

# House Beautiful

JANUARY 2004

## DECORATING IN SMALL SPACES

HOW TO MAKE A TINY  
ROOM **LOOK LARGER**

NEW SOLUTIONS  
FOR **ODD SPACES**

CELEBRATING  
**AMERICAN SILVER**

**SUN VALLEY  
SPLENDOR**





Writer: Eric Cohler

Photographer: Joshua McHugh

Producer: Doretta Sperduto

# SMALL ON SPACE BIG ON COMFORT

Designer  
Eric Cohler  
makes the  
most of 750  
square feet in  
his Manhattan  
apartment





Eric Cohler's living room includes a Thomas Hope chair, c. 1810, covered in pigskin. The penwork-and-Chinoiserie tripod side table holds monochromatic Chinese porcelain purchased by Cohler in China. The bronze Diego Giacometti lady lamp has a woven paper shade. The dining area features William IV chairs, c. 1830, and a Regency breakfast table, c.1820.





Candlesticks from Steuben, Crate & Barrel, and Banana Republic stand in front of a Carr sofa designed by Cohler with a pillow of Kuba cloth. The Paley chairs swivel to face the television set in the bookcase; the stool is by Frances Elkins. The leather-bound carpet is by Stark. Just beyond the living room, the hallway is lit by a Noguchi ceiling lamp.







SINCE COLLEGE, MY DOG TYLER and I have lived in 14 or 15 different apartments. All that moving would make most people weary, but each move allowed me to hone and refine my skills as a designer. Each place I've lived was equal parts design laboratory and shelter. Although I've lived in many larger spaces, my current apartment feels more like home than most of the others.

I chose the apartment not so much for its Art Deco charm and sunken living room as for its proximity to Central Park (for Tyler) and because it's only a five-minute walk to my office. It's only a small, 750-square-foot, one-bedroom rental, but I'm happy to say it offers more creature comforts than I ever thought could be squeezed into such a limited space.

Let's start with the layout. The floor plan is an extruded rectangle, affording me the illusion of space. The apartment stretches out along a 13-foot-wide spine that measures 60 feet in length. The living room has two wonderful features: an enormous corner window fronting on Madison Avenue and a small window facing north that allows me to divide the room into two distinct sections—one for dining and one for living. I ran a traverse curtain rod down the underside of an existing beam from which I hung panels of raw linen and boiled wool. Although the wool curtain is seldom closed, the linen acts as a scrim allowing light to filter through. When I'm entertaining, the curtain is drawn and isn't opened until dinner's ready—allowing the drama of the party to unfold.

The other end of the living room has a built-in bookcase with a flat screen television and two overscaled club chairs that swivel placed diagonally in front for viewing. The foci of my living room are a Barcelona daybed, a comfortable sofa of my own design and, for balance, a few pieces of good antique furniture. All my previous "design labs" have taught me that a smart-



tering of antiques adds tremendous personality. The color palette of the entire apartment is sepia, yellow, orange, and brown. The living room walls with their parchment squares are glazed in sepia, an ode to Jean-Michel Frank, while the walls of the adjacent front hall/library are lined in a warm bamboo-colored grass cloth. There is a large Isamu Noguchi paper lantern hanging from the ceiling and the walls are hung salon style with some of my favorite paintings, drawings, and photographs. My most inspired moment was treating the ceiling as a fifth wall and

painting an allée of cream and beige trees with their branches overhead. The overall feeling of this windowless space is one of great comfort and interest as it must serve triple duty as library, foyer, and study.

There is also a small entry vestibule painted a glossy black that is the introduction (and exclamation point) to the apartment. This transitional space is layered floor to ceiling with abstract paintings. I like the immediacy and pop of the contemporary art against the obsidian walls when opening my front door after a long day.

The “master bedroom suite” overlooks brick walls, but at least they are prewar brick. To capitalize on the fact that the room was so dark, I had it painted a warm, bittersweet brown. The room is 17 feet long, and much of it was wasted space, so I divided it into two sections by inserting a plaster wall and 19th-century garden doors. The first section is a small dressing area with enough room for an antique secretary and a Georgian lounging chair I found in London.

The bedroom is lined with books, and to compensate for the lack of a view I hung a large moody landscape painting—a de facto second window—across from the bed. The headboard is covered in camel hair and the curtains are a bright orange linen with a cream peony design, trimmed in suede.

The kitchen is so small that it’s almost nonexistent. There’s barely enough room to turn around to feed Tyler. I have to step over both the dog and his water bowl when entering or leaving the room, and the refrigerator door opens only halfway. But never mind the inconvenience; the apartment is home, at least until I get the itch to move again. I can unwind here and put my feet up without feeling guilty that I might get the upholstery dirty (even in socks). Experience has taught me to relax more about my personal space, and I’ve also learned that while things are replaceable, friends, family, and pets are not.







This page: A collection of 19th-century paintings and old master drawings hang on hallway walls covered in Madagascar Cloth by Hinson. The old conservatory doors from Treillage lead into the bedroom, where a painting by Robert Kelly hangs above the bed. Opposite: Four works on paper by Al Held hang above an English triple action drop leaf table in the hallway/study. The Camel is Han dynasty, the lamp is from Aero, and the mask is French circa 1940 by Boudey.





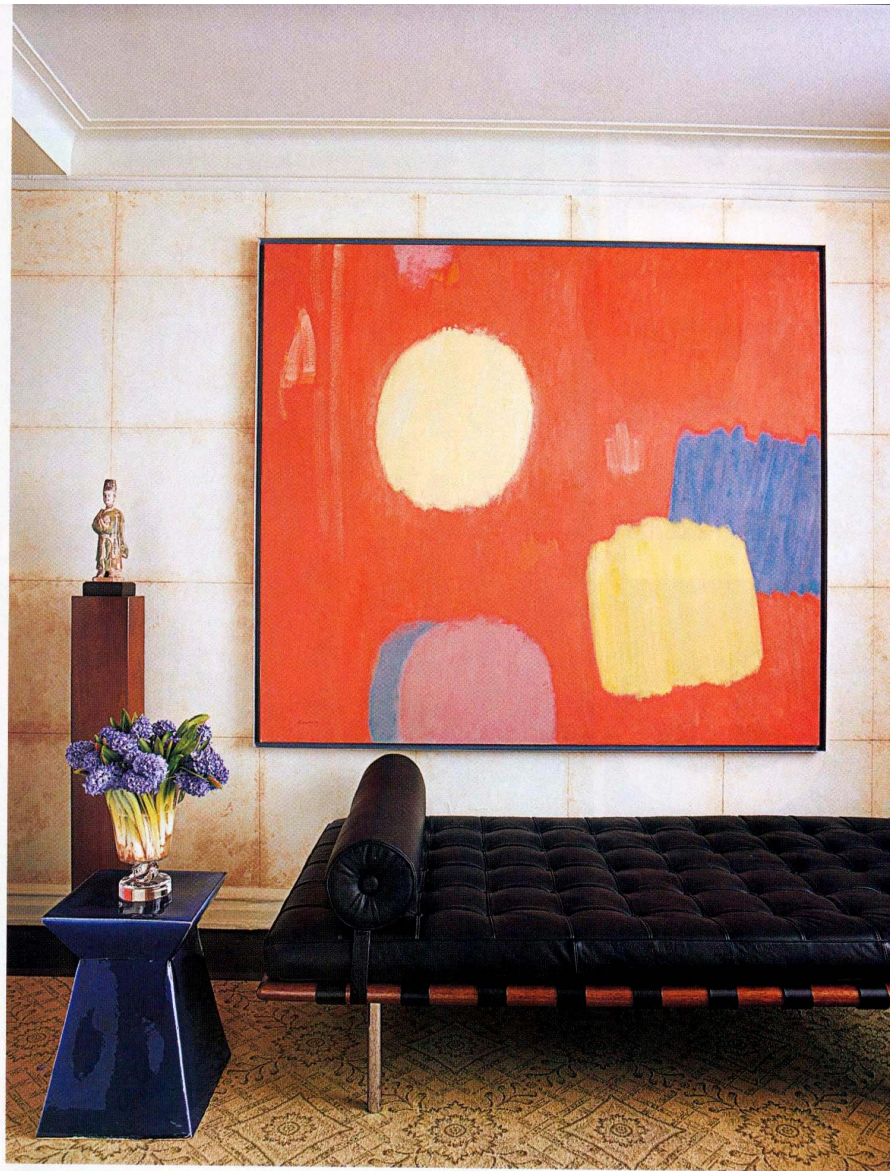
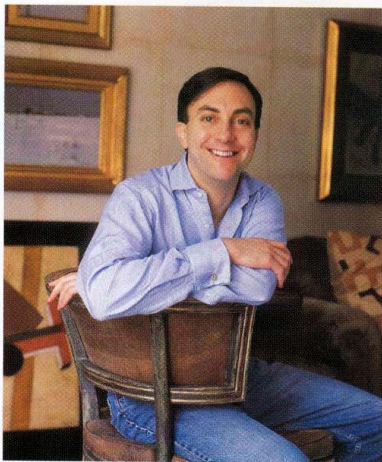
This page: The glossy black walls in the small entry vestibule are hung with modern art, including two monotypes on aluminum by David Band. Opposite, upper right: A painting by Jacob Kainen hangs above a Barcelona daybed. The ceramic Chinese garden stool is from Lexington Gardens. Lower left: Eric Cohler. For more details, see Resources.



## TIPS

*When working in small spaces, keep in mind:*

- Dark colors will actually make a smaller room seem larger. Walls recede when painted in a darker palette.
- Use pattern sparingly—too much will make your rooms look like a television test pattern. Instead, try texture for added interest.
- Oversize paintings or photographs open up rooms, creating a vista or second window—especially if there is no view.
- Pictures should be grouped together to create mass. A small picture placed here and there looks absurd.



- Show some leg. Use unskirted furniture to give the illusion of depth. Skirted furniture can close off a room.
- To add height to a room with low ceilings, install crown moldings. The molding will allow a place for the eye to rest before moving up again, giving the illusion of height. This can be done with a painted stripe as well.
- Mirrors are a quick fix when trying to visually enlarge a room. Place them in the reveals of windows to frame and expand a view, or place them across from doorways to double the visual impact and trick the eye.
- Use fabric as room dividers—it's an inexpensive way to change the mood of a space and works especially well in studios and lofts.
- Don't overdress your windows. Keep them as spare as possible, which allows them to “breathe” and admit maximum light into the room.
- Think big! Use overscale furniture to make a small room appear larger. Try wall-to-wall carpeting to unify a space, or no carpet at all. Undersize rugs only make a room look smaller. ●



