off to college. She bought an almost 2,000-square-foot 1927 bungalow and found she loves living in a small home. Not only does she enjoy the reduced maintenance and related costs, she also loved getting rid of almost everything and starting over with more eclectic finds and a lighter, more contemporary palette of ivory, taupe and charcoal. She repeated those hues throughout the home for consistency. "Sticking with the same colors helps the small home's flow," she says. Even now, she keeps editing if she buys something new. "I always ask—and tell others—do you need something or just want it?" she says.

GOODBYE BASEMENT, HELLO FAMILY ROOM

Even though the basement has a low 8' ceiling, Susan wanted to use the room because of the home's limited square footage. To make it appealing, she recessed lights, since the room lacked sufficient windows; carpeted the floor in wool to make it softer; and chose a sofa and two chaises that she upholstered in sophisticated gray flannel for comfy sprawling in front of a giant media center with a 70" TV. A pop of citrine in the ottoman adds punch; its leather surface lets kids relax without scuffing it up.



solo act
In a room with paired objects, scatter in a few lone items, like the mantel's vase

BEAUTIFUL SYMMETRY While Susan doesn't believe that every room should have perfect symmetry, that device worked well in her small living room, where visual consistency makes it appear larger. After painting the red brick mantel a neutral hue, she placed large lacquered chests on either side to offer storage for linens and other seasonal items. She repeated the idea of matched pairs with two contemporary sofas upholstered in oatmeal linen and window panels with the room's only pattern of florals. Because she thinks too much pattern in a small space can prove distracting, she chose panels with just two tones—gray and taupe. To raise eyes up, she painted the ceiling a high-gloss white with metallic flecks that shimmer.

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open ended
Intersperse glass-
fronted cupboards
to offset heavy wood
cabinets

LEVELING LIGHT AND DARK

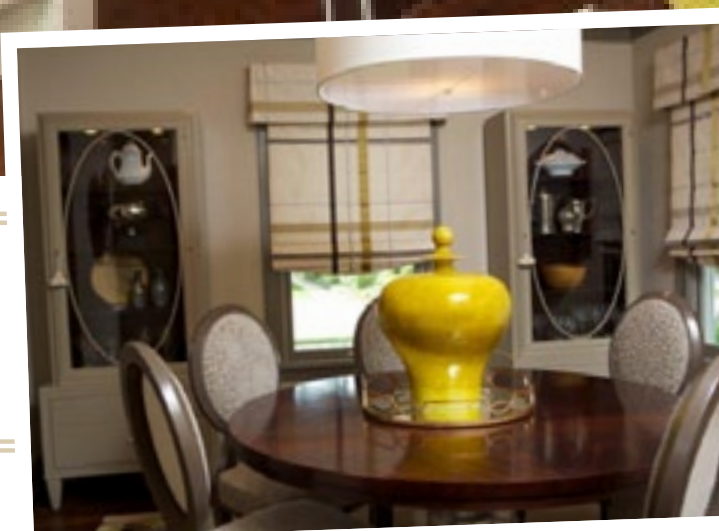
The existing kitchen offered a good-sized space, though its design needed to be better configured. Susan gutted the room, designed a small island with one seat at the center, found room to include a tiny table by a window and constructed cabinets in a charcoal gray to fit the home’s overall palette, as well as to anchor the perimeter. Although she wanted to run cabinets to the ceiling for maximum storage, she had to drop them 2” because of the older home’s uneven ceilings, but they offer the illusion of running all the way up. For one strong contrast, which Susan considers key even in a small room, she chose light-colored quartzite countertops; she painted the island cabinets a similar light taupe, which she repeated in the bathrooms for consistency. All the door fronts in this room are also similar to those in the bathrooms and lower-level family room’s cabinetry, though finishes vary. “This kind of repetitiveness is important to make the entire house seem larger and help flow,” she says.

DOWNSIZING 101

LESS REALLY IS MORE WHEN YOU KNOW THE HOW-TOS.

- **EVERYTHING NEEDS A FUNCTION** “Use everything for more than one purpose,” Susan Brunstrum notes. For example, her living room chests hold off-season clothes and placemats.
- **LIMIT HORIZONTAL SURFACES** The only horizontal surface in Susan’s home without doors or drawers is the Parson’s-style table in the living room. Everything else functions as storage.
- **REPEAT ELEMENTS AND MATERIALS** In a smaller home, you need the repetition for cohesiveness—similar paint colors, similar countertops, similar door styles, similar floors.
- **PARE CHOICES** Limit the colors you use for sheets, towels and blankets. The only thing that should differ are coverlets and duvets, just so you’ll always know which bed they go on.
- **PLAN IN ADVANCE** In the kitchen, Susan planned down to the drawer where everything would go and got rid of what she couldn’t fit.
- **BREAK RULES** Don’t always go with conventional wisdom. In the bedroom, instead of a bench, she used two ottomans, so they can be moved about, even into other rooms for seating.

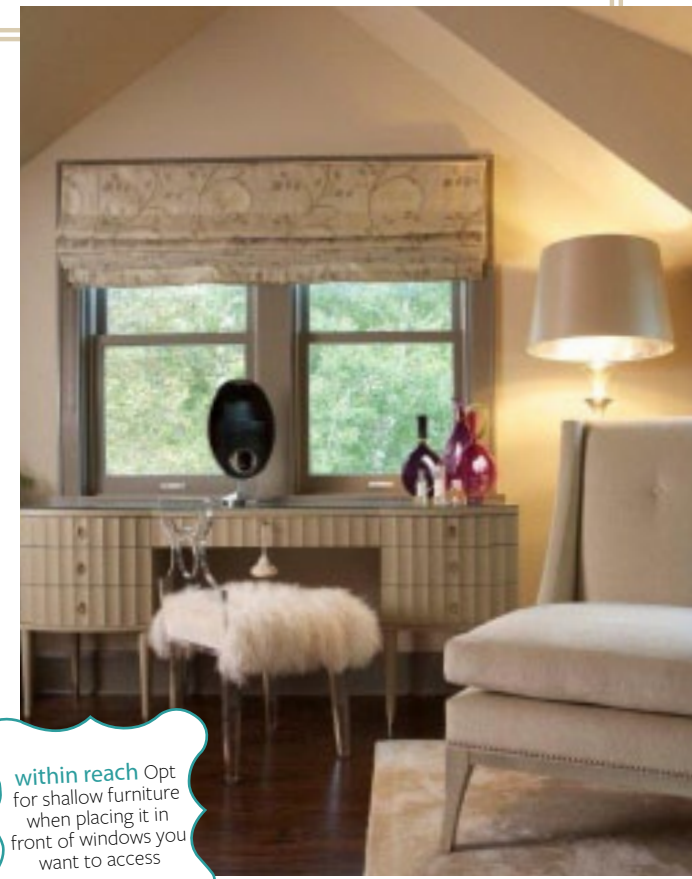
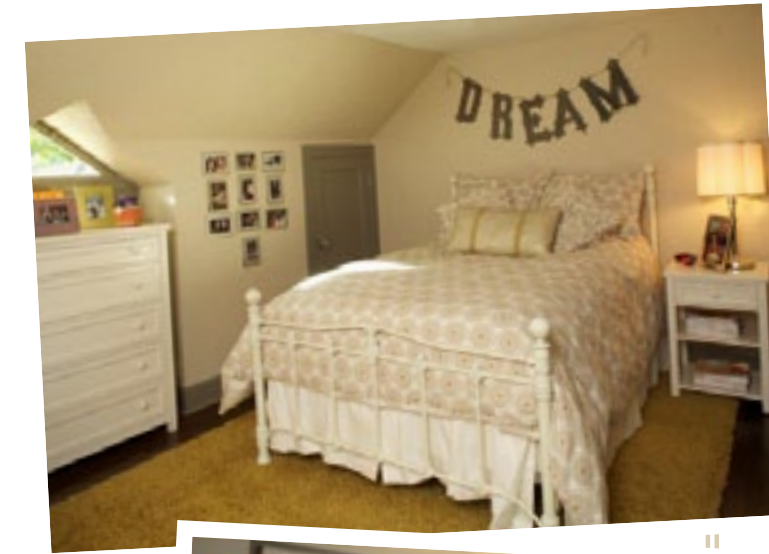
THE CIRCLE GAME To keep the small dining room from feeling claustrophobic, Susan chose a round table with armless chairs to leave enough room to circulate and fit in storage. Since there was no room for a large hutch, she selected two smaller cabinets with glass fronts to make the room feel open. But for a light fixture, she went with an oversized 60” drum-style chandelier. “Every room, even a small one, needs one big design statement,” she says. She repeated that drum shade in the living room and kitchen fixtures. Walls here were painted Benjamin Moore’s soft Temporal Spirit, a light taupe, with Benjamin Moore’s Squirrel Tail on moldings.



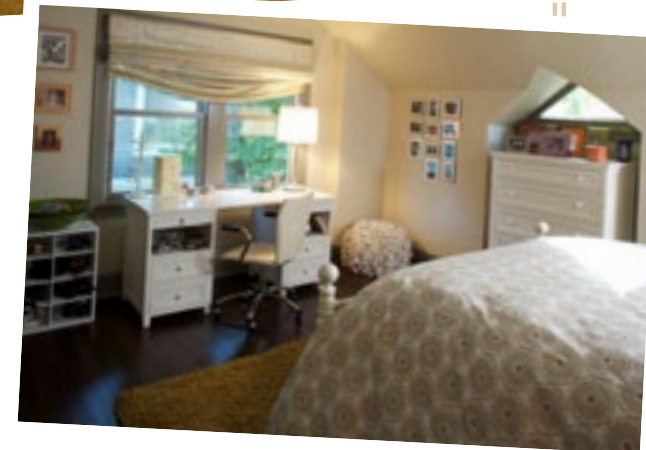
“EVERY HOME NEEDS ONE BIG DESIGN STATEMENT.”



RELAXING THE RULES Because her bedroom also needed to be her personal retreat, Susan continued the same taupe-colored walls in it. But she decided to introduce textures and some femininity. She mixed together a furry spread, two mohair-covered ottomans, a reading chair upholstered in ivory chenille, a “fun, girly” acrylic stool with long hair and a dark mushroom-colored painted desk, which she topped with glass to make it practical for using her laptop or applying makeup. “In a small house, every piece should serve at least two functions,” Susan says. Though she prefers not to place a bed in front of a window as it will block views and light, she discarded that rule here because the window overlooked a garage, hardly an attractive sight, she notes.



within reach Opt for shallow furniture when placing it in front of windows you want to access



DORMER DOES IT Because of the home’s bungalow style, the second-floor bedrooms featured novel window shapes and sloping ceilings. In her daughter’s room, one nook offered a great place to fit a chest of drawers so it almost looks built in, and another window was the right spot to place a desk, which doubles as a makeup counter. Because the daughter’s prior bedroom was tangerine and magenta and she wanted something quieter now that she’s older, Susan kept lively colors in the floral bedspread but painted walls the same taupe and the crown molding the same gray as in other rooms.

ELEGANCE FOR ALL The home’s biggest downside was just one full bathroom upstairs for all three family members. Susan made it more functional by eliminating a tub and converting it to a generous shower stall. She also added a knee wall between the vanity and toilet for a bit of privacy, and installed more cabinetry. A clever center cabinet stores odds and ends and acts as a divider between the sinks. She also built two narrow ledges behind each sink for a place to put stuff used daily. Again for consistency, she used the same surfaces as in the downstairs powder room. ♦

