



FUTUREPROOF YOUR SPACE

Whether you're downsizing or staying put and refurbishing, smart design makes all the difference. Architect **Robert Bourke** has six tips that will improve your space. Photographs by **Ste Murray** and **Alice Clancy**

1 PLAN YOUR LAYOUT

Downsizers may feel the squeeze when moving to a smaller home, but it's better to think about the quality of your space rather than its size so make sure your architect plans for the most efficient layout. Whether adapting an existing house or building from scratch, think about your movement through the house from entering the front door to retiring for bed. Where will you hang your coats on arrival? Is the dining area within easy reach of the kitchen and well connected to the garden? Does it benefit from sunlight? Some of this will be down to the characteristics of the site or building, but a good architect will make the most of the orientation.



2 CHERISH YOUR MEMORIES

Making a move to a smaller home is a great way to review which pieces of furniture, paintings, mementoes are most valuable to you and whether they should be kept or passed on to a new owner. Then, take advantage of the chance to re-think how you arrange the items you keep in your new living space. We often incorporate lots of wall space if a client has a collection of artwork. Shelves and ledges are also excellent places to show off interesting objects or indoor plants. Niches and alcoves also provide spaces for books and curios. If these are considered at the early design stage, they can become an integral part of the design and give great character and richness to the space.



3 MAKE SPACE FOR ENTERTAINING

While your household might be smaller, think about how your dining space could be enlarged when you have guests for Christmas dinner or Sunday brunch. Even if you plan to have most of your meals in the kitchen, a dining space — even if it doubles as something else day-to-day — can be a plus for special occasions. One of our clients transforms her dining room into a plate-painting workshop at weekends. The space has been sized to allow for this, requiring just an extra table to fit more people.



5 IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

The rule is: the smaller the space, the more important the details. Not only should every inch of space play its part in enhancing the quality of your life, but so should the details, or how things are made. A handrail to a stairs is a necessity, but could also be an interesting feature in a room. If you've chosen interesting materials, challenge your architect to use them to their maximum potential.

Brick, for example, is available with a glazed surface that can be a practical and beautiful solution for a kitchen splashback or bathroom wall. Window blinds, often an afterthought, can be built into a recess to disappear when not in use. These details are often a collaboration between your architect and craftsman (be it joiner or bricklayer), so encourage this conversation to take place at an early stage.



6 PLAN THE HUB OF YOUR HOME

A good kitchen takes effort to plan as it is the engine room of a house. Where you position the fridge, stove, sink and work surfaces is critical and will depend on the shape, available space and any existing doorways. But a smaller space need not mean skimping on style and functionality. A kitchen can also be a focal point, so if budget allows, think about the materials for your worktop (stone, oiled timber or quartz) and the style of your units. Investing in both may seem pricey, but a well-designed kitchen never dates and should give long lasting pleasure to the home owner.



4 GIVE GREEN SPACE A PRIORITY

Your outdoor space is as important as your house itself, even more important if you're downsizing to a smaller place. Your new outdoor space may be a garden, patio or balcony, but however big or small, consider hard landscaping (paths, levels and paving) and soft landscaping (your choice of plants). The most important factor is orientation — if it's east-facing, can you enjoy a morning coffee here? If south-facing, is it a good spot to soak up afternoon sun? If west-facing, can you dine al fresco in the evenings? Try to avoid a north-facing aspect as it won't get direct sunlight.

For some, a new outdoor space will be an exciting gardening project. For those less green-fingered, the advice of a good landscape designer on what to plant and where may be well worth the investment.