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LIVING LARGE IN A LITTLE HOUSE

Lizzie Carney rewrites the rules of small-space decorating in her 1,000-square-foot Illinois bungalow.
OLD RULE  White walls are a must when square footage is limited.

NEW RULE  Dark colors create the illusion of depth in small rooms.

Lizzie Carney painted every wall the same custom-mixed charcoal hue; the floors throughout wear a paler shade of gray. In the living room, contrasting color and texture come from pink pillows and weathered woods: oxidized oak shutters and a coffee table made from reclaimed lumber.
OLD RULE  Cramped quarters call for clean lines.

NEW RULE  Ornate, embellished details give even the tightest spots a sense of grandeur.

Carney found this opulent chandelier in Belgium and the vintage refrigerator at an El Paso, Texas, flea market. Her kitchen island, by Euro Trash, incorporates parts from an antique sideboard; the stools are IKEA bargains.
Hidden storage is key to keeping a tiny house tidy.

Why waste precious basement space on boxes when you could have a dining room and a wine cellar?

From the outside, Lizzie Carney’s home in Jacksonville, Illinois, looks like your garden-variety 1930s bungalow. But appearances can be deceiving. Step through the front door of the 1,000-square-foot house and you might think you’ve entered a sprawling French château—complete with luxe antiques, crystal chandeliers, and sumptuous satin drapes. Clearly, this is one gal who’s not about to let a lack of space cramp her style. Instead of dreaming of a bigger place to accommodate the finer things in life, Carney insists on living in the right now. “Don’t wait to enjoy the good stuff,” she urges. “Use your china when eating a hamburger. If you love a piece of furniture, find a way to make it work.”

Which is exactly what she did. Forget the conventional wisdom that dictates diminutive scale and clean lines for tight quarters. The decor of this little cottage demonstrates how large,
dramatic pieces give tiny rooms a dose of grandeur. Carney, who scours flea markets abroad as a stylist and designer for the import firm Euro Trash, literally brought her work home—via an elaborately carved French bed frame, a gilded Belgian mirror, numerous European vintage chairs, and reams of chocolate-brown velvet from Paris. "It’s a misconception that dark colors make a place seem smaller," says the designer, who painted every wall charcoal gray.

Such continuity, she explains, "creates the feel of endless space."

But to really understand her luxurious, rebellious approach, you have to check out the basement—now a full-fledged wine cellar!—and what’s supposed to be the house’s second bedroom. Outfitted with wooden rolling racks, an oversize pink ottoman, and a vermilion vanity, the room serves as a walk-in closet of fantastical proportions. Carney casts an eye toward a row of frilly frocks and declares, with typical carpe diem enthusiasm: "I say, wear a fancy dress, even if you have no place to go! You can make every day a special occasion."
OLD RULE  Small places require small furniture.

NEW RULE  Bitsy often leads to busy. Instead, opt for fewer, larger pieces.

The queen-size bed, a French antique, makes one big statement. Behind it, gray curtains mask an oddly placed window. The duvet is from Anthropologie.
Living Large in a Little House

Four luxe finds echo Lizzie Carney’s lavish boudoir.

**Fabric**  Up the wow factor of upholstery or drapes with this coral satin. ($5.99 per yard; hancockfabrics.com)

**Chandelier**  Channel Carney’s vintage French fixture with this affordable option. ($299.99; lampsplus.com)

**Paint**  Add instant sophistication with Benjamin Moore’s Amherst Gray. ($37.88 per gallon; myperfectcolor.com)

**Headboard**  This tufted stunner (available in more than 100 fabrics) evokes opulence. ($449–$589 for queen, 62”W x 50”H; ballarddesigns.com)