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How to Downsize and Declutter Without Sacrificing Things You Love

Marie Kondo has nothing on this collection-happy couple, who moved from a five-bedroom townhouse to a two-bedroom flat without giving up their beloved acquisitions or creating clutter

BOLD, NOT BUSY In the two-bedroom apartment Perry Sayles shares with his partner, the interior designer balanced patterns with solids to minimize visual jumble. GIANNI FRANCHELLUCCI

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IMAGINE downsizing from a five-bedroom townhouse to a two-bedroom apartment. Now consider that the couple making the move are avid collectors who lived in Hong Kong and London before squeezing themselves into 1,300 square feet in Manhattan. How could clutter and claustrophobia not ensue?

One half of the pair, interior designer Perry Sayles, admits that they stored some possessions and gave others to family. But much of the art, textiles, ceramics, artifacts (his partner is an Egyptologist) and books came with them.

“You don’t have to throw out stuff, necessarily, when you move into a small space,” said Mr. Sayles. “You just need to group them and have a place for them.” He advised consolidating small objects onto a tray, or pictures onto a gallery wall. “You begin to feel clutter when there’s no open table space. You don’t want all your surfaces covered.”

Few patterns or complicated shapes compete with the couple's collections; furniture is clean-lined; upholstery and walls restricted to single solid colors. "I tend to choose furniture that's quite simple to go with the objects," said Mr. Sayles, who also avoided unnecessary contrasts, which can chop up smaller spaces. Walls share the same paint color with built-in shelving and window and door moldings; hardwood floors continue into the kitchen, whose backsplash tile extends into the adjacent dining area.

"As the light shifts around the room during the day, the color shifts too," said Mr. Sayles of the heavily pigmented Farrow & Ball paint he used. When one hue takes on different characters, you needn't clutter up the view by painting various elements different colors. Result: Rooms feel dynamic not stagnant.



PHOTO: GIANNI FRANCHELLUCCI

Illusion of Grandeur

“I tried to make the place look a little more intentional, a little more formal by putting in the cove molding,” said Mr. Sayles of the snazzy architectural border he added to the foyer. Painting it the same color as the walls, Farrow & Ball’s Savage Ground, helps make the ceiling look higher. Though the yellowish-stone hue also appears in the kitchen and dining area (below left) in a matte finish, here it’s used in high-gloss to maximize the limited natural light. An Egyptian-style cherry-wood vitrine is both fronted and backed with glass to lighten its perceived weight and show the bibelots it holds well. Otherwise, said Mr. Sayles, “you wouldn’t have the effect of silhouetting the objects against the wall.”



PHOTO: GIANNI FRANCHELLUCCI

Look, Ma, No Legs

Mr. Sayles loves Saarinen’s pedestaled tulip tables for spaces such as this study, which also functions as a guest and dining room. “You can slide in as many chairs as you can set around,” he said. “You don’t have any [table] legs to deal with.” When the couple entertains, seats of differing styles pulled from the rest of the apartment play well with the eclectic mix of the room: the midcentury table, red-lacquered Chinese chairs and the Turkish kilim rug.



PHOTO: GIANNI FRANCHELLUCCI

Dining in the Round

In the kitchen seating area, another pedestaled Saarinen table joins a corner banquette, which saves space too (chairs need room to back up). Bonus: Storage under the seat stows special-occasion equipment like silverware and linens. Glass-front cabinets make the kitchen feel more open and show off dashing dishes. Solid doors conceal less-attractive jumbles. A midcentury brass counter-weighted pendant over the table does the work of many light fixtures. Raised, it illuminates the whole room; lowered, it casts a puddle of intimate light for dining.



PHOTO: GIANNI FRANCHELLUCCI

Boundless Storage

In the living room, Mr. Sayles painted the built-in shelving the same silvery blue as the walls and moldings to create a unifying backdrop for books and ceramics without further “crowding” the area. “If you have a big bookcase sitting against the wall with space around it, it feels more overwhelming than if the whole wall is bookcase,” said Mr. Sayles. In solid blue, the sculptural Finn Juhl love seat with a single pillow gives the brain a little respite. Mr. Sayles lit shelves with library-style lamps for post-sunset drama. “I designed this apartment in part to look good at night because that’s normally when we were home,” he said. Now that the couple uses the apartment more during the day, Mr. Sayles appreciates how the paint color appears to shift from gray to blue as the daylight changes, revealing many moods.

Solids That Rock



PHOTO: GIANNI FRANCHELLUCCI

In the living room, Mr. Sayles created visual resting places among his and his partner’s many collections. Solid-colored upholstery—flame-tone Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec armchairs and a custom yellow sofa—give the eye a break from art, books and intricately patterned rugs. Mr. Sayles puzzled together the carpets (from another collection), then balanced their elaborateness with punchy, figured curtains, one of few such textiles in the apartment. Lamps create zones with inviting

pools of light, key in a small apartment, said Mr. Sayles. “If you use just one big light fixture in the middle of the ceiling, you’re in the same box all the time.”