



**SMALL SPACES**

# MINOR MIRACLE

A DESIGNER IN ARIZONA SHOWS THAT  
COLOR, STYLE, AND A HANDS-ON APPROACH  
CAN MAKE UP FOR SQUARE FOOTAGE.

Valerie Borden uses color with confidence throughout her first home, a renovated 1930s cottage located in an older neighborhood in Phoenix. To counter the bedroom's vibrant eggplant walls, Valerie chose classic white bedding, layered with a quilted coverlet and matelassé spread.

BY LYNN NESMITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILY MINTON-REDFIELD PRODUCED BY BARBARA MUNDALL





New stucco in a cheerful, custom shade of pumpkin and colorful 5-inch-square accent tiles set on a diagonal around the front door and living room window combine to transform a modest cottage without major structural changes (top). New landscaping, pathways, and a brick terrace accentuate the home's L-shape configuration and the property's mature trees. This mix of expensive and moderately priced linens achieves sophistication, comfort, and durability. Her dogs, Chairman Mao and Bosley, can attest to that (above).

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From the street it looked like a dump with eviction notices pasted on the doors and windows," recalls Valerie Borden. "But inside it was bright and open, and the large front yard felt like a park." The design negatives didn't deter this determined interior designer. As soon as she saw it, Valerie knew it was the house for her.

Even though the structure measures in at only 950 square feet, Valerie opted for cosmetic changes and minor modifications rather than adding on or moving walls, which would have been too expensive. The most ambitious changes took place in the kitchen, starting with elevating the floor. "Before there was an awkward single step at the front door," recalls Valerie. "I raised the kitchen floor six inches, which provides a subtle distinction between the living and cooking areas." She also removed an unattractive acoustical ceiling and reconfigured the island. By extending the length and elevating the island's counter height, the gently curving counter now serves multiple functions. "It's everything—a desk, an eating area, laundry folding table, painting studio, and the focal point of my entertaining," says Valerie.

Throughout the house Valerie mingles old and new. Although little of the house's original charm had survived, there was a 1930s O'Keefe & Merritt stove. >> on 102





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"It worked well and it looked cool," says Valerie. Concrete countertops and nine bold colors of hand-painted Mexican tile on the backsplash instill a contemporary touch, yet are in keeping with the house's humble origin.

The living room might be small, but Valerie doesn't hesitate to enliven the space with a bold mix of diverse furnishings and artwork. "I love the interchange between the funky 1920s rocker, with its sculptural curves and animal print fabric, and the bossy leather sofa," says Valerie. Adding curves, like the bentwood side table, chrome rocker, and the arch of the island, >> on 104

Valerie makes the most of a tiny living room through a courageous pairing of vintage mid-century pieces and a sofa chosen primarily for comfort. The bold patterned rug counters the Mexican tile floor and complements the artwork.

A SMALL  
SPACE NEEDS  
FURNITURE  
THAT SERVES  
A DUAL  
PURPOSE.

INTERIOR DESIGNER VALERIE BORDEN





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is another of Valerie's trade secrets. She says the curves keep a small room from feeling boxy and four-square. Abstract artwork and the movement in the design of the rug also help keep the room from feeling static.

The two vintage heavy-plastic stools with plush leather seats can be a part of the kitchen, or they can pull out to join in the conversation area. "They add a touch of sass, but they can tuck under the counter," says Valerie. "A small space needs furniture that serves a dual purpose and then seems to disappear when not in use."

One of the things Valerie liked most about the house was the meandering arrangement of spaces. To accentuate the sense of connection between spaces, Valerie installed Saltillo tile floors throughout and retained >> on 106



The removal of the dropped ceiling opened up the kitchen and allowed for 42-inch-tall maple cabinets and a revamped pantry. An expanded multipurpose island is the centerpiece of the space (above). The colorful new 4-inch tile backsplash complements the kitchen's concrete countertops and natural wood surfaces. Valerie tucked a stackable washer and dryer behind the front door (left).



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the original arched doorways that connect the bedroom to the hallway. All the ceilings and walls were resurfaced and painted in bold colors and neutrals.

In the bedroom, seven layers of color wash result in a courageous shade of eggplant with textures to accentuate the new stucco walls. "I used a brush and then repeatedly ragged the surface," Valerie explains. "I experimented with six sample boards, so I thought I knew what it was going to look like, but you never know for sure on a large wall." Her distinctive technique creates a vivid background in a tiny space.

Valerie was so inspired by her handiwork on the walls, she attempted her first painting on canvas, which now occupies a prominent spot above the bed. 🏠

A corner of the living room becomes a cozy dining nook when outfitted with a small chrome-and-glass table and a pair of simple black chairs. "Furniture crafted of shiny metal with thin legs, curved wood, and open arms takes up less visual space and helps make a space feel larger," says Valerie. Another of Valerie's secrets for efficient use of space is hanging pendants and track lights rather than table or floor lamps.

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