

ready to rent



When Bigger Isn't Best

Renters who move into smaller apartments learn to live with a little less

Moving

Gregg Orton and Meina Banh's recent move had a few casualties: among them, a man-cave. The couple went from a two-bedroom basement apartment in Mount Pleasant to a one-bedroom place in Columbia Heights, losing Orton's entertainment room in the process.

"Most of the bigger places we looked at were way out of our budget," says Banh, 30. "When we found this apartment, it seemed like the best space, even though I had to give up our washer/dryer."

Moving means downsizing for many renters. Some want to move to a more popular area, where the cost is higher. Others go from sharing a place to having their own space — which usually means having less of it.

"A lot of people do have a budget, and in order to stay on that budget and be where they want to be, they're forced to downsize," says LeiYana Stevenson an apartment Realtor with City Chic Real Estate.

No matter why renters decide to downsize, they must come to terms with the fact that all of the stuff from the larger apartment isn't going to fit into the smaller one.

"If you have the space, you'll fill it, so we tend to fill our homes with things," says Certified Professional Organizer Scott Roewer.

When Christopher O'Connell, 28, decided to get his own place and moved from

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

When Gregg Orton, 26, moved from a two-bedroom to a one-bedroom apartment, he and girlfriend Meina Banh learned to make better use of their new space.

KEVIN DEITCH FOR EXPRESS

Downsizing

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Arlington to a smaller place in Fairfax in August, “[I] had to downsize almost everything I own,” he says.

O’Connell had to pare down his kitchen and office space, which meant ditching a lot of clutter — and an entire bookcase — along the way. “I had a lot of stuff that I had just accumulated through the years,” he says.

Many renters embrace decluttering. “Basically it was my chance to get rid of Gregg’s ugly clothes,” Banh says.

nextweek

What’s not to love about the new developments in D.C.? Plenty, say some community groups. We’ll cover that issue in next week’s Ready to Rent.

For others, letting go is hard, especially when things have sentimental value. The key is realizing how much more you’ll enjoy your space when it is less cluttered.

“When you’re in the room, you want to enjoy being in it, not constantly spending time shifting stuff to do what you need to do,” Roewer says.

Getting rid of things can be tough. Eliminating redundancies and extras is a good place to start. “Ask yourself, ‘Do you really need that mixer?’” Roewer says. “How many spatulas do you actually need at once? Pick your favorites, pare down, and ask if some things can do double duty.”

What about that massive dresser you inherited from your grandmother? Large furniture doesn’t



Gregg Orton’s previous apartment had an extra bedroom he used as a media room. Now, he plays video games in his living room.

The Giving Season

Professional organizer Scott Roewer (Solutionsbyscott.com) has helped clients get rid of a lot of stuff over the years. Here are his favorite places to donate items:

- ▶ **A Wider Circle** (Awidercircle.org): Gives used furniture to families who are transitioning out of shelters. They’ll take mattresses and box springs in good condition. With enough advance notice, they’ll even pick them up.
- ▶ **Soles4Souls** (Soles4souls.org): They’ll distribute your used shoes to people in need all over the world — including in the U.S.
- ▶ **Career Gear – DC** (Careergear.org): Donate men’s business attire to help low-income men have what they need to enter the workforce.
- ▶ **Dress for Success – DC** (Dressforsuccess.org): Accepts women’s business attire for low-income women who are trying to enter the workforce.
- ▶ **Bikes for the World** (Bikesfortheworld.org): They collect unused bicycles, parts and tools for community programs in developing countries.
- ▶ **Art for Humanity** (Artforhumanity.org): Based in Arlington, they give used shoes, clothing, sheets and towels to poor families.
- ▶ **CCF Cares** (Nccf-cares.org/what-you-can-do): Donate kids’ toys, furniture and appliances that are in good condition to help low-income families. **M.R.**

necessarily have to get kicked to the curb, but “make sure you can use it in a multifunctional way,” says Roewer, who once stored clothes in a large television armoire.

If you need to buy new stuff, there’s plenty of useful furniture out there to help you fit into a smaller space. Roewer says local stores such as Vastu (Vastudc.com) and SkyNear (Skynecardesigns.com) are great places to find pieces that are multifunctional and help you make use of vertical space by storing upward not outward.

Of course, when nothing you can buy seems to fit, you can always do it yourself. “We had to be creative with the space in the kitchen,” Banh says, “so we just built a rack there so that we can put some

of our bigger pots and pans away.” With less space, it’s especially important to keep things tidy.

“I have a rule that the kitchen has to stay clean,” O’Connell says. “I’m trying to expand it out to the rest of the apartment.”

It’s not just stuff that renters have to give up: It’s also personal space. “We don’t want to always be in each other’s face,” Banh says. So the couple found a way for Banh to give Orton enough space for his video-game habit. “We moved one of our smaller TVs that we had in our living room into the bedroom so I can go watch TV.”

“How many spatulas do you actually need at once? Pick your favorites.”

— **SCOTT ROEWER**, A CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZER WHO HELPS CLIENTS DECLUTTER THEIR HOMES

Finding a layout that works for you is helpful when going smaller. A smaller apartment with open space can often feel bigger than a larger apartment with poor design. “Our first apartment, the space was very awkward and kind of narrow,” Bahn says, noting the open space of their new living area where they can now more easily entertain.

Despite losing space, a smaller apartment can be just right for renters. “You need to be able to give up on some things,” Bahn says. “When you do that, you can find a place that works.”

MATT RAZAK (FOR EXPRESS)