

AT HOME



A 500-square-foot bungalow has room to spare thanks to small space solutions

# small wonder

## AT HOME WITH PAUL DENYS

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By maximizing this deck area, designer and renovator Paul Denys expands his square footage by embracing outdoor living in the warmer months. This hand-crafted woven chair, side table and ottoman set were purchased at Pier 1 Imports. Paul says another trick of the trade he uses to make his home feel more expansive is by using mirrors and glass throughout the space. The large beveled framed mirror (left) over the living room fireplace was found at Centennial Glass.



**W**hat's the secret to living large in small space? For Paul Denys, it's all about making the most of what you've got. Since 1990, the award-winning designer, renovator and owner of Denys Builds Designs has called a 500-square-foot English cottage-style bungalow in Ottawa's Rideau Gardens area home sweet home with his wife, Jean, and 14-year-old son, Nathan. The cozy house, built in 1944, reflects Paul's philosophy of living with a small ecological footprint. He recently gave *Ottawa At Home* a tour of his home and described the many small space solutions that prove less definitely can be more.

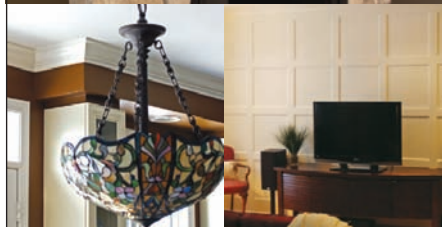
**IS IT DIFFICULT TO LIVE IN A SMALL HOUSE, OR ARE PEOPLE TOO HUNG UP ON TONS OF SQUARE FOOTAGE?** I call our house "comfy cozy" and it really meets our needs. Rarely do we want for more. Plus it's definitely easy to keep clean. Most people say it feels like it's about 1,200 square feet once they're inside because it has all the components of a regular house with a living room, dining room, eat-in kitchen and two bedrooms.

And I think we kept the idea in mind that

“Often it's all about reducing clutter and culling what you don't need.”



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when you renovate a small house you need to keep everything in proportion. All the rooms work together, plus the deck space is where we live when the weather is warm.

**HAVE YOU CREATED AN OUTDOOR OASIS IN YOUR BACKYARD?** Last year I made the deck bigger and it looks like it's floating outside. I also built a shoji panel because we wanted separation from the neighbours. It's frosted and transparent so it lets light flow through.

If you put up a big wood wall around your deck it becomes very closed off. When the sun comes through the shoji panels we get leaf-shaped shadows – it almost illuminates. My wife was very pleased with the deck because I had promised to build it 14 years ago.

**WHAT OTHER SIGNIFICANT CHANGES HAVE YOU MADE TO THE HOUSE?** I added the patio door in the dining room when we first moved in, but the biggest renovation was creating the master bedroom in the attic space and adding the skylights.

The hardest part was figuring out how the winding staircase to the bedroom was going to clear the kitchen space. I made the stairs out of Douglas fir plywood from Rona, and it's held up really well over the years.

**IS ONE OF THE SECRETS TO LIVING WELL IN SMALL QUARTERS USING EVERY SPARE INCH FOR STORAGE, SUCH AS HIGH SHELVES?**

We have lots of little storage areas. One of my favourite spaces to use is over the doorways. My wife has all of her cookbooks over the doorway in the kitchen and we've done the same treatment for towels in the bathroom. We also have a crawl space off the staircase that works out well. Plus often it's all about reducing clutter and culling what you don't need.

**WHAT OTHER TRICKS HAVE YOU USED?** I've used a lot of mirrors in the house because they're a tried-and-true way to open up a space. In our bathroom the mirror goes halfway down the wall so it refracts a lot of light and you see two images of the window.

We also installed a full wall of mirrors in the master bedroom using that principle. As long as you're OK with seeing yourself when you wake up in the morning, then it's a way of tricking or fooling the eye in smaller rooms.

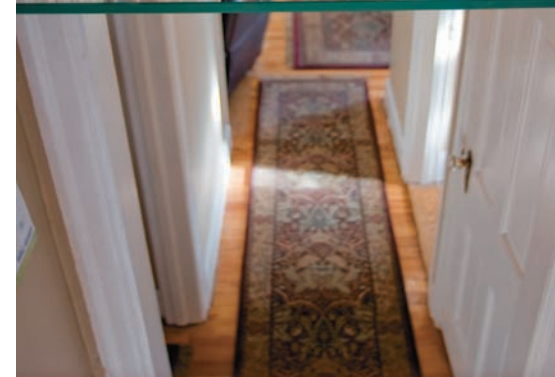
**DO YOU FIND MANY CLIENTS ARE ASKING FOR ADDITIONS OR RENOVATING THEIR CURRENT SPACE?** People seem to be doing fewer additions nowadays. The first thing I do when I start working with a client is ask if there's a way we meet their expectations by renovating the house from the interior, instead of adding an addition.

You have to keep the cost versus value in mind when you're doing renovation, in case



**ABOVE** This winding staircase leads to the master bedroom, which was converted from the home's attic. Paul added a built-in kitchen table for a custom solution that maximizes space.

**BELOW** There's nothing that makes a small place feel cramped more than too much clutter. Paul built this shelf for cookbooks above the kitchen door as an organized space saver.



you're going to sell within five years. Kitchen and bathroom renos are the most popular on people's wish lists and you'll find that they'll give you close to 100 per cent in value. Additions will give you about 55 per cent of the cost, landscaping and windows about 35 per cent and paint 200 per cent. You have to seriously consider what will give you the most bang for your buck.

**HOW HAVE YOU MIXED OLD AND NEW IDEAS IN YOUR OWN HOME?** We've embraced new technology by adding a 42-inch flat-screen TV in the living room. It's my favourite new toy and it can also double as a piece of changing art with still images. But sometimes for the same amount of money, you could get something new.

You can find something old, like an antique that has retained its value, or something sculpture and paint it. I think you can always mix and match furniture. A lot of people get caught up in rules, but I think the rules are whatever you're comfortable with. In two to three years, our house will probably be switched up and we'll have renovated the kitchen. It's whatever you're happy with.

### Paul's tips for living smart in a small space

- ▶ Plan to green your design, whether it's reusing your mother's antique dresser or scaling down the size of your plans.
- ▶ Solar tubes in bathrooms give a clean, hygienic feel and reduce the need to turn on lights.
- ▶ Donate harvest materials to Habitat for Humanity.
- ▶ Add more lamps and points of light than you think you need and use dimmer switches. In the long run you will use less energy.
- ▶ Commit to smaller, more energy-efficient and durable appliances.
- ▶ Bring the light in with large mirrored surfaces. It can make small rooms seem twice the size.
- ▶ Frosted glass in a door or transom windows allow light to travel between spaces without needing to turn on lights and gives an ethereal feeling.

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