



Apartment Therapy's Big Book of Small, Cool Spaces

Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan

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Whether you inhabit a studio or a sprawling house with one challenging space, Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan, co-founder of the most popular interior design website, Apartment Therapy, will help you transform tiny into totally fabulous.

According to Maxwell, size constraints can actually unlock your design creativity and allow you to focus on what's essential. In this vibrant book, he shares forty small, cool spaces that will change your thinking forever.

These apartments and houses demonstrate hundreds of inventive solutions for creating more space in your home, and for making it more comfortable. Leading us through entrances, living rooms, kitchens and dining rooms, bedrooms, home offices, and kids' rooms, *Apartment Therapy's Big Book of Small, Cool Spaces* is brimming with ingenious tips and ideas, such as:

- Shifting the sense of scale through contrasting colors
- Adding airiness by using transparent collections
- Utilizing the area under a loft bed for a kitchen and mini-bar
- Tucking an office with chic vintage doors into an unused bedroom corner

In each dwelling Maxwell points out what makes the layout work and what adds style. Most of the “therapy” involves minor tweaks that can be accomplished on a limited budget, such as dividing a room with sheer curtains, turning a door into a desk, or disguising electrical boxes with art displays. An extensive resource guide, including Maxwell's favorite websites for buying desks, open storage solutions, and much more, will help you turn even the tiniest residence into a place you are always happy to come home to.

Apartment Therapy's Big Book of Small, Cool Spaces Details

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From Reader Review Apartment Therapy's Big Book of Small, Cool Spaces for online ebook

Michelle says

Lots of great ideas for interior design and a good listing of places to buy items with information on pricing in the back.

Maria K. says

I first heard about "A Big Book of Small Cool Spaces" on NPR's The Splendid Table hosted by Lynn Rosetto-Casper. Lynn interviewed the book's author, Apartment Therapy's Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan, about challenges of cooking and entertaining in tiny big city apartments. And while New Yorkers, Bostonians and Chicagoans can get by without cooking due to the abundance of take-out options, according to Mr. Gillingham-Ryan, there was definitely hope for those who wanted to combine city living with culinary fun.

Many of the “small cool spaces” in the book are located in renovated former office buildings, warehouses and factories. While all of them have oodles of character, square footage is definitely at a premium. Instead of giving up and moving into the suburbs, the owners tackle the challenge head-on, resulting in some truly unique, practical yet elegant layout solutions.

Do not be mistaken – we are not talking about movie stars, big-shot lawyers or realtors here. The owners of these fascinating little urban gems range from beginner artists, photographers, graphic designers and architects getting their first “real” place in the city to families with two working parents and multiple children.

The author's own apartment is also in the book, and is just as worthy of admiration as the others. He and his wife lived in a 300 square foot space with their baby daughter for a year (you can almost hear a chuckle as you read, “...you get to know your baby really well that way.”), before their neighbor decided to move and sold his 400 square foot apartment to them, making it possible for the young family to significantly expand their living space and finally create a bit of separation between themselves and their little girl.

Even if you are not scrambling for space, I would strongly recommend this book as a fantastic source of space-saving ideas that allow you to make the most of your square footage without sacrificing style.

Jimmie says

You can tell when I'm planning yet another move when 1) I start watching HGTV and 2) I start reading design books.

I have a love/hate relationship with these books. I love reading them because the photography is always so fun and beautiful, and I like to fantasize about what these people's lives are like.

But I also hate them because they're never actually useful for uncool, uncreative, unrich people like me. Of

all the families featured in this book, almost all were creative types (architects, artists, designers, etc.); half live in Los Angeles, and the other half live in New York (mostly Brooklyn). And they all live in tiny spaces for various reasons, none of which is that they're poor.

I read these books for ideas on how to spiff up a teeny tiny rental apartment on a teeny tiny budget (the reason I have a teeny tiny rental apartment to begin with). So I can't exactly go knocking down walls to "open up the flow." I can't build a structure that is loft bedroom on top, child's bedroom inside, storage all around, and plop it into my ginormous industrial loft. I can't just decide to add a second floor to my apartment with 18-foot ceilings. I can't buy the apartment next door and make it into a bedroom.

This book is just cheating! It's like those home-improvement shows where the guest designers just happen to find a complete set of furniture in the basement along with beautiful original artwork. Oh, and these matching lamps? They were just lying in the street! Eff you!

jess says

Ahhh, the newest from the Apartment Therapy family. And how sweet of my public library to make it available to me in such a timely manner. I love you, Public Library.

The Good:

There is a focus on basic concepts in a way that makes them seem accessible. It is not totally dependent on expensive, hard-to-find high design pieces. The rooms are not totally dependent on custom architecture, although some of them do have architect-driven solutions to their space challenges. For example -- if you like the way a room looks, you can identify the key features of that room, e.g. "contrasting paint on the ceiling" or "built-in workspace in a cabinet" or "recessed lighting." If you have a hard time figure out what it is that you like about rooms you're drawn to, this is helpful.

There is a useful index and resource list with sources, shopping resources, and basic pieces. The photos are beautiful, big enough, clear and bright. The accompanying text curates the photos well. Each section isn't totally focused on the homeowner. The book is divide by types of rooms / spaces (entrances, kitchens, dining rooms, living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, offices, children's rooms)

The Bad:

Do you think it's really true that all the people who have cool small spaces are artists and designers? The book gave me that impression. I was not sure if mere mortals could aspire to what they had accomplished. Just because you can find a friend who's a carpenter/metalworker/architect/contractor who helped create custom built-in shelving and a lofted bedroom in your warehouse space does not mean that is a realistic budget conscious measure for most people.

But overall, I like this book and thought it escaped some of the more difficult challenges of interior design books.

Sarah says

Lots of good ideas, ranging from very expensive to quite reasonable or even free. I feel inspired to get going on my own small apartment.

Lexi Wright says

I once lived in a 300 square-foot Brooklyn apartment. On a block of ornate brownstones with intricate facades and dramatic stoops, mine was a cereal box of a building. But what my apartment lacked in grandeur, storage and temperature control, it teemed with possibility.

Looking back, I did a meh job decorating it. But at the time, I thought I was an interiors mastermind.

The truth is, we're all just trying to make our homes as livable and lovely as possible for who we are in this moment. I liked looking through this collection of clever, teensy spaces, some of which made my old apartment look palatial. I liked reading about who the people who lived in each place and guessing about why they made the choices they did.

I miss that apartment. I hope it's well-loved and appointed today.

sleeps9hours says

Makes me want to do some decorating and make some art.

Sarah says

This is more of a Lookbook; there's no way anyone making under 100K is going to be able to make these apartments liveable. That said, there were some interesting design ideas and spatial arrangements that may be stolen to suit your needs. It's a shiny catalog, and tries to keep the handy poor-man tips subsumed under glossy upper-west-side hipness--but if you can ignore the price tags, you'll get some good tips.

Mckinley says

Tips, layouts, photos.

Sophie says

This book is filled with beautiful photos and design ideas that got me excited about decorating my next apartment. The tips are useful and the way these people have customized their homes is amazing. It offers

suggestions on how to camouflage elements you don't like (I particularly liked the photo of the buzzer panel surrounded by similarly-sized artwork), and how to enhance elements you love. I wish there were more of every section--more examples, more tips, more ideas. I feel completely out of my depth when it comes to decorating--I can tell if a space is beautiful, but have no idea WHY it works so well--so having the copy to explain what worked about each room was really helpful.

It does frustrate me that there are so many apartments with modifications added, like loft beds or walls torn down, because most people can't do that in a rental. This book isn't exactly written for the average person in a cheap apartment they can't do very much to. That's why I ultimately stopped reading the AT blog, as well. It's not great at acknowledging that many people don't have anywhere near the budget for the kind of things they promote.

Some of the copy referred to design elements that can't be seen in the photos, which is annoying, like it wasn't proofread enough before going to press.

You know what I'd really like to see? Apartment Therapy: Ugly Apartment Makeover Edition. Like, take a crappy carpeted apartment with ugly doors and horrible "bones" (like the one I live in now), that you're not allowed to make major modifications to, and make it something gorgeous. That's something I could really appreciate and learn from.

Brittany says

I'm fascinated by small living spaces that are cleverly designed. I watch a lot of HGTV and love to see the creative ways that people use their space. I saw this book at the library and was immediately hooked just by looking at the picture on the cover! I am please to say that there are tons more gorgeous photos inside as well.

The book is divided into chapters which focus on different living areas (Quick Entrances, Cozy Kitchens & Dining Rooms, Compact Living Rooms, Miniature Bedrooms, Smart Home Offices, and Petite Children's Rooms). Each chapter also contains a "Thoughts On..." section to go with that chapter's theme. For example, the living room chapter contains "Thoughts on Bookshelves" and "Thoughts on Televisions and Stereos." There are a lot of great tips on making the most of these living spaces, and there are a lot of details on the homes shown in the photos. In the back of the book are more resources and tips for small living spaces.

I was really impressed with this book, and I enjoyed reading the tips as much as I enjoyed looking at the pictures. I recommend it to anyone who has a small apartment or house and is looking for creative ways to maximize their space!

Meril says

Full of advice that is nearly no good to people who rent apartments in my area. With most apartments having no-paint leases and layouts that resemble nothing found in NYC or LA, it's useless. However if you own your condo, go right ahead and read this; it will be useful to you.

K says

Needs more pictures per room to accurately show the space.

Heather says

I FREAKING LOVE Apartment Therapy :)

Marina says

Well, some of those spaces might be cool but they are definitely not small, so in case you are aiming to find some inspiration for your 15 square meters, try something different.
