

san francisco

In the main room, Rice countered the formality of dark green walls with a lively leopard-print carpet. "In a space this small you're very aware of every detail, because they are all around you," says the homeowner.

Designer
Georgina Rice
gave the royal
treatment to
a small studio
apartment,
proving that
luxury comes
in all sizes.

BY ERIN FEHER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DAVID DUNCAN LIVINGSTON

PETITE MAISON



“Everything has a place, and absolutely every centimeter matters.”

With the Murphy bed folded away, the salon is set for an intimate dinner party. Built-in cabinets provide ample storage and bring added architectural dimension to what was once a “grim little box.”

The elegant San Francisco home of a now-retired technology executive has just about everything a lady could desire—a salon for entertaining, a dressing room, a fully outfitted kitchen, a soaking tub and plenty of storage. The sparkle of crystal chandeliers, a collection of 19th-century antiques and stunning views of the Bay make this luxury residence even more remarkable, especially given that it all fits into a 500-square-foot studio apartment.

For this homeowner, creating a full-time residence in a space that would seem most suitable for a pied-à-terre was a choice, not a concession. Because she used to travel frequently for business, she was accustomed to a simplified existence. “For a few years, I rented a 300-square-foot studio, and I was perfectly happy there. That’s when I knew once and for all that a small space was what I wanted,” she says. “I loved getting rid of all my stuff—it was so liberating.”

Thanks to San Francisco designer Georgina Rice, the homeowner was able to keep more than a few of her worldly possessions without relinquishing any style. By adding elegant built-in cabinets and rococo detailing, Rice transformed what was once a “grim little box” with white walls and out-of-date appliances. “Nothing was left untouched—we designed every single inch,” says the homeowner, who told Rice she envisioned the space as a tiny jewel box.

ABOVE: An office is tucked neatly into the east end of the galley kitchen. Custom mahogany cabinets conceal a panoply of necessities, including a computer, fax machine, printer and complete filing system.



There was nothing bright and shiny about the condo when the homeowner purchased it in 1997. Located on the fifth floor of an immaculately maintained 1920s building in a desirable neighborhood, the studio has an entry hall with two walk-in closets, a galley kitchen and a full bath. The home-owner knew she was facing a complete overhaul, but was unsure where to start. She met with a few designers, including one who had completed many high-profile renovations in the city, but most were wary to work with such a small space. By the time she met with Rice's firm, she was ready to give up. "I said to them, 'Listen, if this is really just a pathetic and hopeless project, and I should just sell it because I made a huge mistake, I will bite the bullet and do that. Just tell me.'" Rice's assistant didn't miss a beat. "No way," he said. "People in cities like Tokyo and Paris live in spaces much smaller than this."

"I hired them on the spot based on that conversation," says the homeowner. "I knew I had found the people who would get me through this and achieve what I wanted."

To start, Rice painted the walls a green so dark that it borders on charcoal, and gilded all of the moldings for a sense of grandeur. New floor-to-ceiling built-ins add much-needed storage and create architectural interest in the main room. A pair of finely detailed cabinets flanking the sofa opens to reveal books, mementos and a petite entertainment center. Another hidden door in the hallway offers extra storage near the bathroom. "You've got to keep your hair dryer somewhere," says the homeowner.

Rice tore up the existing carpet, installing walnut parquet flooring in the entry hall and kitchen. For the main room, dubbed "the salon" by the client, Rice suggested a leopard-print carpet. "We wanted to add a little whimsy to the room," says Rice. "With the dark walls and the elegant design, it's very serious." The homeowner admits she needed a little convincing when Rice suggested the safari-inspired floor. "It was the single hardest decision, because it's the only real room in the house," she says, "but I just loved it once it was done."

ABOVE LEFT: In the entry hallway, gold wallpaper on the ceiling plays up the gilded wooden chairs from Urban Chateau. BELOW LEFT: "It reminds me of a suite in a classic ocean liner," says the homeowner of the intimate alcove that houses the Murphy bed.

One element warranted no debate: the Murphy bed that folds down gracefully into the main room to reveal a regal nook with a custom headboard, bolsters and inset shelves, all upholstered in luxurious midnight-blue silk damask. The homeowner spied a magazine article featuring a Murphy bed in a small New York City apartment and was instantly inspired. "When I saw it, I couldn't contain myself—I knew that I absolutely wanted my little cubby in the corner," she says. "Now when I bring down the bed, it feels like I have all these different rooms." When the bed isn't in use, folding doors covered with antiqued mirrors convert the room back into a salon, where dinner or cocktails can be served on the late-19th-century French kingwood table in the center of the room.

The galley kitchen is another study in diminutive luxury. Rice chose mahogany paneling for the cabinets and shelving. Two miniature refrigerators and a half-size dishwasher are set beneath the granite countertops. Nearly everything is tucked out of sight, with drawers and doors that open at odd angles for maximum storage capacity. "I wanted to be able to throw real dinner parties with real, home-cooked food," says the homeowner. A home office sits at the other end of the galley, with more mahogany doors concealing a computer and other modern-day necessities.

The homeowner credits Rice with perfectly executing her vision, as well as seeing to it that she has never bumped into the corner of a table or misplaced an umbrella. "I really want a space to be beautiful and inviting, but it also has to work," says Rice. "Everything has a place, and absolutely every centimeter matters." ■



Abundant cabinets and compact appliances fulfilled the homeowner's request for a fully functional kitchen. A space was reserved to display pots and pans from her days as a culinary student in Paris.

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