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Living

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Lofty ideas: Design your dorm to maximize your space

Lauren Peeples | Staff | Story updated at 5:09 PM on Sunday, August 13, 2006

It's no secret college dorm rooms contain smaller living quarters than most other homes. Many students experience a large adjustment when first moving into their new residence. No longer can they store 25 pairs of shoes and every outfit they own, they must learn to condense their personal belongings down to their necessities. This transition from having anything and everything at one's disposal to inhabiting a small space with fellow students can result in a major predicament.

According to a survey of 442 students conducted by Dormbuys.com, six out of 10 students feel the size of their college dorm room is uncomfortably small. Ninety-four percent believe creating a more spacious, livable dorm room adds to a positive college experience. To create such an environment, students recommend several space saving ideas:

First, loft the bed. This is a process of elevating the bed 8 to 12 feet off the floor and freeing space beneath to use as storage. Another option are bed riser blocks, which can provide extra space for under-bed storage. In addition, under-bed storage boxes provide a place to store seasonal clothes instead of using precious closet space. Bed raisers feature a large square base to keep the bed steady and can add 5 to 6 inches in height. Blocks can be purchased online at Dormbuys.com (\$13.99).

Another good space saver is a bed shelf. Shelves that attach to the post of college beds eliminate the need for a bulky nightstand. According to Catherine Gentile, public relations manager for Bed, Bath and Beyond, "shelf units that sit on the floor and fit over a twin bed are now available to create additional over-the-bed storage."

At Dormbuys.com, one of the most popular space-saving products this year is the Mini-Mantle, a shelf that attaches to the post of any bunk or lofted bed. It creates a bedside shelf for top bunk users and eliminates the need for space consuming tables for bottom bunk users. (\$14.99).

Organizing with storage boxes is another idea. Plastic organizers can hold

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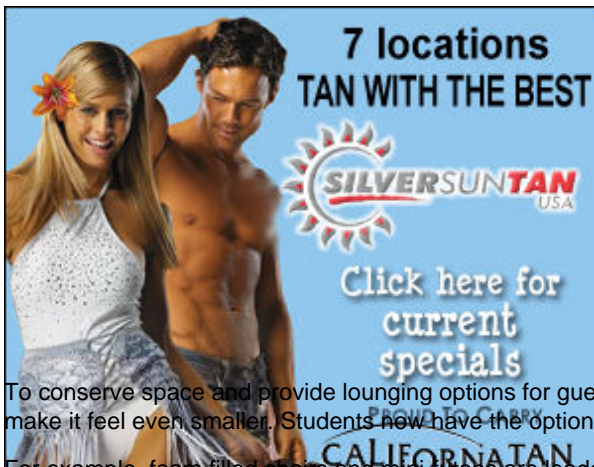
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clothes, dvds, books, shoes and a variety of items to keep clutter at a minimum. Specially designed boxes that fit under the bed or in a closet work best for dorm rooms. For many students, boxes that collapse for space saving purposes are declared the most useful.

"Folding crates for the closet are also an option for students," explains Gentile. Crates are available at a variety of stores in various price ranges.

An option for shoe-fanatic students is the pocket shoe rack. This rack is a durable, long-lasting space-saving solution that is simply placed over the closet door. This option avoids the need for bulky shoe bins, while keeping all shoes within arm's reach (\$8.99-\$19.99). For cap lovers, a selection of specially made hat racks are also available (\$6.95-\$16.99, Dormbuys.com).

To conserve space and provide lounging options for guests, purchase small furniture. Large couches can cramp a dorm room and make it feel even smaller. Students now have the option to select small, trendy dorm-specific furniture.

For example, foam filled chairs and mini futons are leaders in dorm room seating. Bean bag chairs have also been a popular college dorm room look for years. In dorms where space is tight and seating is a must, bean bags are the perfect option. Dormbuys.com offers the E-Frame Futon Set, a sofa that can also be transformed into either a full or twin-size sleeper (\$234.99).

Dorm residents admit closets fill up quickly. To provide a more spacious closet, try condensing as much as possible. Use only hangers that can hold more than one item and add extra hooks. When it comes to laundry, purchase a hamper that hangs over the closet door. A pop-up hamper is also an option for tight spaces. These hampers fold flat for easy storage and pop open in seconds. In addition, the hamper's interior can hold up to two loads of laundry (\$5-\$15, various stores).

Many students agree study time is more productive in a clean and organized environment. To organize a desk area, there are several products to choose from. Dormbuys.com recommends the Organize-Up (\$23.59), a desk organizer that provides desk space through its ability to clamp onto the overhang of any desk. For desks without an overhang, a convenient base piece allows placement on the top of a student's desk.

Students attempting to study with a sleeping roommate nearby will appreciate the Flex-Neck Reading Light (\$9.99, Dormbuys.com). The small reading light can clip onto a book or computer for late-night reading and takes up very little space.

Space saving appliances are also available for dorm residents. To store those beverages and snacks, the Haier 1.7 cubic foot Compact Refrigerator with Freezer is available at K-Mart (\$79.99). The product provides students with can and 2-litter bottle storage, as well as ice cube tray storage.

Don't think for a minute that living on your own will prevent those household duties from becoming a must. Students who wish to wash their clothes in their new home still can with the Haier 6.6 pound Pulsator Washer with Stainless Steel Tub, available at K-Mart (\$169.99). Washing dishes is also possible with the Haier Table Top Design Portable Dishwasher. This washer, available at K-Mart, is a convenient space saver, since it requires only a counter top or table (\$159.99).

According to Jeff Gawronski, college dorm expert/product development for Dormbuys.com, the most innovative way to conserve dorm space is to "purchase products that have multiple uses. For example, the Pyramid Storage Ottoman (\$47.98) quadruples as a table, ottoman, storage unit and an extra dorm seat. Other great examples are trunks that store extra items can be doubled as a coffee table. Also, if covered by an inexpensive tapestry, trunks can be quite stylish."

A variety of colored trunks can be found at Wal-Mart for \$29.99. Georgia Bulldog designed trunks are also an option for University of Georgia students and fans (\$49.96).

It is obvious the wants and needs of college-bound students are different. As Gentile explains, "it depends on what your roommate is bringing, what you are taking from your own room or from siblings' previous college years, etc." But the majority of students will agree one of the top concerns of living in a dorm is comfort and space. With proper organization and helpful space-saving products, students can eliminate this common stress and concentrate on enjoying their college experience.

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Decorating advice from "First Digs: The Quasi-Adult's Guide to Decorating with Style - Without Blowing Your Budget" by Yee-Fan Sun. Sun offers some easy themes. We add some sensitive personal options, based on items we have gathering dust in our garage:

Zen. Include bamboo matchstick blinds, fake orchids and bonsai trees. We'd suggest incense, but the resident advisers might get a little antsy.

Jungle. Animal prints, lush plants that conceal dust and untidy items, mosquito netting.

World travelers. Sun suggests maps decoupage onto storage boxes. We suggest maps lining the walls and desks, which will take a fraction of the time. Also, postcards from around the world.

Tiki! Elvis loved it, and so can you! Grass skirts, fake flowers, bobble hula girls.

Viva Las Vegas! Again, nothing succeeds like Elvis on black velvet, accompanied by a pair of fuzzy dice in the window. Except maybe sequins and a white polyester cape.

Space-age retro. Graphics '60s and '70s prints. Think Peter Max. And you, or your parents, probably already have the lava lamp and Jimi Hendrix poster.

Sun also offers what she calls "The Lazy Decorator's Bag of Tricks." We call it the way around the depression of being encased in cinderblock walls:

Staple gun. For floor-to-ceiling fabric draping, crafts projects and very simple reupholstery.

Velcro. Because who hand-sews buttons?

No-sew tape. Bond fabric using just the heat of an iron. Hem your heart out! Add a ribbon trim!

Hot glue gun. It's all about texture. A fun way to add oddities to lampshades or any other surface on which your college will not be charging you a damage deposit.

Bedsheets! Bedsheets! Bedsheets! You might call them bed linens; we call them cheap, colorful fabric that can be anything from a futon cover to curtains.

Grommets. Grommet kits include a device for punching holes and attaching grommets as well as the grommets themselves. Who needs metal rings for curtains?

You can visit Sun's Web site at DigsMagazine.com, an online magazine that provides advice for the "post-college, pre-parenthood, quasi-adult set."

- **McClatchy**

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