

To make the sofa in this Manhattan living room appear longer, designer Ashley Whittaker ordered a single cushion for the seat of the Century Furniture chesterfield, covered in a Rogers & Goffigon canvas: "It's more comfortable than individual cushions—no one falls into the cracks." The Billy Baldwin Studio slipper chair in a David Hicks linen from Lee Jofa is on a swivel, "so you can turn and talk to people at either end of the room," and the acrylic coffee table opens up the seating area. Hanna chair by Oly Studio in Cowtan & Tout's Barcelona.



800
square feet

PLAYING UP THE PATTERN

GOING BOLD—AND PRETTY—MAKES A BIG STATEMENT IN A SMALL PLACE



LYGEIA GRACE: This is an apartment Holly Golightly would swoon over—please don't tell me a retired couple lives here.

ASHLEY WHITTAKER: The owner is a delight—she's a single girl in her 30s with a great sense of style. Even though the living room is only 300 square feet, she wanted somewhere she could entertain. And she really does it! She routinely has 20 people for cocktails.

Where does she put everyone?

Almost all the furniture in the living room is multi-functional. The desk doubles as a buffet and a dining table, the settee pulls up to the desk like a banquette, the bar cart can hold anything—liquor, brunch, desserts—and the little West Elm silver stool works as a perfect perch. I call it the hostess stool—you can easily pop up and run to the kitchen or move it from group to group.

The apartment is feminine but never goes over the edge. What holds it back from the brink?

From the very beginning, the client knew she wanted a lavender palette. But she also wanted to incorporate a large black-and-white photograph by her brother, Landon Nordeman, into the mix. That led us to use more touches of gray and black—on the slipper chair and settee, in the rug under the desk, and in the chevron rug in the entryway. It adds some neutrality and keeps the place from looking so girly-girly. Navy has the same effect—you see it in the wallpapers in the entryway and kitchen and in the gimp on the bergère.

What's a gimp?

It's the trim under the nailheads on the armchair. The navy line on the lavender upholstery gives weight to the chair and makes it feel important.

Some people would have painted the whole place white to open it up—you did just the opposite.

Pattern can actually make a place look larger. I know there are those who would look at the scale and color of the paper we used in the entrance hall and worry it would be too dark and busy. But the darkness makes the walls recede, and the large pattern gives the room a grander scale. If you used some tiny, all-over pattern on the walls, it would be so low-impact the room would almost disappear. This way, you walk in and you are knocked out. You know you've arrived somewhere special.

But mixing wallpapers can be scary.

There is a fear factor. But I always tell clients that at the end of the day, wallpaper is what makes a place feel finished and decorated. You don't want

to repeat the same scale of pattern from one room to another. And you want contrasting colors. One trick I often use when I'm considering two papers for adjoining rooms is to hold one up just a few inches from my face and the other one farther back. Then I look through from one to the other. It really helps you visualize how the patterns and colors will relate to one another.

It's a small space, but, miraculously, you don't feel like you're in a dollhouse with scads of delicate furniture.

If you have lots of small pieces of furniture in a small room, it can feel cluttered. Furniture should be scaled to the people who live there—not to the size of the room. You want it to be comfortable and inviting. There isn't anything in this apartment that I wouldn't use in a 10,000-square-foot house. Here, there is less furniture, but it's not smaller.

Still, I think you'd have to be a sort of minimalist to live here. What do you do with all your stuff?

Having enough closet space in a small apartment or house is life-changing. We enlarged the closet in the bedroom by three feet, even though it made the room a little smaller. Living in a small space is like living on a boat. You need a specific place to store the things you use. And if you don't use them, then out they go. In this project, we also added a linen closet and a broom closet, put in tall kitchen cupboards, and installed a bathroom sink with a cabinet instead of using a washstand. You need storage in order for the rooms to feel neat and tidy.

Any other universal rules for small spaces?

Yes. You can't think about a room on its own. You need to be aware of the room just beyond it, because that's where your eye travels. So the idea of contrast between rooms comes into play. When my client is working at her desk, she can look to the entry hall and see a whole new scheme, rather than just more paint. It makes the apartment feel bigger.

To pull it off, you have to be pretty brave with color.

When it comes to color, I say, 'Go big or go home.' You have to trust yourself. But you don't have to commit to it all at once—you can play with it as the rooms evolve. Start with one palette and then mix things in. The blue zebra paper in the kitchen was our jumping-off point, then we added the red light fixture, and later the yellow seat. The bedroom began with a pale-blue palette. Floral sheets brought a punch of red, pink, and blue. If you think you want color, you are going to love it. Believe me, you will wake up every day and be happy you did it.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO

LEFT: Whittaker gutted the kitchen, replacing the dark cabinetry and terra-cotta tiles with white cupboards and Carrara marble. "The room now feels twice as big," she says. The Rose Cumming Zebra wallpaper is in the client's favorite color: navy. The slim white table provides extra counter space and doubles as a breakfast nook. Whittaker dressed up a barstool with a vivid Schumacher faux snakeskin. Rather than recessed lighting, she chose a cherry-red birdcage lantern from the HomePort Collections. "It's whimsical," she explains, "and it provides a fun refracted light. When you're working with a small apartment, why not make the kitchen feel like another decorated room?" Wooden blinds from Smith + Noble.



One end of the living room is defined by a Madeline Weinrib rug; the Parsons table from Katch Design makes an eye-catching display surface. When entertaining, the desk is used as a dining table. C. Wonder throw pillows on Ballard Designs' Brigitte settee. The Benjamin Moore paint, Silver Half Dollar mixed with white, is "between lavender and gray to complement the upholstery." Stool, West Elm. **OPPOSITE:** Whittaker chose Osborne & Little's Maharani wallpaper for the entry: "Billy Baldwin said you should start with a dark space and work your way through the apartment, lightening rooms as you go." The Ballard Designs table allows just enough clearance to open the front door. Bungalow 5 mirror. Stephanie Odegard umbrella stand.



1. "We start every project with a furniture plan," Whittaker says. "In a small living room, you have to think about the maximum size of each piece." 2. Whittaker snapped up this ceramic bowl on Etsy. "I like the contrast in textures—the smooth interior and spiky exterior. It's like a sea urchin." Faux python table, Two's Company. 3. The lime-green Quadrille wallpaper in the hallway "offers a break from all the lavenders and blues." In the bedroom beyond, she mounted the Roman shades an inch below the crown to make the windows appear larger. 4. Whittaker in the kitchen. **OPPOSITE:** The designer used a mix of catalogs and to-the-trade sources. "I love the Ikea drawers by the bed," she says. "They serve as bureaus and nightstands." The savings allowed her client to splurge on a Christopher Spitzmiller lamp and D. Porthault linens. "She'll have them for the rest of her life." Phillip Jeffries Japanese Paper Weave on the walls. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

