

ready to rent



Always Room for Storage

Make space for your stuff even in a small apartment

Apartment Living

When Stacy Schwartz, a professional singer and actor, moved into her Southwest Washington studio apartment and saw a sea of yet-to-be-unpacked boxes, she panicked. Schwartz, 39, sublets a 600-square-foot furnished condo that is slim on storage space but fat with oversized furniture: a huge entertainment unit, a big Murphy bed, a dining table for four and an enormous sectional sofa. (“Who has a sectional in a studio apartment?” she asks.)

Used to living out of a suitcase while touring, Schwartz has learned how to manage small spaces. She set about using that knowledge in her studio, making the most of any extra room she could find.

Schwartz is not alone. Space is at a premium in D.C., so many renters struggle to find room for all of their stuff. Luckily, there are solutions.

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JASON HORNICK (FOR EXPRESS)

plus Ready to Rent's listings directory makes finding a new place easy.

Stacy Schwartz's small studio doesn't have much extra space. In her closet, she used shelving and hooks to make room for all of her clothes plus a dressing area.

Storage

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The first thing renters should do when confronted with cramped living quarters is obvious, if painful: Get rid of as much as you can. “Learn to live with less,” says Kathy Baczko, a nonprofit consultant, who discovered how to edit her belongings when she downsized from a six-bedroom house in McLean, Va., to an apartment in Manhattan. Baczko, 65, and her husband now live in a townhouse in Alexandria, where they have continued to live simply and tried not to accumulate clutter.

Scott Roewer, a D.C.-based certified professional organizer, helps his clients decide what to keep: “You use it, you love it, you know you want it? Fine,” he says. But if your belongings don’t fall into one of those categories, it’s time to ditch them.

On trimming your wardrobe, C. Lee Cawley, a certified professional organizer based in Arlington, gives this tip: At the beginning of the year, hang all of your clothes with the hangers facing backward. The first time you wear an item, flip the hanger around the right way. In December, the clothes still on backward-facing hangers are top prospects for being discarded.

Once you’ve donated, sold or thrown away as much as you can bear, it’s time to get creative. One solution is to invest in furniture with hidden storage. Schwartz has placed two stools that double as bins at the end of her Murphy bed. She can reach inside a stool to grab some running clothes and then put



Renter Stacy Schwartz uses every extra nook she can find in her studio for storage. Since she doesn’t cook very much, her oven makes an ideal place for storing shoes.

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— C. LEE CAWLEY, A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZER BASED IN ARLINGTON

the brown suede lid back on top and sit down to tie her sneakers.

“Never buy anything without storage,” says Cawley. She implores tenants in small spaces to buy furniture with multiple purposes. “They should outlaw ottomans that don’t have storage,” she says.

With a bit of imagination, you can also find hidden storage spaces that already exist in your home. Schwartz doesn’t do much cooking, but that doesn’t mean her appliances sit unused. Inspired by “Sex and the City’s” Carrie Bradshaw, Schwartz houses her off-season shoes in the oven.

In fact, don’t overlook any space that can be turned into storage, especially vertical space. Schwartz’s closet was already fitted with Elfa shelving from the Container Store, which allowed her to store things all the way to the ceiling. Roewer says Elfa systems are perfect for renters because they can be made to be free-standing and are adaptable for any space.

Merely finding a place to stash

Need More Space?

Rental storage units are available throughout the D.C. area. You can find units as small as a cubby or as big as a two-car garage. Here are some tips for renting a storage unit:

- ▶ If your apartment building offers storage units for an extra fee, consider negotiating the use of storage space into your lease.
- ▶ If you’re looking to rent a self-storage unit away from your home, get multiple quotes — even from within the same company. Prices are based on supply and demand in each location.
- ▶ Look out for sales. The same unit could be priced at \$216 per month one day and \$108 the next.
- ▶ Don’t lock yourself into a long-term contract. Most reputable self-storage companies contract on a month-to-month basis.
- ▶ For safety, find a storage facility with video surveillance, on-site managers, alarm systems, coded entry and smoke detectors. And never enter your storage unit with someone you don’t know. (T.K.)

JASON HORNICK (FOR EXPRESS)

your belongings doesn’t necessarily make your home organized, though. You still need to remember where you put everything.

One way to keep your stuff organized is to use storage containers. “Consistent containers are the magical key to making things look good,” Cawley says.

Small plastic totes, for example, can bring order to any pantry. To make the best use of space, Cawley recommends placing round items — like cans — in round organizers and square objects in square ones. Placing a turntable in your kitchen cabinet — Target’s 11-inch versions fit perfectly in most homes — allows access to containers once out of reach. And renters can reuse them in their next place.

“If containers are identical, they will stack easily,” Cawley says. And that doesn’t just apply to the kitchen. Cawley uses clear plastic shoeboxes from the Container Store to bring order to the area under the bathroom sink. She stacks the plastic shoeboxes and labels them based on the clients’ needs: dental, eyewear, first aid, hair supplies, etc. The uniform storage turns the area from a cluttered mess into multiple layers of easy-to-access supplies.

In small homes, living space and storage space are often the same thing. But you don’t have to feel like you’re living among boxes. Schwartz wanted her walk-in closet to double as a makeup area while also housing her wardrobe. To help her enjoy the space, she came up with a simple solution.

“I put a chandelier in the closet,” she says. TRACY KRULIK (FOR EXPRESS)

