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The design lesson learned at grandma's house

Tiny kitchen gets big feel with pale colours and cabinets that multi-task



Vicky Sanderson

Evelyn Eshun's affinity for small spaces began with childhood visits to her grandparents' home in Wroclaw, Poland, which she describes as "absolutely tiny."

It was also, however, a model of functionality, especially the 10-by-10-foot kitchen.

"Every square inch was used very efficiently," says Eshun, a Toronto-based interior designer.

"So I learned early that you don't need all that much space for a room to work."

It's a lesson that city-dwellers would do well to take to heart, she says. "Frankly if you want a home in the GTA, it will probably be smaller," says Eshun. "But small spaces are no longer a compromise, because with smart, creative design, they can work — and even multi-function."

Eshun recently applied her small space design skills to a 10-by-14-square-foot kitchen in Ajax, Ont.

It was a challenging project. While the client had a long list wish, she wanted to save on construction costs by maintaining existing walls and appliance location.

"She wanted it to feel warm and inviting and luxurious, but she also demanded that it be very neat and clean-lined. On top of that, she had beautiful glasses and tableware that she wanted somehow to display without taking away from storage space. And it all had to be accomplished on a small budget," explains Eshun.

Each of the client's requests was carefully weighed. Eshun says her goal is to "reflect the client's esthetics, because even if I have certain sensibilities, it's really about them and how they live in the space."

The resulting plan meant carving out space, wherever it could be



LARRY ARNAL PHOTOS

A narrow display cabinet makes a handsome entryway to the kitchen.

found. The fridge, for example, is hidden by a narrow cabinet that's a mere eight inches in depth. Too small for serious storage, perhaps, but perfect for displaying accessories and tableware. Interior lighting added a gallery feel and the cabinet acts as a bright and pretty entryway to the room.

The geography of the floor plan didn't include enough square footage for a sprawling island. So Eshun opted for a space-saving peninsula that comfortably seats three. Where it

meets the wall, she added a small bar cabinet.

Her client also wanted French doors that swung out onto a patio. But there was not enough space to do that, and the building code prohibits a design that has the doors swinging in. Eshun suggested sliding doors that mimic the effect.

That visual trick was just one of a variety she used. To create a sense of space, Eshun looked to the colour palette. A warm white was chosen for the cabinetry, with brick-patterned



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Lighting in the cabinet over the sink mimics the effect of a window.

marble tiles in the same colour-family used on the backsplash. The floor was covered in a creamy marble tile.

The visual continuity of the palette helped make the room look larger than it actually is, says Eshun. "Because the floor and base cabinets are similar colour, the line where one stops and the other starts is blurred," she says. For the same reason, she "doesn't like areas where there are corners with hard contrast." She also brought moulding up onto the ceiling; another trick, she says, that adds a feeling of height.

Initially, the client wanted a light-coloured counter, possibly in granite. "But it tends to be quite busy, and I suggested the room needed a sleeker kind of punctuation," says Eshun.

In the end, an earth-toned Caesarstone quartz was used. With a smooth texture and subtle pattern, it's almost like a piece of well-polished jewelry. Pendants over the peninsula add another touch of restrained bling.

Lighting is always top of mind for Eshun, who remembers that in one of her first design classes at Ryerson University, she was told: "Without light there is nothing."

The client for the Ajax project wanted more pot lights than Eshun thought was necessary, but she did convince her to have them put on a dimmer switch.

"It just gives you that flexibility. I also like to have under-cabinet lighting that you can turn on for a cosy dinner. It instantly changes the mood."

Because there was no window above the sink, Eshun added a glass-fronted cabinet which was also lit. "It almost fools your eye into thinking it's a window," she explains.

While loving the challenge of small spaces, she says the fundamentals of a good design don't really change according to the size of a room.

"When I walk into an empty space, my ultimate job is to make sure it fulfils its function. But it should also be a bit of an adventure, a beautiful adventure. A good designer should be able to do that, no matter what the size of the space is."

More from Vicky Sanderson at thestar.com/life/vicky_sandersons_on_the_house. Also the DIY editor for *Reno and Decor* magazine, Vicky is on Twitter: @vickysanderson or email vswriter@sympatico.ca.

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