

Small footprints with big potential

By thinking outside the blueprints, this one-bed design by Sam Stephenson has been transformed

Alanna Gallagher

Tiny House Nation is a TV show that first screened in the US in 2014 and is currently being broadcast by Channel 4. It looks at inventive ways homeowners use tight spaces from a reasonably roomy 90sq m (968sq ft) to just 10sq m (107sq ft). What's the appeal? "There is a belief that small homes are a more sustainable way to live, easier to manage and run and they cost less in terms of property tax," says Stephen McMahon, a Co Tipperary-based carpenter who set up Tiny Homes last year. He makes homes for single people and so far has constructed two, including one which was just 20sq m (215 sq ft).

The same thinking applies to apartment living, no longer considered a short-term solution. Comprising 11 per cent of all occupied households in Ireland, according to the 2011 census, and one-third of occupied households in Dublin city, apartments are where more and more of us now call home.

And while planning guidelines have increased the amount of storage required in all new builds, there are many existing examples – boom-era and earlier – that don't factor in life beyond the Marie Kondo decluttered simplicity of the show unit.

In real life, most people are tethered to belongings – books, sports equipment, art, photographs, computers, records and

CDs they can't part with, to name just the basics. But by thinking outside the blueprints to create the right space, light and storage can coexist happily.

Architect Eva Byrne of Houseology was recently hired to optimise the existing space in a 40sq m (430sq ft) one-bedroom apartment in Dublin 6 built by the late bold and controversial architect Sam Stephenson.

Every centimetre was important, she says. By moving a door and some internal walls and reconfiguring the bathroom she almost doubled the storage space from 3 cubic metres to 5.7 cubic metres.

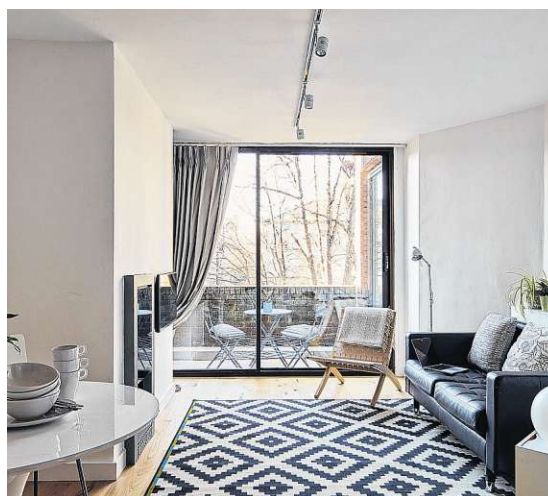
"I'm in the business of making things work. There is a place for all your belongings," she says.

Byrne charges €300 for an initial two-hour consultation. John Lee of Cherryvale Builders estimates that a similar refurbishment, including building a kitchen and wardrobes, will cost in the region of €30,000. Houseology.ie; Tinyhomes.ie

Livingroom

The living room needed the most work to make it a properly defined space. Originally this room had a carpeted area, and a tiled floor in the dining section. New oak flooring throughout made the room feel bigger.

A sofa that sat in front of the glass doors out to the terrace blocked light and any sense of space. Its natural home was opposite the open fire but a door out to the hall prevented this. Byrne moved the door, creating a natural nook for a small sofa. A narrow shelf behind the sofa acts as a side table for a morning cup of coffee or an evening glass of wine. A ceiling-height bookcase hides the kitchen.



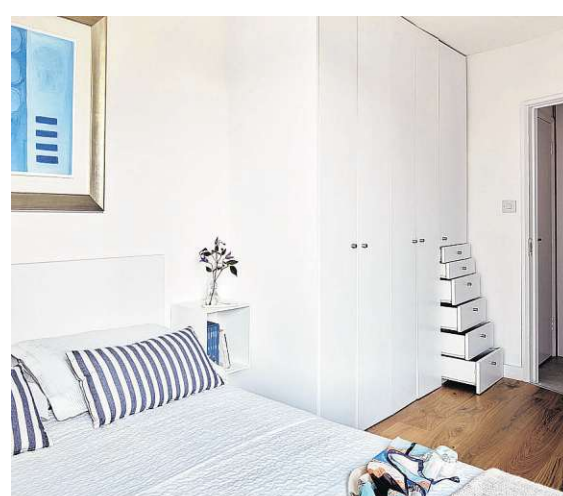
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The open fireplace was positioned off-centre in a large chimney breast. Not wanting the hassle of an open fire, Byrne installed a Gazco electric fire instead. On the same wall the TV set to the right at viewing level filled the gap presented by the off-centre fire.

Kitchen

The apartment had a U-shaped kitchen concealed behind leaded glass paneled fold-back doors. By removing these, and reshaping the kitchen into an L-shape with white MDF units put together on site by a joiner, she created a simple wall of storage.

Reconstituted stone worktops and a tiled splashback in a staggered pattern

reflect light in. Bins are concealed beneath the sink and a hanging rail for pots and kitchen towels keeps countertop clutter to a minimum.

Bathroom

The apartment had a relatively big bathroom but a bath took up valuable space. By removing the bath and installing a shower on the opposite wall, as well as a wall-hung toilet and sink, Byrne reduced the footprint and used the extra square metre in a clever utility cupboard that's accessible from the hall.

By using the same materials on the walls and floor, the smaller space somehow feels bigger. The concealed cistern left room for mirror-fronted cabinets,

with adjustable shelving to take toiletries, toilet rolls and cleaning products. An electric towel rail is set on a timer, ensuring a cosy bathroom temperature only when required.

Hall

In the dark hall a terrazzo-like tile reflects light. Here also is the utility cupboard created from the excess bathroom space, with a washer-dryer plumbed in from the bathroom. The cupboard has full-height doors, a storage area tall enough for an ironing board and sweeping brushes, and hooks on the doors can take bulky reusable shopping bags and wet coats. In the adjacent hot press Byrne added more

shelving, set 25 cm apart, to stack bed linen and towels.

Bedroom

The bedroom got an additional square metre of storage by incorporating a hall cupboard into the room; this made a large wardrobe with double-height hanging, tall hanging and drawers.

The tall wardrobe doors are floor-to-ceiling with additional storage shelves above the hanging areas for less-used items such as extra duvets, pillows and suitcases.

The MDF wardrobes were made by a joiner, to Byrne's specifications. The bedside lockers also "float", to make the room feel bigger.

Design Moment Eames plastic chair, c. 1948

By now you've seen versions of this chair by American designers Charles and Ray Eames (right) pretty much everywhere. It's become the go-to option for restaurants looking for a modern, spare look but with a nod to vintage; and most interior magazines feature homes where coloured versions around a wooden table are a casual sign of design savvy, a smart buy-in to the retro revival.

The Eameses were America's most prolific and influential 20th-century designers – he was an architect, she an artist – and the first version of this chair was designed in 1948 for an international competition for "low-cost furniture design" sponsored by



the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Inspired by manufacturing techniques devised by the US military in the 1940s to mould plastic, the Eameses experimented with fibreglass-reinforced plastic to make a rigid one-piece shell, contoured for the body to be comfortable but, crucially, able to be mass-produced.

"Getting the most of the best to the greatest number of people

for the least" was one pillar of their design philosophy. When the plastic chairs were launched on the market in 1950 by manufacturer Herman Miller, they were the first mass-produced plastic chairs.

Once they got the concept for the plastic chair just right, the Eameses created many versions, with different moulded shapes, but the main difference being the bases: some had wooden legs, others chrome, four legs or pedestal, H-legs or stackable, the most intricate being the Eiffel Tower base of steel wire.

And since the start they have been produced in a vast range of colours; there are even uphol-

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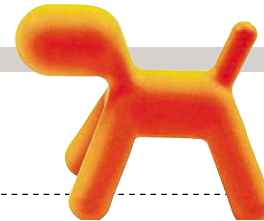
Predictably, the early fibreglass versions are the most collectible; since the 1990s, the chairs have been manufactured in matt polypropylene.

Vitra has the licence to make the plastic chair so their quality in terms of manufacture, materials and faithfulness to the Eames original are assured.

But there are so many "plastic chairs" around it's likely some are copies, mostly manufactured in China – and they'll never become collectible.

BERNICE HARRISON

House Rules Living with dogs



So you have your perfect pad in this season's palette of muted shades of taupe and ochre (just like last season). Your hard surfaces of polished wood and marble are offset by overstuffed velvet sofas, and there's a nice pale-cream wingback chair for himself. It would all be perfect if it wasn't for the dark stains of dog clouding the lower walls, and leaving reminders, like little hairy ghosts, on Fido's favourite spot, which happens to be on your favourite chair. Even the most beautiful of breeds can be a mucky pup.

Bo, the Portuguese water dog owned by the Obamas, is famously non-shed and hypoallergenic, but even the Bos of this

world have to be house trained.

Dogs can also mark your paintwork, and shyer types, particularly rescue dogs, like to hug the walls until they get confident. Painting the lower part of your walls in a darker colour is a stylish solve. And all dogs will jump on sofas when you're not looking.

Ownspot

While they do love to stretch out on your seats, dogs are at their happiest when they have their own spot. Check out pet-bliss.ie for luxury dog armchairs and chaises longues from €129.99, or go lower-key with a suede-effect dog cushion by Chanelle Pet from €21.50 from petcara.ie.

TK Maxx also does a great and eclectic range.

Apart from that, it's all about the fabrics: velvet and chintz are the least forgiving, but washable slip covers and throws can be your best friends. Washable rugs are also good.

One of the great things about owning a dog is that they get you out for walks. So plan your return on rainy days and keep a towel in the porch or hall to rub your dog down. If you don't fancy the idea of a dog sitting on your favourite chair, pick up a dog chair to sit on yourself. The Magis Puppy Chair (pictured) comes in a range of brightly coloured plastics and costs from £49.30 at nest.co.uk.

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