

JULY/AUGUST 2011



# House Beautiful

LIVING  
LARGE  
IN  
SMALL  
SPACES

650 SQ. FT.  
**STUDIO**

1,400 SQ. FT.  
**COTTAGE**

900 SQ. FT.  
**ONE-BEDROOM  
APARTMENT**

1,050 SQ. FT.  
**BUNGALOW**

295 SQ. FT.  
**ONE-ROOM**

DECORATE  
BY NUMBERS!

TOP 10 TIPS

CLIP & KEEP



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Interior design by CHRIS BARRETT Interview by DAVID A. KEEPS Photographs by VICTORIA PEARSON



An 18th-century limestone mantel from Cavendish Grey is the focal point of the living room, where Barrett mixes period furniture—a pair of 1950s Italian loungers, a midcentury coffee table—with a skirted sofa of her own design. “All the silhouettes complement one another because they’re all rounded,” she says. Curtains in Donghia Sauvage Natural silk burlap provide textural contrast to the smooth plaster walls. A large-scale Brian Hodges photograph anchors the sofa wall.





**WID A. KEEPS:** This house is certainly cozy—more casita than hacienda.

**IRIS BARRETT:** It's definitely a bungalow. It was built in 1929 in the Spanish Colonial style that was popular in Santa Barbara, and it does feel like a big house that's been shrink-wrapped. But it has the details I love—wooden beams and lintels and plaster walls—all in the right proportions and scale. I took a lot of my design cues from the architecture.

**For instance?**

The original living room ceiling is random tongue-and-groove. I echoed that pattern with a floor made from varied widths of oak—it looks more true to the architecture, and more authentic. In the kitchen and bath, I designed paneled cabinetry that feels period-appropriate. The walls had to be resurfaced, and I used integrally colored plaster in some rooms. What a mess that was, but it really gives the walls depth, which makes the spaces look larger.

**What else did you do to make that little living room feel so big?**

I used curved furniture that I can easily walk around. The sofa has a back that curves into these chic, elegant arms—I based it on one I saw in the lobby of the Bulgari hotel in Milan. I tried using a rectangular rug, but it chopped up the room and made it smaller. So I ended up with a cowhide—the irregular shape draws your eye to the edges and really makes the room spread out.

**You're a former actress—you must've lived large in the 1970s, when you played nurse Ellen Bart on *Emergency!* So what are the advantages of the small life?**

I'm single and my kids are grown, so a smaller house makes sense. And you actually use every room. I wanted a dining room, a library, a den, and an office, but I didn't have that kind of space. I had to make it all work in one room. It actually feels bigger now that I put the bookcases in. The walls don't close in on you, because there are so many things to look at on the shelves.

**You bookscape like a scholar.**

The big key is to take off all the paper



**ABOVE:** In a sunlit end of the living room, a rosewood Tansu chest with gold paper-covered sliders is a visual anchor—and provides a touch of glamour. **OPPOSITE:** Floor-to-ceiling bookcases give depth to the dining room-office-library; artfully arranged objects on the shelves engage the eye. "You need air around things—give them room to breathe," Barrett says. A Danish Baroque desk doubles as a dining table (and a hangout for dachshund Frankie). The mesh lantern from Hollyhock and 19th-century bamboo-turned Windsor chairs add a chinoiserie accent.

jackets on your new books. They don't look good with old books. And don't fill every space. I collect a lot of things—globes, ivory, dolls' eyeballs—and you need to leave space around things that are grouped.

**You've also made the most of a tiny galley kitchen. How did you finesse it?**

I gutted it and made a niche for the stove, a visual trick that makes it look like it's in another little room. And I replaced the original French doors with new ones. Wall cabinets are utilitarian but so dull. I love having open shelves and being able to stack pretty dishes and paintings on them. And even though it's not Spanish—and I'm not some huge chef splattering spaghetti on the walls—I was determined to have floor-to-ceiling white tiles for texture, reflectivity, and easy cleanup.

**How would you describe your color scheme?**

It's white on white on white, along with the natural colors of wood, leather, and textiles. I tend to have a more masculine feeling to my deco-

rating, so I balance it out with color on pillows and fresh, girly flowers. If something isn't blooming in my garden, I'll buy peonies and ranunculus. But most of the year I can cut roses from my own bushes.

**Having a garden is a cure for small-space claustrophobia, isn't it?**

Absolutely. You sit in my little white cloud of a bedroom and look at the greenery outside, and it feels like you're in a tree house. I always sleep with the windows wide open. I grew up in Los Angeles, and I do not do well in an apartment building. I like to pull weeds and trim olive trees. I need a garden for my soul.

**Your garden is more rambling than manicured. How do you decorate a yard like yours?**

This garden is loose and relaxed, so I wanted to mix old things—like a French bistro table and chairs I've had for years—with fresh pieces like these two Paola Lenti lounges that resemble giant beanbags. I went with that wild, surprising pink color because sometimes you have to be brave. On the top patio, off the kitchen, I designed alder daybeds. I like an aged gray look for outdoor furniture, so I am going to let them rot. When I couldn't find the right outdoor cushions, I developed my own textile line.

**Very resourceful. What should I expect when you have me over for dinner?**

In good weather, we're always outside. I'll be in jeans, a T-shirt, and flip-flops. Much to the chagrin of everyone, I'll be playing the Gipsy Kings or Duran Duran or David Bowie. There will be candles everywhere, but not scented ones—they ruin the aromas of cooking. Dinner will be barbecued something, corn, grilled asparagus, salad, bread, cheese, and lemon cornmeal cake from Huckleberry bakery, all served everybody-help-yourself style. My dinner plates are really platters—there is no formal dining here.

**You certainly know how to live. If the best things in life are free, what are the best things in your life?**

My dachshunds, Bob and Frankie; my kids; and flowers. Funny, I said the dogs first, didn't I?



Shelves—instead of wall cabinets—help the small kitchen feel open and give Barrett a place to display shapely pitchers and small-scale paintings. The pale Calacatta Gold marble counter complements white field tiles from Waterworks. OPPOSITE: Barrett found the tall 1860s Czech table, with beautifully turned legs, at J.F. Chen. It works perfectly in a space that was “too small for a dining table and too big to have nothing,” Barrett says, serving as both breakfast island and buffet for dining on the terrace outside the French doors.



1. A Spanish headboard and 19th-century dresser chair give the 8-by-12-foot guest room antiquarian personality. 2. Roses from Barrett's garden add "girly" color to her white-on-white-on-white palette. 3. For the pillows on her terrace daybed, Barrett designed outdoor fabrics inspired by vintage wallpaper and textiles; her fabrics are available at Thomas Lavin. 4. She had the master bath's vanity and medicine cabinets made to her specifications and placed the tub in a niche that gives the space-expanding impression of "a room within a room." 5. Paola Lenti's Float lounge chairs in hot pink draw the eye down the hill to the lower level of the garden. 6. A vintage embroidered pillow from Maison au Naturel on Barrett's custom curved sofa. 7. An Ikea flokati on the 1950s lounge by the living room fireplace is a plush perch for Bob. OPPOSITE: A vintage Lane nightstand on a Moroccan rug from Anthropologie flanks a Barrett-designed headboard in white denim.



