

BIG IDEAS FOR SMALL SPACES



Utilising storage space can prove an unexpected bonus in small rooms. It pays to have a hard look at under-used areas to the mutual satisfaction of tenants and landlords. **By Liesl Johnstone**

SMALL BUT IDEAL? DO YOUR PROSPECTIVE

tenants whisper these words as they peruse your rental for the first time? Or is there more of a pointed stare into inadequate wardrobe spaces and a pantry far too economical on shelving?

Your rental property might be small. It may not have much room for storage or anywhere to put things. But there are clever space-saving ways to overcome this issue to help your property stand out from the crowd.

Rachel Hurford and Andy Lea, Christchurch directors of Max Property Management, are adamant good storage allows a greater choice of tenant. It increases the rentability of a property, which saves time. They see value in creating inbuilt wardrobe space and ideally, providing some drawers for clothes also.

“What you’re trying to avoid is tenants fixing the lack of storage themselves, causing potential harm to walls and doorways as they drag storage units inside,” Lea says. “We also emphasise clutter removal, as damage and clutter tend to go together,” Hurford adds. “We’ve sometimes asked tenants to hire a skip.”

Customised storage space

Seasoned Christchurch property investor Adam Armstrong warns thinking about storage as space should be avoided, period. Cavernous “storage” spaces without cupboards or shelving can turn negative. He says he believes that without purpose-built storage, empty extra areas often become a dumping ground. He’s taken back keys to the garage in one property where tenants had filled it, then left him “having to dispose of three years’ of absolute garbage”.

“Worse is when you find your tenants have let relatives store furniture for them, with the latter then going overseas,” Armstrong says. “Then the tenancy ends and you, the owner, are left with the problem!”

In a tenants’ market, where housing supply outstrips demand, good storage design can mean the difference between back-to-back tenancies or having to suffer fallow gaps. The temptation in a taut market is to let these extras slide ... but it doesn’t pay. Thoughtfully designed accommodation often invites a better, longer tenancy.

A case in point is a well-located character cottage managed by Max Property Management, which becomes more difficult to tenant than other properties, solely because of its dearth of storage beyond the kitchen.

A good exercise is to try to imagine living in a property yourself. Mentally go through the tasks and activities of a normal day. What would annoy you? The lack of a bathroom shelf or cabinet? No bedroom mirror?

Easy edition

Is there over-rail shelving in wardrobes, for shoes, woollens and scarves? If there’s space for a shelf, it’s an easy addition and will make your tenants’ lives simpler.

Is there room on the property to add a garden shed with shelving? Maybe you can pick one up for very little and then line it with a few second-hand bookcases around the interior perimeter. That's great for cycling gear, and keeps sports and garden gear out of the house itself.

Architect Mitch Coll's Matipo Street townhouses in Christchurch, have dedicated under-cover bike parks for each unit. This streamlined design ensures maximum usability of available space, avoiding pile-ups of gear and averting theft.

If you rent out townhouses with stairs, you'll add value by building an under-stair cupboard, or installing shelving where there isn't any. If space is dedicated for luggage or boxes of precious items to be stored out of sight, that will increase your rental's appeal.

Take a long hard look at the kitchen. Is there a place for all those frequently used essentials? If there's a poky little space with hardly any bench, can you add a butcher's block (for an upmarket rental) or a table nearby to make food preparation less frustrating?

How about using an existing cupboard space for a vertical divider, for oven trays and chopping boards? This simple addition

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ADAM ARMSTRONG

keeps bench tops clear of items that are awkward to store.

Hooks near entrance-ways and on the backs of doors are another great idea ... especially if the floors beneath are hard surfaces (for taking raincoat drips) rather than expensive soft furnishings.

For landlords who need to furnish compact student flats, apartments or minor dwellings, Elfin Kitchens import high quality "plug in" German units that include drawers, a sink, a fridge, microwave and cook top, all in one small elegant unit. Delivered as one complete unit, Elfin Kitchens' installation is simply a matter of drop in and plug in, provided plumbing and power is already in place. They are pre-assembled and ready for easy installation - a great option with space at a premium.

Hafele offer a folding door concept so you can hide an entire kitchen or office in

a small recess. The doors bifold and slide back into a side niche creating a wide open space when it's needed giving optimum versatility for open spaces, letting tenants hide away mess in an instant.

Lockable cupboards

If you are renting accommodation to separate individuals within the same house, well-designed storage in each bedroom is crucial. Some landlords routinely provide one or two lockable cupboards per tenant.

Say you've bought an investment property with one wardrobe-free bedroom. You could build one in, as Andy Lea would, or attach a roomy bookcase to one wall for folded clothes and shoes.

While you don't need to stretch to the cost of a full wardrobe organiser, shoe storage is a boon for tenants. Consider installing a hanging fabric shoe rack like one from Howards Storage World with a velcro hook that wraps around the rod. It keeps the rest of the wardrobe clutter free and adds more room for suitcases and bulky off-season duvets.

If a bedroom is truly tiny with no room for either a wardrobe or bedside tables beside the bed, attach a shelving unit or cabinet that reaches the full width of the room above the bed. If there's a high ceiling, use the vertical space for vertically 'stacked' shelves. It's space that would otherwise be neglected. You won't lose any floor real estate at all, and tenants will gain a lot of extra storage.

Extra storage

Many old villas or bungalows lack storage space in bedrooms but there's an enormous under-utilised cavity in the attic with no way to access it. Sellwood can help landlords capitalise on this huge storage with pull-down stairs and attic storage solutions, creating the perfect place for stashing sports gear, suitcases, out of season clothes and so on.

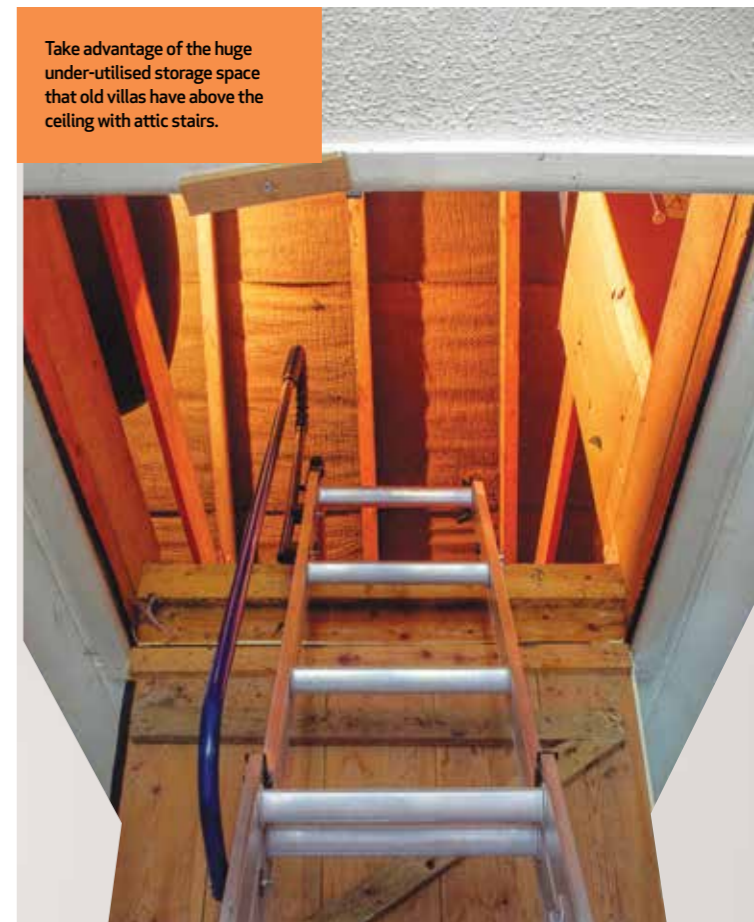
If you're about to buy furniture to let a property fully furnished, consider buying pieces that do double duty. Why not choose a lidded coffee table with storage space beneath? Tenants can store blankets, throws, or cutlery and table mats inside.

Paint to maximise appeal

Much can be achieved simply with paint. Most of us know the theory - whites and neutrals on walls and ceilings visually increase space. Within that, there's still a wonderful amount of choice. Check out



Make use of empty space with bookshelves against the wall where tenants can stash boxes of clothes, shoes and accessories.



Take advantage of the huge under-utilised storage space that old villas have above the ceiling with attic stairs.

Resene's whites and neutrals, a new range that is released regularly.

If your rental needs to be extra resilient (and whose doesn't?) check out Resene Lustacryl Kitchen and Bathroom paint. It'll produce a semi-gloss finish with added protection against bacteria and mould.

If your rental has a low ceiling, then make it paler than the other surfaces. Your go-to could be Resene Ceiling Paint, or the wipeable/washable Resene SpaceCote Flat.

Look at your surroundings with a critical eye. Are there any features to which you want to draw attention? For instance you

could "white-out" the rooms in a retro white shade, leaving characterful windows in a natural wood stain finish, especially if they're framing pleasant views. See the Resene Colourwood range for inspiration.

Remember that you also have a choice about sheen levels. Choosing a high sheen should be done only when a surface is perfectly flat. The higher the gloss level, the brighter and cleaner the colour will appear. Walls or surfaces with imperfections should be painted in low gloss, for a duller, chalkier finish. Shelves, however, are often good in a glossier, more wipeable incarnation.

Another tip for a trendy pad: Try painting a characterful door in a metallic finish, imperfections and all. It'll give your place a café/bar vibe. You can then inject metallic focal points such as a shiny mirror or cushions, all of which increase a spacious feel. Resene Enamacryl Metallic or Resene Pearl Shimmer are two options in an extensive product range, achieving differing effects.

Small improvements garner larger gains. Added together, they'll make a big difference to your rental and could easily be the reason why your property is more ideal than another. ■

Elfin Kitchens "all in one" kitchen unit is an elegant, easy solution for small flats or minor dwellings that lack room for a full kitchen.



Make use of overhead storage in kitchens to free up clutter on the bench tops.