

ASK THE DESIGNER: Christmas Decorating 101

By Jean Bisnaire

Niche Decor

?How can I decorate for the season without overwhelming my small-ish space?"

I am often asked about decorating small spaces, not just at the holidays.

With beautiful new buildings popping up all over the city, many people are making the move to condo and townhome living. Because the average new condo in the GTA is under 800 square feet, furniture companies are now manufacturing more and more ?apartment sized? styles of furniture and décor items.

The first thing to be mindful of is scale: it's important to make sure your pieces are the correct size so that they don't overwhelm your space. The same goes for your Christmas and holiday décor. Companies are now starting to make condo-sized Christmas trees. When choosing ornaments for the tree, be mindful of their size. Buying oversized ornaments can make your pint-sized tree look small and cheesy. Simplicity is key in tight spaces. Keep your ornaments simple and elegant.

If fitting a tree into your space just isn't an option try one of these ?outside the box' ideas: Put some evergreen branches in vases and hang some ornaments off of them or, hang ornaments from a wall in the shape of a Christmas tree. Hang some ornaments from the ceiling or even from an existing chandelier! Done right, this will look fabulous.

Another great way to pack punch into a small home is by creating a beautifully decorated mantelpiece to star as the focal point of the room. Start by switching out your regular art that you have hanging above the fireplace for a wreath or a beautiful family photograph. Putting a mirror over the fireplace will help to reflect light making your space feel larger. It will also reflect the colour of any decorations you add to your fireplace making it feel even more festive!

Drape a garland across the mantel, and anchor the ends of it with clusters of red carnations or poinsettias. Why not add a grouping of hurricane vases with red or white candles? This will create an elegant and comfortable feel. Are you having kids over for the holiday festivities? If you're looking for a more funky and colourful holiday look, fill mason jars with brightly coloured ornaments, candy canes, string lights and gift bows for a fresh take on mantel décor.

Entertaining at the holidays always highlights the fact that we never have enough seating in our homes ? especially if we've just downsized. One way to downplay this problem is to use an eclectic mix of dining chairs. By having various styles of seating you can easily get away with pulling some chairs away from the table and adding them to your living space while your guests are visiting.

To conserve space, especially when adding additional pieces of holiday décor, try to include multifunctional furniture in your design scheme. A bench by the front door or at the foot of your bed can be pulled out into the den for additional seating at the holidays.

Don't forget hidden storage! You can hide a multitude of household items in a storage bench or ottoman. Tuck your everyday throw cushions, accessories and tchotchkes away to make room for your holiday items!

The last thing I'll mention is that there is a lot to be said for ambiance. Decorate the front door to set the holiday inspired tone for your guests as soon as they arrive. You can create atmosphere without taking up any space at all. Light some pine or gingerbread scented candles ? whatever scent makes you feel ?home for the holidays'. Throw on some Christmas tunes and you're good to go!