

# Small wonder

With a little creative inspiration, Waldimar Pelsler turned his tiny Johannesburg apartment into the contemporary loft of his dreams.

By Natalie Boruvka • Photographs Elza Roux

When Waldimar bought his 52m<sup>2</sup> one-bedroom apartment in the leafy suburb of Craighall in 2009, he had no intention of renovating. But he had always dreamt of living in a modern industrial city loft, and the itch was yet to be scratched.

Last year he considered selling, but changed his mind while browsing through images on the interiors website Houzz.

"I realised I was living in a space that could become all I wished it to be. What I needed was an architect who could help me to open up its potential," he says.

The vinyl floors in Tempo Ebony Oak by Earthwerks are from Kevin Bates Flooring. The wall paint, mixed into Cashmere part of their legacy collection colour Geneva Morn, is from Herbert Evans – it works perfectly with the flooring. The Velvago paint in Military Grey on the steel beams is also from the Herbert Evans legacy collection.

Size of property:  
52m<sup>2</sup>

*I realised I was living in a space that could become all I wished it to be. What I needed was an architect who could help me to open up its potential. - Waldimar*

Lugging the steel cabinet from Tin Table into the flat was well worth it. It looks as though it's been here forever. - Waldimar



Salad bowl, carafe, tumblers and breadboard from @home (0860 66 66 74, home.co.za)

## Bright idea #1

### Radical restructure

One of the first things Waldimar and architect Debby Searle agreed on was to remove most of the brick wall that divided the apartment into two separate spaces: one half formed the bedroom and the other a very cramped open-plan living area. "It was a no-brainer as the wall completely limited the ways in which I could make the most of the apartment's floor space," explains Waldimar.

The next step was to relocate the bedroom. A completely new space was created by taking advantage of the apartment's lofty 5m-high volume. The original mezzanine level, which functioned as a very small study area, was extended by means of a steel I-beam framework, creating a floor area of roughly 6m<sup>2</sup> for a new bedroom.

"It's astounding how the entire apartment has benefited from this," says Waldimar. "I now have a living area double in size." >>



Design Team bolster cushions on leather sofa from Essential Life (011 447 2142, essentialliferetail.com) ceramic vases from In Good Company (011 447 1628, ingoodcompany.co.za)



## Bright idea #2

### Switched on

Waldimar realised just how important effective lighting would be in enhancing the size of the apartment. This was achieved by hiding LED lighting in the recesses of the I-beams, which follow the angle of the ceiling on either side of the apartment. "At night, the angled glow draws your eye upwards and the apartment instantly appears so much bigger," says Waldimar, adding that the lighting also establishes the walls as areas of interest rather than blank planes.

In the bathroom, LED lighting backing the mirror above the basin creates the impression that it's floating. "It's an idea I borrowed from a hotel in Cape Town," admits Waldimar.

Instead of a bulky pendant light above the dining table, Waldimar suspended two funky, bright yellow halogen globe fittings brought back from a trip to Paris. "I far prefer this as a way to remember one's travels than a stack of postcards," he laughs.



*This section is all that's left of the original wall that separated the flat into two rooms.*

**TOP LEFT** A very steep staircase that connected the original bedroom to the small mezzanine study has been replaced and the space where the cupboard was now forms part of the new bathroom.



**TOP RIGHT** A glass panel separates the shower from the living area.

## Bright idea #3

### Kitchen matters

The only element restricting the flow of the newly-established open-plan ground storey was a bulky, protruding kitchen counter. It functioned as a small dining area, separating the kitchen from the original living area. Hence, the counter was removed to make way for a larger six-seater dining table.

The practical U-shape of the kitchen was retained but refurbished with new cabinets and an elegant kitchen counter that Waldimar discovered while browsing Gumtree. "The kitchen is a wonderful social space," says Waldimar. "I like being able to cook and set the table for a dinner while chatting to friends who can filter out onto the balcony and into the living area as they please." >>



## Bright idea #4

### Without boundaries

Throughout the renovation, Waldimar was motivated by a concept he calls “extreme openness” – which means that at any given point, as much of the apartment as possible should be visible. This idea applied to the shower too.

Originally a small cubicle sandwiched between a built-in passage cupboard and the boundary wall, it was extended to and separated from the passage by a wall of glass. “It’s wonderful to shower in this large, luxurious space in full view of the beautiful Carl Buchner oil painting that’s mounted on the brick wall across the passage,” Waldimar says.

Similarly, the bedroom on the mezzanine level has been ‘opened up’ to the apartment by means of frameless glass balustrades. “Viewed from below, it is an integrated space but upstairs it still offers a measure of privacy,” he explains.



## Bright idea #5

### Savvy storage

One of the most challenging aspects of the renovation was ensuring adequate storage space, especially since two built-in cupboards had been removed to make way for the spacious new shower. Debby came up with the ingenious solution of housing Waldimar’s collection of books on shelving created in the empty cavity beneath the new staircase.

“I was really amazed at how much could be stored in these 70cm-deep spaces,” says Waldimar. “It’s an extremely practical space that functions as an attractive focal point too.”

Right next to this, an industrial-style steel cabinet from Tin Table multitasks as additional kitchen storage and as a drinks cabinet. “It was one of the pieces of furniture that the apartment was designed around,” says Waldimar.

The original mezzanine level, now a passage leading to the bedroom space, was the ideal spot for a built-in wardrobe. Further storage space was created with bespoke cabinetry by Coenie Vermaak of Woodworx Joinery. Fitted against the wall behind the bed, it conceals the old air-conditioning unit.



### Waldimar’s tips for small-space living

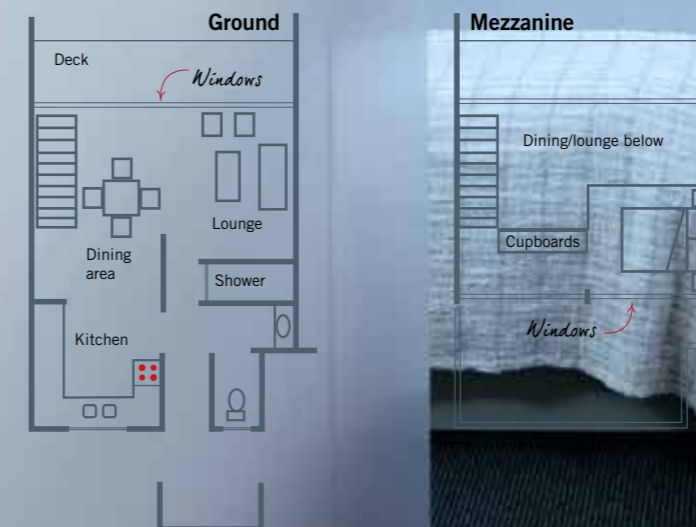
- Don’t be afraid to ‘unpackage’ the space you have to work with by eliminating walls to create a more spacious, comfortable flow.
- Don’t be limited by a footprint; if there’s height, use it.
- Keep the foundation of the space (floors, walls and furniture) neutral and bring in colourful accents with accessories.
- Maximise storage space and, where possible, make a feature of it.
- Blinds, as opposed to curtains, don’t take up space – they’re also neat and easier to maintain.
- Invest in furniture that multitasks, such as a sofa that turns into a bed for guests.
- In a small space, you can never go wrong using mirrors and glass. ↑



**ABOVE** The lighter wood on the floor shows the width of the extension on the old mezzanine floor. The stairs lead up to a passage that houses the wardrobes and goes to the bedroom. **RIGHT** The bedroom, and the staircase, have been covered in carpets – Weavers Choice Oasis by Belgotex – from Kevin Bates Flooring.

Large windows on either side of the apartment make the space light and airy.

### Floor plan



**CONTACTS AND STOCKISTS**  
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**Tin Table** 011 726 7878, tintable.net  
**Woodworx Joinery** 082 956 9101, woodworx.co.za