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APARTMENT

TORONTO  
ONTARIO



# *Small Wonder*

A Toronto couple turn an austere high-rise apartment into a jewel box.



**THIS PHOTO** The gallery's barrel-vault ceiling was inspired by a friend's London apartment. An airy contrast to the heavily paneled space, the retro-style Lucite light fixture is an unpredicted embellishment.

**OPPOSITE** A trio of marble in the foyer announces the lavish use of the material throughout the previously unadorned apartment.





**ABOVE** "It's always smart to choose furniture that can double as storage," homeowner Philip Mitchell says. A pair of midcentury Biedermeier-style chests flanking the living room sofa float on slender legs, visually lightening the space.

**LEFT** A new fireplace—outlined in the same marble that defines the gallery floor—and built-in bookshelves enrich the apartment. **OPPOSITE** An ebonized parquet floor grounds low-profile, tailored furnishings that respect the living room's small size. Artwork and accessories—easily changed according to season or whim—supply pops of color.

# A

At just under 1,000 square feet, Philip Mitchell and Mark Narsansky's apartment is small. Yet it's embellished with sophisticated style and gracious comfort worthy of a dwelling much grander in size—a house similar, say, to the one the pair moved from to live in the heart of downtown Toronto. Within walking distance of their offices—Philip is an architect and Mark is in advertising—the new home's spectacular skyline views are appreciated by both men. Less impressive was its plain interior. "It was completely devoid of detail or character," Philip says. "It was a boring 1960s box."

Today the couple's home is more apt to be described as a jewel box. "Mark was completely adamant that the apartment not look like an apartment," Philip says. When they bought it, he says, "we made sure we could upgrade it and make it function layoutwise but also aesthetically, given the way we like to live."


That meant tweaking the floor plan to gain storage, embrace the view, and welcome sunlight into the once-dark entry. "We made our vestibule a bit smaller than it had been and created a gallery that not only leads to the rest of the



### *Small-Space Ideas*

Diminutive spaces can benefit from grand embellishments, such as the Murano glass light fixture crowning the dining room and the inky black doors that either expand or enclose it, depending on the mood the homeowners want to strike.



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**LEFT** A corduroy sofa and 1970s chrome bench gather atop a leather-bordered, patterned sisal rug in the cozy den. A washer and dryer tuck into closets flanking its entry.

apartment but also allows you to see this panoramic view of the city right from the get-go," Philip says.

Moreover, the vestibule announces the home's signature architectural richness. "We tried to detail it in such a way that it would feel a bit European," he says. "We get a lot of our inspiration from our travels. All the detailing created a really nice envelope, or architectural backdrop, for us to work with." Applied plaster moldings and custom milled woodwork grace nearly every surface, from the gallery's barrel-vault ceiling to the pediment crowning the dining room doorway.

"Everything is detailed and layered, but at the same time it's very classic looking," Philip says. Undeniably beautiful,

the apartment is also functional. Concealed cabinetry in the entry's panelwork, for instance, provides shoe storage, while generous baseboard moldings secret the DVD collection in the den and sterling silver in the kitchen. "Even if people are minimalists, most often they still have tons of things to store," Philip says. "I like to incorporate storage in untraditional, inconspicuous ways."

Accordingly, he also favors furnishings that do double duty. "A lot of the pieces you see in our place are chests, or commodes, so we have a beautiful look but at the same time we gain an additional three drawers' worth of storage. The end tables in our bedroom and living room, for example, are



### *Small-Space Ideas*

To hide support posts, ventilation units, and other immovable eyesores in apartments, conceal them behind cabinetry or panel-covered appliances. To the right of the range, the effect is seamless because hardware is employed, too.





## *Voice of Experience*

Duplicating materials between—and even within—rooms creates continuity that helps magnify the appearance of small spaces. Philip Mitchell and Mark Narsausky's kitchen is an ideal example. A single slab of white statuary marble forms its countertops; the same slab, cut into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch squares, creates the room's mosaic backsplash. Floor tiles from a second piece of statuary marble compose the kitchen floor, as well as the entry and gallery floors. "That way, it all reads as one space," Philip says.

chests. If we'd used just an open cabinet, we would have lost all that storage capacity," Philip says. A carefully edited collection of new and antique pieces, the furnishings embrace the pair in comfort and welcome guests.

"Everything had to work for entertaining yet still be relaxing for us," Philip says. "Our sofas, for instance, are extremely deep so we can stretch out with the newspaper." Likewise, the fabrics they used are formal yet serviceable, ranging from deeply toned chenille and corduroy to finely finished linen and wool. "We don't want anyone to be scared to put their

feet up," he says. "Everything has an elegant appearance but is actually practical."

Against this subtly elegant backdrop, the couple's extensive collection of artwork commands the attention it

**ABOVE** The narrow kitchen provides a long length of counter space ideal for mixing drinks and serving buffet-style food. The counter's coved edge "adds another level of detail without being fussy," Philip says. While the wall was torn apart, it was easy to run an electrical line for the wall light above the artwork.

### *Small-Space Ideas*

Support a shelf atop a backsplash to gain precious extra inches in a bathroom—especially important when multiple family members share the same space. Choose a cabinet-style vanity, rather than a pedestal sink, to boost storage.



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deserves. “We love art, and we love to collect,” Philip says. “We like to juxtapose a really contemporary abstract painting with a 20th-century photograph and an 18th-century oil painting. And then we like to put them in everything from a hand-carved, Baroque frame to something simple, streamlined, and silver-leafed. We are always rotating things around, so mixing frames and media enables us to have flexibility and freedom to see things in different ways.”

The diversity of the collection is unified by walls—some dark, some light, and all architecturally detailed—and floors—marble here, ebonized parquet there—that honor the home’s myriad textures and colors.

Even the kitchen complements the photography collection gracing the adjacent gallery. Wrapped in timeless white cabinetry and statuary marble, it is used more often for a quick breakfast or cocktails than preparing dinner. “We don’t cook much in the city,” Philip says cheerfully. “We do most of our cooking at our country house. But we both have a bit of a sickness when it comes to dishes, so we needed a lot of storage. Because this kitchen is small, I didn’t try to make it

something it’s not. I wanted it to be reminiscent of a turn-of-the-century butler’s pantry.”

While heirloom china and crystal shine behind antiqued leaded-glass doors, immovable mechanicals, such as plumbing stacks and ventilation units, are cleverly hidden behind armoire-inspired cabinets.

“We do a lot of entertaining,” Philip says, “and it’s interesting that our guests are at ease here whether their taste is more modern or super traditional. We’ve kept everything neutral enough to encourage that. The apartment is really just a backdrop for everything that’s important to us.”

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**ABOVE** Linen-upholstered walls imbue subtle texture—and soundproofing—to the cocoonlike bedroom. A tufted leather headboard and lampshades woven from fabric strips contribute additional tactile qualities. Crown molding runs the perimeter of the room, taking into account the depth needed to conceal the drapery hardware above the window. This added touch helps soften the hard edges of the plateglass windows used in the building’s design.



## *Molding Personality*

Transforming a space from ordinary to outstanding is all a matter of applying architectural interest. Homeowners Philip Mitchell and Mark Narsansky punctuated the cozy rooms of their apartment with chair rails and baseboard trims, *left*, cornices, *above*, and recessed panels, *above left*. "When we bought this place it was just a bunch of drywall and glass to the ceiling. We threw in architectural details from different periods and mixed them, but it doesn't look too over-the-top because we simplified all the elements. They add real depth to the apartment," says Philip, an architect. Perhaps counterintuitively, the petite spaces feel larger as a result. "Repeating materials gives continuity and a comfort level from room to room, which is especially important in small spaces where you don't want to be jarred," he says. "It ensures warm, interesting, beautiful rooms no matter what's in them—even if they're not completely furnished."

## The Plans, *Before & After*

Distinguishing a previously rectilinear floor plan with an angled gallery off the foyer is key to the success of Philip Mitchell and Mark Narsansky's newly restyled apartment. "It wasn't welcoming before. Plus, you had no indication—until you walked through two rooms—that we had such a wonderful view," Philip says. To remedy the situation, he rotated the axis of the space to create a 45-degree angle. "Now, the second you open the door you can see the reason we bought the apartment."



**BEFORE**  
The apartment's single bathroom was too small to comfortably accommodate two people, and it lacked a separate shower and bathtub.

Five doors converged in the foyer, consuming a disproportionate amount of the small apartment's square footage and constricting the flow of traffic.

A second bedroom boasted a much-needed closet but was an otherwise unnecessary use of space.

**AFTER**  
Borrowing space from the master bedroom created enough room to expand the bathroom, which included adding a soaking tub and, within the mirror-covered wall behind the water closet, a linen closet.

The kitchen traded its U-shape location off the living room to a more functional, galley-style layout accessed from the gallery, freeing space for a living room fireplace and built-in bookshelves.

A TV and hidden laundry make the second bedroom-cum-den the most often-used room in the apartment.



960 square feet

ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN: PHILIP MITCHELL