

SMALL-SPACE MAKEOVERS P.68

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# Built to fit

“I wanted to start with a clean slate. If we had a bigger unit, we wouldn't have done a major remodel.”

—MONIQUE MENCONI

”

“We had the quintessential Portland life,” says Monique Menconi. “A 2,500-square-foot ‘ranchalov’ with a finished basement, chickens, an amazing garden.” But then? “We grew out of it.” It’s not that Monique and her husband, John, craved a McMansion. Rather, they wanted to live more efficiently.



So they downsized, purchasing an 875-square-foot loft in Portland’s Pearl District and hiring interior

designers Jessica Helgerson and Mira Eng-Goetz to reconfigure the home. Today, the loft’s main 15- by 30-foot space is kitchen, home office, dining room, and living room. “The irony is we have more space for the things that really matter,” says Monique. “We could easily have 20 people over and spread out from the kitchen to living room.”

**DESIGN:** Jessica Helgerson Interior Design, Portland; [jhinteriordesign.com](#).



## 10 SECRETS OF SMALL

**1. Go big on the wow factor.** When the kitchen is the highlight of a floor plan, tile is a statement of style. The textural glazed thin brick rises to the soffit and covers the range hood.

**2. Solve problems with a sectional.** For efficient rooms, Helgerson ignores the prevailing design wisdom about pulling sofas toward the center of a room. “We

can squeeze a lot of people into a small space by building seating right up against the walls,” she says. The sofa is so large that “10 or 12 people could sit on it, and a few could use it to sleep overnight,” says Monique. “It’s almost the width of a twin bed.”

**3. Expect more from walls.** Plain walls are under-achievers. Helgerson lined the one that

separates the living room and bathroom end-to-end with shelves for the Menconis’ books. In the kitchen, a bump-out separates the kitchen and living area, while open shelves and a counter are the perfect spot to set out a buffet or drinks. “I’ve worked in restaurants, and I like the flow of cooking and reaching up, grabbing a plate, and putting food on it,” Monique says.

“  
We tend to expand to the volume we have. We realized we could downsize pretty easily and still be comfortable.”  
—JOHN MENCONI



BEFORE



**4. Reach the ceiling.** A wall of floor-to-ceiling cabinets uses all available vertical space to hold what the kitchen drawers can't: a pantry, small appliances, dog food, and extra dishes for entertaining. "We use the top cabinets to store coolers, luggage, and extra bedding," Monique says.

**5. De-loft the loft.** The former floor plan included a lofted bedroom—a misguided effort to save space. Helgerson moved

the bedroom back to ground level to take advantage of one of the condo's large windows, then put walls around it. The privacy "makes the bedroom a more usable space," John says.

**6. Swap cabinets for drawers.** Standard kitchen cabinets often have unreachable, wasted back corners. Instead, the Menconis prefer drawers. "They're big, deep, and you can pull them out all the way," John says.

**7. Infuse the space with warmth.** Items with history and texture keep a home from feeling utilitarian, Helgerson says. Her team painted the existing ceiling beams the color of dark wood and chose a rough-textured thin brick for the kitchen. Decorative touches like the Moroccan-style rug and leather poufs in the living room (page 56) and the applied headboard in the bedroom (top right) add warmth too.



**8. Take lighting off the floor.** When every inch counts, there's no extra floor space for lamps. In the bedroom, wall-mounted sconces flank the custom headboard. Helgerson strung glass pendants from the living room's ceiling to light the sectional (page 56).

**9. Floot it.** Wall-mounted cabinets don't save much square footage, but the open, spacious feeling they bring is invaluable, says Monique. Helgerson used this trick for the living room credenza.

**10. Have furniture earn its keep.** Virtually every piece in the loft functions as storage. Drawers beneath the sectional contain dog leashes, exercise gear, cords, and guest bedding. Notebooks and other work-from-home equipment are in the credenza under the TV. And drawers hidden in the bed's platform hold books. **»**



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