



Living Large in a 130-Square-Foot Apartment

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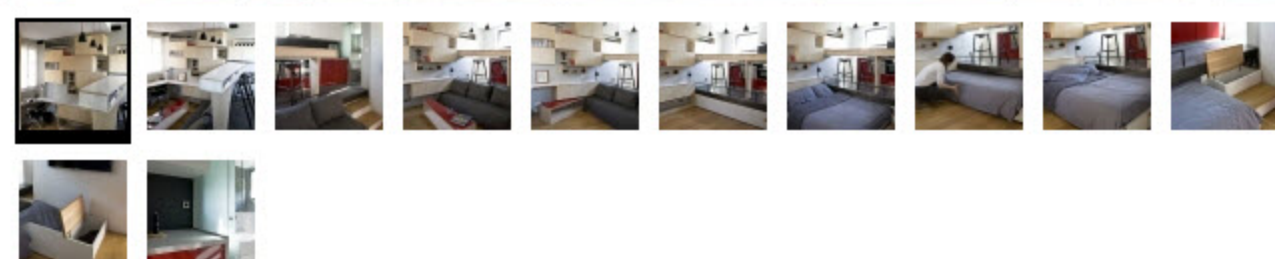
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With dense urban centers and housing that was built hundreds of years ago, Europeans have long known how to make their tiny spaces feel triumphant. But this apartment in the Montparnasse neighborhood of Paris is an above-and-beyond exemplar of hyper-efficient, micro-urban living.

Architects [Marc Baillargeon](#) and [Julie Nabucet](#) carved a 130-square-foot space out of a Haussmann-style building to create a flexible yet utterly comfortable pied-à-terre. "Our approach to architecture is that the house is not so much a machine for living, but a tool for living well," says Baillargeon.

The apartment was once the master bedroom of a larger apartment, which should give you a pretty good idea of its postage-stamp size. The idea was to separate the room to create a small studio that could create rental income.

Thibaut Ménard, a student and the son of the apartment's owner, lives there now. He says he notices new architectural details in the space every single day. "This studio has been created in a very intelligent and adaptable way of thinking, and with plenty of storage space and cupboards, which makes it suitable for each type of situation."

The smartest design trick was to create a split-level floorplan. Baillargeon and Nabucet divided the studio into two levels by building a platform for the kitchen and bathroom, which creates the illusion of separate spaces without using any walls or dividers. The only true partition between living and dining is a long, bar-height shelf that doubles as a functional table for eating. A smart take on the traditionally depressing breakfast nook.

The split-level floorplan creates the illusion of separate spaces without using any walls or dividers.

Although the bi-level design does wonders for the space, Baillargeon cautions that a too-low ceiling height can make a space feel dreary. These ceilings were just right: a little over 9 feet high.

Raising part of the apartment's floor also had an aesthetic effect, says Baillargeon. "One of two existing windows were too high to look out of — doing exterior work in Paris is extremely administratively intensive and not always possible," he says. "We forgot any ideas about enlarging or moving the windows. But instead we decided to raise the floor, and now one has views overlooking Montparnasse!"

While the platform added much-needed storage to the space, another innovation keeps stored goods handy. The set of stairs leading from the 'ground' floor to the kitchen is fitted with hinged cabinets so no space is wasted. The stairs themselves are on casters so they can be tucked below the platform if necessary. And don't worry, says Baillargeon: "They are sufficiently heavy that they don't move when you walk on them."

The bed is always a challenge in a studio space. You don't really want a mess of comforters and pillows in the middle of your living space, and no grown person should really be sleeping on a futon. Baillargeon and Nabucet brilliantly bucked the Murphy bed concept with a bed on wheels that slides elegantly beneath the kitchen platform. The bed can also do double duty, sliding halfway underneath to create the illusion of a couch, thanks to the addition of decorative pillows.

The multi-faceted space can be adapted for watching a movie, working, inviting friends over or cooking.

A coffee table, stored along the wall while the bed is in use, slides elegantly out in front of the couch. The convertible bed/couch is Ménard's favorite feature, as it allows for maximum square-footage for socializing. "It's a multi-faceted space which can be adapted for watching a movie, working, inviting friends over or cooking."

The unified palette of the apartment also helps to keep it feeling cohesive yet spacious. The blond woods and dark grays are nicely set off by bright red accents (a nod to the apartment's door, which you can't see).

Throughout the space, Baillargeon and Nabucet used a Finnish birch plywood that's durable but also can patina gracefully. If anything, that's his advice for small-space homeowners when picking out materials and finishes. "Don't be afraid to use your furniture," he says. "Nicks and scratches tell a story."

And even though most Europeans don't have a choice when it comes to living small, there's something to be said about the mindshift that comes from downsizing. According to Ménard, it's already altered his behavior in a positive way.

"I learned to be tidier," he says.

Photos by Sylvie Durand

