

# THE CHALLENGE OF SMALL SPACES

Three new books show that less is more—and tell you how to make it work

By Kevin C. Madigan



## Small Apartments

By Alejandro Bahamón

(Collins Design Paperback; \$19.95)

**B**est things come in small packages, we are told. The authors of three new books from the design imprint of Harper Collins would agree. The peculiarly American propensity towards all things large tends to ignore the attractive qualities of those that are less so. *Small Apartments* goes to great lengths to show how nice a smaller living place can be if arranged, decorated and furnished properly. Beautifully laid out and featuring stunning photographs, this new paperback edition takes the reader on a world tour of remarkable living spaces that make the most of limited square footage.

The book's author, Alejandro Bahamón, a Colombian architect based in Spain, veers towards the modern and there's scant depiction of older interiors. The furniture, though not to my taste, seems to agree with its surroundings. In several units, an abundance of plastic chairs and loud colors jar the eye. Another obvious flaw is that many of these ideas cannot be adapted without vast expenditure. Presumably residents of smaller apartments live there for the simple reason that

larger spaces are considerably more expensive. But I suspect that the majority of these places are not the main residences of their owners, and are merely pied-à-terres.

They certainly do not have that "lived in" look that many readers of design books look for and relate to. The book works well on many levels, though, displaying the functionality of interiors with elegance and taste, showing the reader locales as diverse as Milan, Los Angeles, Paris, London and Vienna. The use of color and accessories is explained in detail. Diagrams and layouts are included. A series of photographs shows how movable panels can work in multi-purpose areas. Each chapter features a different architect or interior designer and explains the challenges of the space and the plan of attack.

## Lofts 2: Good Ideas

By Cristian Campos

(Collins Design Paperback; \$24.95)

**T**he approach here is more complex, given that lofts, by their very nature, are a diverse, even eccentric style of living quarters. The origin of the loft dates to the 1950s in Manhattan. Their resurgence in recent years has allowed good use to be made of old buildings that would otherwise be neglected or torn down. Such is the popularity of lofts that many new buildings are now going up for the sole purpose of housing them, though purists will argue that they are not, technically speaking, lofts.

This book offers plenty of imaginative design ideas, detailing conversions of industrial spaces, warehouses and garages into attractive, sometimes cozy, abodes. There is even the occasional converted farmhouse or factory thrown in for good measure. The

transformations take many forms, such as one in São Paulo that has a glass mezzanine suspended above the main room, adding space, light and continuity to the entire area. In fact, the use of glass and translucent panels is a common feature of the book, given the limited room available in such settings. A loft in Elizabeth Bay, New South Wales, reminiscent of the 1950s, has distinctive circular ceiling lights. At night they reflect in the vast windows that overlook the water, creating an ethereal, far-away effect.

The book's cover catches the eye as well, with its transparent three-dimensional cover. A useful directory in the back of the book gives contact information for all the designers and architects inside. *Lofts 2*, part of a continuing series, acts as an international open house and features an interesting variety of lofts, from rustic to ultra-modern, in an array of inspired designs. The decor used in some of these places is questionable, but again it's a matter of taste whether you approve of bright red carpets with white plastic coffee tables on them. There is still plenty here to adapt and adorn, should the fancy take you.

## Small Space Gardens

By David Stevens

(Collins Design Paperback; \$19.95)

**S**mall Space Gardens is a big, bold book that showcases all manner of stunning, imaginative gardens and will gladden the heart of anyone with a green thumb. It merrily strays from traditional concepts and presents an assortment of fresh ideas that can be transposed into any space.

The chapters are broken down into simple, direct sections that guide the reader without overwhelming. The first part offers basic instruction on

analyzing what is already there, what should be kept or discarded, and recommends what to add. Then there are ideas on how to make the most of your space by introducing walls, raised areas, partitions and paths. The final two chapters present practical options on materials, colors and ambiance. Extensive, superb photography accompanies the text.

The author explains his purpose like this: "Throughout this book I am trying to encourage you to think literally and explore the different ways you can use design, materials and plants to best advantage." Stevens goes on to illustrate his suggestions for the use of tiles, curved decking, cobbles, paving, hedges, water features, ornamentation and numerous other facets and concepts.

There is a description of a garden with more than 300 plants, and an amusing look at various whimsical touches that can enhance a space, such as large reflective surfaces, metal figurines hanging on a clothesline, stone balls of various sizes and even an enclosure made for guinea pigs, captioned as "an elegant run comprising a timber deck topped with slatted fencing and black bamboo." A chapter called Seclusion in the City shows how a small courtyard can be converted into a "cool minimalist garden utilizing warm Mediterranean colors." The result is a cheery, intimate refuge.

Those who want to do something a little different with a small garden will be inspired and motivated by Stevens' efforts and ideas. ➤

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