

THE TIMES

Create space at home - on every budget

By Susan Emmett

February 5, 2010

Has your income failed to grow as fast as your clutter, your children and house prices? If so, your home probably feels a bit cramped. Gone are the days when trading up would have provided the easy solution. Homeowners are now likely to stay put for 17 years before moving on, according to new figures from Savills. The recession, the rising cost of moving and unaffordable property prices mean that, on average, we will trade up only three times in our lives. The metaphorical housing ladder, which had ten rungs between the 1960s and the 1980s, when homeowners moved every seven years, has all but disappeared.

Its demise means that we need to work harder than ever at making the most of the space we feel we have outgrown. It will take a lot of organising and a little creativity and you may have to spend some cash. But if you are going to be stuck where you are for another few years it will be worth the effort. Here's what to do if . . .

You've little money

Your situation is not hopeless. The most space-enhancing action you can take is a few trips to charity shops, the recycling depot and even the local dump. If you have been in your home for some time, you are probably hoarding things you no longer need but fail to even notice. Take a critical look around your home and sort the superfluous into separate bags based on how you plan to dispose of them — then get rid of them immediately. Once this is done you can start your mission to find all the dead spaces in your home. "There can be a lot of dead space on landings, passages and corridors," Toby Kalitowski, of Boulter Kalitowski Architectural Designs, based in London, says. "You can fit shelves in lots of awkward places. Even a tiny 120mm shelf is worth it to store jars, bathroom stuff and Lego boxes. Look at what you have to store and break it down into sizes to see where it can fit," he says.

The tops of cupboards and beneath beds and sofas can also be good spaces. Make it look deliberate by storing your bits in uniform boxes, baskets or caddies that match their surroundings. Mirrors can also transform a space.

Trisha Kalitowski, of the same firm, says: "Rooms work best when there is a source of light coming in from two aspects. But if you have only one window you can create the same effect by placing a mirror opposite it." It does not need to be a standalone one. Adding mirrors to the back of shelves, for example, can work just as well.

You have a bit of cash to spare

Fitted cupboards and furniture can transform a home. Wardrobes in the bedroom are an obvious place to start. But you need not stop there.

"Think of putting cupboards on internal dividing walls rather than exterior ones," Trisha says. "A wall of shelves and cupboards can work particularly well if it is framed around a door. You don't see them as

soon as you walk in.” Keep floor-to-ceiling cupboards streamlined, with push-open latches rather than handles; when closed, you will barely notice they are there. But don’t go over the top.

“Adding a recess with downlights or a shelf displaying books and ornaments can add character to a room and enhance space,” Toby says.

To keep costs down, Toby suggests you use Ikea carcasses and employ a local carpenter to make the doors out of 18mm medium-density fibreboard. “A good handyman is key to all of this. Personal recommendation works best or you can check the windows of newsagents in smart neighbourhoods for names,” he says. Homeowners with more space and money could go one step farther with a walk-in closet. Gay Roper, one of the founders of Manhattan Closets, which builds bespoke walk-in wardrobes and fitted cupboards, believes that most of us could make better use of our space. “You save room with a walk-in wardrobe because as all your clothes and belongings are stored in one place you can then get rid of the other furniture in your bedroom.”

You have savings in the bank

If you were to move, you would have to spend several thousand pounds on stamp duty, solicitor’s fees and estate agent’s fees. So why not spend the money extending up, back or down instead?

According to Robin Chatwin, of Savills in Wandsworth, southwest London, an extraordinarily high number of people are adding extra living space to their homes, and building can make financial sense. “If you add on a side extension of about 200 sq ft, it might cost £60,000, but you would add £100,000 to the value of a Victorian terrace or semi.” According to Martyn Clarke, of Martyn Clarke Architecture, ground-floor extensions should be about enhancing natural light.

“Victorian terraced houses can be dark and kitchens at the back can have lower ceilings than the front of the house. By creating a side extension or a back extension, you not only increase square footage but also create the feeling of space by using lots of glass and opening the back of the house to the garden.”

Conversions can cost anything between £80,000 and £150,000. A cheaper option would be to start at the top. Nick Woodworth, a director of Qualitas Constructions and Pure Basements, says that a loft conversion to add a bedroom and shower room to the top of a Victorian terrace costs between £30,000 and £60,000.

But recently most of his work involves digging deep to create more space beneath houses.

“Many people have already converted their lofts and extended out the back. Now they want to do a basement extension to add a playroom and a utility room.” Adding a large basement of 1,500 sq ft can cost up to £400,000. But smaller spaces underneath two reception rooms cost £130,000-£160,000.

Manhattan Closets: 0844 8000024, manhattanclosets.co.uk; Martyn Clarke Architecture: 020-7263 7121, martynclarke architecture.com; Qualitas Constructions: 020-8944 6325; Pure Basements: 020-8944 6325, purebasements.co.uk;

ourproperty.co.uk/guides/building_an_extension_what_to_consider.html

Tricks of the design trade

“I’m a tidy sort of bloke,” the Beatle, George Harrison, once said. “I don’t like chaos. I kept records in the record rack, and tea in the tea caddy.” Some of us need a bit more help to keep our house in

order. There isn't always an obvious rack or caddy for everything. Barbara Weiss, is an architect and the co-author of *Storage*(Dorling Kindersley).

Learn to adapt

Alter the storage solutions to fit the house. "When we lowered the ceiling in a hallway to match the house dimensions, we added a cupboard above with a little trap door," Weiss says.

Sense of proportion

If you have a long, thin room, put cupboards at the short end to give the sense of as much space as possible.

Mix it up

Try to be diverse; vases look elegant with light shining through, so consider a glass cupboard. Use adjustable shelves to accommodate books of different sizes.

Plan ahead

Decide what you want to store in advance. There's no point creating a huge space for something tiny, such as deep cupboards in the bathroom just for beauty products.

Streamline

"One of the worst things that homeowners do is have cupboards that stop just before the ceiling, which creates a dust-trap and looks piecemeal." Make things fit.

Doing it for the kids

Encourage children to be tidy, with different-sized drawers in bright colours. Teenagers need small, private spaces for CDs and trinkets.

Home office

A huge growth area for storage providers, says Weiss, as more people work from home. Be decisive: lever arch files or document wallets? Keep wiring out of the way with careful furniture placement and clever drilling.

Clothes war

The biggest bugbear in many households, from men who leave dirty socks on the floor to the girls who leave clothes strewn across the bed. Keep dirty washing drawers for different colours in a place everyone in the family can easily access.

Cupboards, cupboards, cupboards

"Have them in every room," says Weiss. "Whatever the design, just have lots of them."