

This page: The 12-foot 6-inch ceiling invites both light and drama, like the full-height sheer curtain (of Fabricut's polyester *Spinola*). Inspired by a hotel in Montreal, the translucent drapery mysteriously veils one piece of well-framed art while leaving unfiltered visual access to painted photographs by M. Ellen Cocose. Opposite, from left: The warehouse building dates from 1913, architectural designer Joel Agacki (left) created seating in the windows where homeowners Peter Parrino (center) and Lee Golden (right) can take a break.





Stepping Up to Less

This busy **Milwaukee** couple kept reducing the size of their living space until they found one small enough to fit.





Sometimes you just have to keep trying until you get it right. For Peter Parrino, a physician and

assistant director of emergency medicine, and his partner, Lee Golden, the owner of a branding and target-marketing firm, the third condo was the charm. Their first was 3,000 square feet. Too big, they decided. The next: a trimmer 1,800 square feet. Still too big, and not well located. "In the two years we lived there," says Golden, "the guest shower was never turned on, and we had to get in our car for everything."

The scale of their lives would have to tip down again. As Parrino explains, "Lee and I love to go to Europe, and we always rent an apartment. They're tiny, but doable. We realized that if we could do it abroad, we could do it here." Drawn to the burgeoning café and gallery life of Milwaukee's historic Third Ward, they spent their free time there, enjoying the vibrant combination of grit and polish. "Europe inspired us," Parrino adds, "the neighborhood drew us."

So when Golden stumbled upon an available 750-square-foot warehouse space in their favorite neighborhood, it took only days to make an offer. They immediately began compiling flooring, shopping for kitchen cabinetry and tucking away tile samples. When they met Joel Agacki of Striegel-Agacki Studio, they showed him some images. Agacki recalls, "There were three specific images I remember. I thought, 'That is exactly the kind of thing we do well: thoughtful, on a small scale.'"

This page, from left: Organization is key to small-space living, like this ingenious Snaidero storage drawer for stainless steel kitchen utensils that's on display beneath a glass dining surface; Joel Agacki opened a living room wall to send light into the bedroom, then filled it with glass for sound separation. Opposite: A floor-to-ceiling curtain alongside the kitchen makes a soft-edged entry corridor.

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What the Pros Know

"Well...yes, this is the smallest residential project I have done," designer Joel Agacki admits, "but it was fun." He also admits to loving a challenge. "Don't think that smaller is easier," he begins. "It's not. It may take longer to design small than large. For a small space to be successful, the clients must understand how they live and be able to communicate that because choices have to be made. In a small space, you can't have everything." He says, "What the client displays is as important as the architecture." Editing is essential so only the most valued possessions remain. And don't underestimate how a tiny gesture in the right place can make a room seem to expand: Instead of meeting as usual, surfaces fall just short of each other, an architectural practice called the reveal. "I use it at the entry door, at walls, windows, even the ceiling is dropped with space around it. It creates a sense of breathing room."



Agacki and interior designer Lisa Zach, who has worked with Parrino and Golden on three projects and describes them as

"elegant," began to put elements together like a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle, a trial-and-error process that requires time and patience.

Agacki's approach was to take advantage of the condo's 12-foot 6-inch height. With two separate plans—one at floor level and a second articulating the area above the door jams—he created a carnival of planes and perspectives. He sliced into walls, moving them forward and back. He made niches and cut windows out of interior walls for mechanicals, display and light. "I call it a perspective fun house," he says.

Meanwhile, Zach was working her own magic. Contrary to logic, she uses larger-scale pieces in a small space, but does so selectively. Sheer curtains suspended at ceiling height in the living room accentuate volume and lift the view. By carefully repeating the flow of color and finishes (pearlescent paint in the bedroom mimics the shimmering curtains in the living room), she created a sense of calm. "Even though this home is only 750 square feet," she says, with a pause and some emphasis, "I think it lives large."

Before Agacki could create a 3-D model, Parrino and Golden had built one of their own. It was detailed to the point of including a scale cutout of their beloved cat (who has since passed away). With this kind of passion for perfection, it is not surprising that the project took 18 months to complete, including five iterations of the bathroom alone. But this time, they've gotten it right. 🐾

For Resources, see last pages.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: In the bedroom, Lee Golden's photograph of Amsterdam printed on canvas against graphic white-on-white wallpaper is the only artwork in the room; horizontal teak paneling alongside the glass pocket door from the living room to the bedroom; a surprisingly ornate space-expanding standing mirror from Howard Elliott. This page: The tile-on-tile master bath.

