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Dishes P.172

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ALL IN THE FAMILY
Making hand-me-down pieces work is part of Amy McKinney's strategy for furnishing her home on a budget. Her childhood mahogany bed is a little formal for her adult taste, but she relaxes it with a hot-pink love seat and a painted writing desk that belonged to her mother. To give the love seat a girly makeover, a coworker painted the cherry trim ivory with gilded accents.



smart style in a small package

A young designer's first home offers ideas for supersizing a small space for little cash.

by SHARON OVERTON photos BRIE WILLIAMS produced by SANDRA L. MOHLMANN





amy McKinney started collecting furniture while she was still in college. So when this young Charleston, South Carolina, designer finally got a place of her own—a three-room condo carved out of a stately 19th-century home—the challenge wasn't so much what to put in it as how to arrange it.

In a home with less than 1,200 square feet of living space, every stick of furniture needs to pull its weight—and then some. Pieces that perform multiple functions do just that. Rather than waste space on a dining suite, Amy opted for a drop-leaf table and movable seating she pulls out when needed. In the master bedroom, her desk doubles as a nightstand and home office.

To stretch her budget further, Amy invests in timeless styles, such as a wingback chair slipcovered in pale gray cotton and a pair of slipper chairs with demure pleated skirts. Then she tweaks tradition with modern print pillows and bold, colorful accents. Bargain finds, such as a Victorian-style sofa and love seat purchased at a Habitat for Humanity resale store, look newly chic with fresh paint and upholstery.

“That’s part of the fun for me, not just looking at something for the way it is now but figuring out how I can change it. How can I spice it up a bit?” Amy says. In a small space and on a starting salary, sometimes the answer is as simple as tossing a turquoise beaded necklace on a nightstand or filling a glass jar with bars of mango-color soap. “Use what you have,” Amy advises. “It doesn’t have to cost a fortune.”


NEW TRADITIONAL Amy’s furniture is traditional, but her lifestyle is casual. Upholstered chairs wear washable cotton slipcovers, and floor pillows are perfect for lounging. The drop-leaf table sometimes holds a television set and sometimes transforms the living room into the dining area, above. Amy pulls the love seat from her bedroom for extra seating.

“I like everything to be subtle and then you throw in an exciting punch every so often. A little can go a long way.”

AMY MCKINNEY



BEDDING BY FORMULA Amy likes to dress each bed with a basic white cotton matelassé spread, which she buys inexpensively at discount stores. In the guest room, above, she layered on a quilt and shams in restful shades of turquoise and green. The soft colors of the braided rug are repeated in the quilt's border. "Everything was acquired at different times, in different years," she says. "Lots of white is what makes it work."

THE LITTLE THINGS A bright rug and bars of soap are all the color that's needed in the guest bathroom, left. The rolling tray table, which Amy bought in college, can be folded up and stored when not in use. 

For buying information see page 252.