

DAWN DELLASANTA-SWANN **writer**

Creative Uses for

think back to that childhood tree house you had or the one that you longed for. A magical space that granted both privacy and freedom inside the woodsy plywood walls. What if we told you it's never too late for a clubhouse? That you're never too old for a little hobbit hidey-hole of your own? Naturally, as responsible, bill-paying adults, we might call them a "reading nook," a "Mom central," or something that sounds a little bit more sophisticated. But make no mistake, that little part of you that secreted away a package of Double Stuf Oreos in a splinter-loaded wooden structure five feet up in an old oak is still alive and kicking. Join Wellesley's finest as they show you how to create attractive and functional spaces out of previously unused or under-utilized areas.

Where can you carve out space?

Wellesley and Weston's older homes in particular tend to have nooks and crannies aplenty. Landings, Harry Potter-esque cupboards under the stairs, and even bedrooms that in today's world are just too small to use as bedrooms.

Karen Newman of Pentimento Interiors says that what these little creative spaces become is dictated by "the size of the space and the loca-



Small Spaces



top: Architect Jan Gleysteen reworked an existing closet to create a much-needed office/work space;
bottom: Laura Meyer of Meyer & Meyer Architecture & Interiors created a cozy yet elegant powder room by taking advantage of the area tucked under the stairs;
facing page: This sleek yet functional entry area by Michael Ferzoco of Eleven Interiors takes full advantage of the space with built-in millwork and cabinetry



Creative Uses for Small Spaces

tion.” For example, a reading nook or a little “Mom central” type work station, she says, would not lend itself to a space located near the front door where guests would walk right into it. “It’s just not good karma.”

There is almost always space to be found. The trick is matching the function with the space, then perfecting scale and function. Or, conversely, matching the space to the function. “What people often are doing,” says Newman, “is inviting me over and saying, ‘we’re going out of our minds. We have to have a place to put a small lav in.’”

A “lav,” or powder room, may be one of the more popular ways to convert a bit of unused space. In historic and older homes, there sim-

ply wasn’t enough thought given to guests who needed to use the, well, water closet without tromping up to the second level of the home. The tiniest of spaces, just enough for a toilet and sink, can double or triple the convenience factor and add value to the home.

Laura Brooks Meyer of Meyer & Meyer Architecture & Interiors is called upon to work on many historic homes and described a graceful, turn of the century home where she recently designed a first floor powder room. By taking advantage of the area tucked tightly under the home’s main staircase, she was able to eke out enough space for a powder room, creating a cozy hideaway complete with Swarovski crystal

pendant lights, a gold framed accent mirror, and a demilune shaped marble shelf, perfect for hand milled French soaps and embroidered linens.

The Many Uses of Small Spaces

You’d be surprised — the smallest of spaces can be transformed into something useful. Unused corners where you might think only a plant on a pedestal could fit can be transformed into floor to ceiling storage opportunities. A three foot by three foot space is enough room to hold a comfy chair. Add an end table with enough room for a task light, a snack, and a good book and you’ve created a cozy reading hideaway. Just a little bit more square footage and the reading nook can become a comfy, private library.

To be truly conducive to reading, a nook or a library should be a bit off the beaten path. Perhaps tucked up into a landing or some

Interior designer Mollie Johnson transformed a small room into a large walk-in closet with an abundance of natural light and plenty of useful space



Something Useful

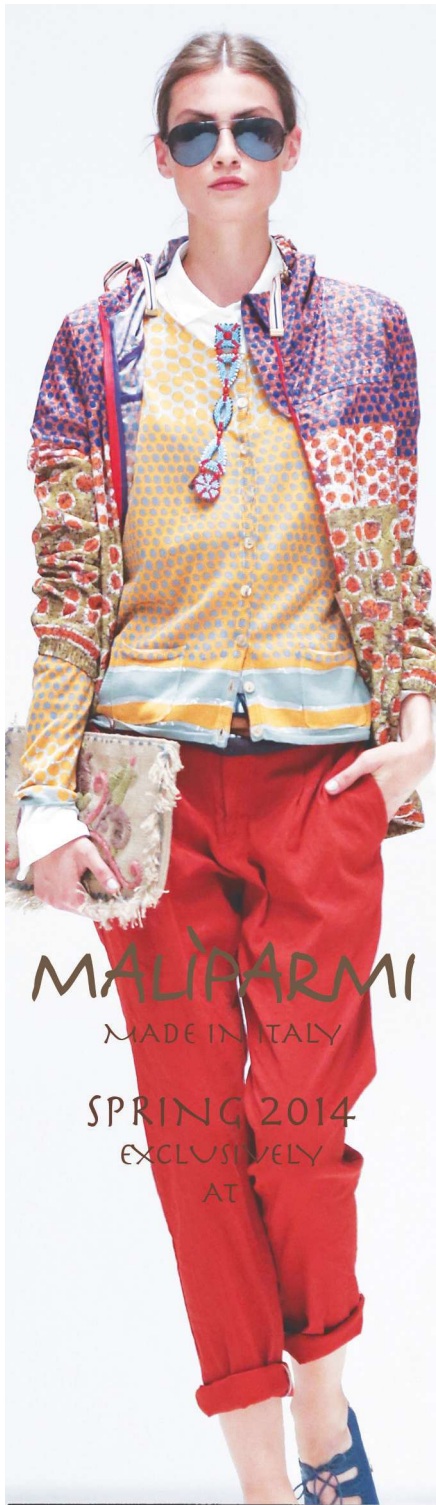
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Cozy Hideaway

This strategically-located home office by architect Jan Gleysteen serves as command central for a busy family

quiet space in the house. The three by three space can also be used for a computer nook or a satellite office where bills can be paid, plans can be sketched out, or homework can be puzzled over.

Which brings us to what Newman affectionately terms, “Mom Central.” If your kitchen is the heart of the home, chances are your kitchen table or counter has become the landing pad for school papers, bills, calendars, and laptops. A simple small desk and cabinet area designed to tidily store these items away while providing a work space could be just what the family organizer ordered.

Wellesley architect Jan Gleysteen is all for accommodating the busy lifestyles of today’s families. In one recent project, a detail-oriented inglenook serves as command central for a family with young children. Located between the family room and the living room, it allows parents to keep an eye on the little ones playing while managing the family affairs. In another home that was lacking a first floor office area, Gleysteen reworked an existing kitchen closet and created a much needed work space with custom millwork to allow for maximum use of every square inch.

Wellesley-based interior designer Mollie Johnson likes to transform a bit of unused interior real estate on the main level of the home into a wet bar or a coffee bar, depending on the inhabitants’ tastes. An art lover might claim a sunny spot by a window to section off and set up an

COURTESY OF JAN GLEYTEEN ARCHITECTS, INC./RICHARD MANDELKORN

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easel. Johnson also likes to combine fun and functionality with the often unused space beneath the stairs.

Interior designer Candace Bouley is also a huge fan of under the stair space combined with an abundance of playful creativity. “Small spaces are wonderful to use as a cozy reading alcove, but if entertaining is your passion don’t forget this nook is also a destination for a stow-away bar, including wine rack and mini refrigerator. This secret spot is a perfect setting for a dramatic use of functional roll back draperies installed for a hidden reveal: instant party!”

And don’t forget your four-legged family. Wellesley resident and dog owner Bouley thinks that the humans aren’t the only members of the household that can benefit from a getaway. Since the family pet doesn’t tend to grow tall enough for the height factor to be an issue, under the stairs can be “a perfect spot for a comfy dog bed and — how great is this — dog den for the ever present food and water bowls!”

Useful Space



Meyer & Meyer reconfigured space in this Wellesley kitchen to include a butler's pantry utilizing recycled bricks from Boston's Old North Church

Re-Store

There is always the old standby use of space that *everybody* needs more of: storage. A Wellesley kitchen renovation recently completed by Meyer & Meyer reconfigured space to allow for an inclusion of a butler's pantry, creating a useful area between the kitchen and the dining room. Bricks from the Old North Church in Boston that were used in the home's previous kitchen were recycled and given a place of honor

COURTESY OF MEYER & MEYER ARCHITECTURE & INTERIORS/SHELLY HARRISON



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in the new pantry. Ample storage provides plenty of space for barware, holiday plates, and serving pieces, and the new sink and under counter refrigerator also help facilitate effortless entertaining.

Entry areas, or, less formally, mud rooms, are another area where exceptional spaces have been created from what was largely wasted space. In a recent project, Michael Ferzoco of Eleven Interiors stole ceiling height space from a staircase that led downstairs. The staircase's excessive headroom allowed the floor to be extended, making room for multi-functional built-in millwork and cabinetry. An upholstered bench is a place to rest and put on shoes; a storage cabinet hides shoes, boots, hats, and gloves; and a cantilevered shelf provides space for mail, keys, wallet, and dog walking accoutrements. In another project, Ferzoco created custom cabinet lockers for children in an entry area by claiming space from an oversized garage and bumping out the wall to accommodate a set of cantilevered lockers.



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Scale and Function

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Interior designer Karen Newman of Pentimento Interiors created this "mom central" space

Newman advises to remember the air above and the air below. While she recommends keeping spaces open below furniture in a small space to maintain the flow of air and lighten the feel of the room, when planning storage, spaces both low and high should be utilized. Store out of season decorations or infrequently used appliances up high. A thin shelf positioned high on the wall can hold a collection of colorful vases or bottles out of the way but still appealing like "eye candy," she says.

How it Should Look

Whether for storage or planning or escaping the grind, a creative and small space should be, above all, neat and orderly. Clutter will turn a creative space into a closet, and nobody wants to hang out in there. Furthermore, advises Johnson, keep furniture to scale. An oversized piece will feel wrong in a tiny space.

And don't forget lighting. A reading nook, artist retreat, or office will optimally have a window that lets in good, natural light. A window is less important for a wet bar or a lav, but lighting should never be underestimated. A small room without windows will quickly feel like a cave without adequate artificial lighting. Johnson likes recessed light-

Sources

■ CANDACE BOULEY

Candace Bouley Interiors / 781.718.1956

■ MICHAEL FERZOLO

Eleven Interiors

www.eleveninteriors.com / 617.423.1114

■ JAN GLEYSTEEEN

Jan Gleysteen Architects, Inc.

www.jangleysteeninc.com / 781.431.0080

■ MOLLIE JOHNSON

Mollie Johnson Interiors

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■ LAURA BROOKS MEYER

Meyer & Meyer Architecture & Interiors

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■ KAREN NEWMAN

Pentimento Interiors

www.pentimentohome.com / 617.559.0450

ing on dimmers combined with task lights. “It’s good to have a combination so you can control the light in different situations.”

Old thinking dictates that a small space should be light colored to help it appear bigger. Not necessarily, says Johnson, who loves to add punch to a powder room with a fun and unexpected wallpaper since people don’t spend enough time there for it to become overwhelming. The designer has also been leaning towards utilizing geometrical and metallic wallpaper trends, reminiscent of the famed English designer David Nightingale Hicks, that have been showing up as of late.

The possibilities for taking advantage of small spaces are endless, and we have just touched on a few of the basics. So have fun, be bold, and with minimal effort you too can give maximum impact to the unused areas of your home. **WW**



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