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Creative ideas help make the most out of small college dorm spaces

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So you thought when you left home, you'd be on your way to absolute freedom?

Think again. Your living quarters likely will be about as big as a jail cell and about as attractive as one. And if you're not cramped in a **dorm** room with a perfect stranger, you'll likely be forking over most of your entry-level job salary for rent.

Don't freak out. You can turn the box of white into a box of personality.

Here are some tips to start:

First, know your college or landlord's rules (bet ya thought you left the rules at home with your parents), said Emily Balcom, director of Residence Life at Utica College.

"Most campuses won't let students have halogen lamps or bring things like candles and incense unless it's just for decoration," Balcom said. Utica College also doesn't allow tapestries to be hung from walls or ceilings. Nor does it allow its walls to be painted. Most landlords won't allow it either.

The good news is there are ways around the rules. Posters will add life to a dull room almost immediately, said Hamilton College junior Caitlin McGilley.

Hamilton allows students to paint their rooms as long as they're repainted white by the end of the year, but McGilley, 21, said students still plaster posters on the naked walls. They're easy to find- generally in the college bookstore and can be relatively inexpensive.

"In my first room we had a lot of posters," McGilley said. "We had some art posters, but then we had the Periodic Table of Mixology- you know the typical college poster."

Make sure you add a little balance to the room- you'll need it during midterms and when your roommate's having a meltdown or when your boss thinks project deadlines are more important than Saranac Thursdays. Try bamboo plants, McGilley recommended.

"They're easy to grow, and they give a little feng shui in the room," said the psychology major.

Jeff Gawronski, a spokesperson for dormbuys.com said there are some simple and cheap ways to savor the space in a **dorm** room or small apartment:

* Check out products that have multiple uses.

"An easy way to save your wallet is to purchase products that have more than one benefit," he said. Gawronski suggested throwing a cushion on a trunk, making a storage tool into an extra seating area.

* Organize with storage boxes.

"Boxes that collapse for space saving purposes are deemed to be the most useful," Gawronski said. Plastic organizers are great for clothes, sheets, DVDs, shoes and books and can be bought in dollar stores or discount department stores such as Wal-Mart.

* Get the most out of your doors.

Don't discount doors as usable storage tools.

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Gawronski suggested using over the door products such as shoe racks, laundry bags, towel hooks or clothes hangers.

Q&A with Interior Designer Jim Ellis of New Hartford

Interior Designer Jim Ellis said the most important thing to keep in mind when decorating a small space is the less-is-more rule.

* How can students decorate their **dorm** rooms on the cheap?

"Less is more, and the best thing is if you are going to have a roommate decide on a color scheme."

* Where's the best place to find trendy but inexpensive items?

"Target. Target is the best."

* How can students make the best use out of living in a box?

"Bring as little as possible. Remember you have to move it all back home at the end of the year."

* How can students express their personal style, but still follow **dorm** rules?

"You pick your favorite color and you just build on it. As much stuff that you buy you get in the same color. The same color gives a bigger sense of space."

* How can roommates merge their styles?

"Keep it simple. When in doubt, don't do it."

Try it, find it, buy it

Try it: CD Screen Panel. Its slim design is perfect for small spaces, and it's still chic while being functional.

Find it: Target or www.target.com

Buy it: \$49.99

Try it: Euro futon. Once again, the slim design suits a small space perfectly. The silver legs on this piece give it a modern twist. Great for the friend who's always crashing at your place.

Find it: Wal-mart or www.walmart.com

Buy it: \$149.77

Try it: Black Studio Light. Extra lighting is a must, especially in college **dorm** rooms, where the basic lighting system is fluorescent. This lamp from Pier 1 has a funky feel and is small enough to put on a desk, dresser or nightstand.

Find it: Pier 1 or www.pier1.com

Buy it: Regular price is \$50, on sale for \$39 (save 15 percent with student ID).

Try it: Cord Shag Rugs. These rugs will add color, warmth and texture to a room. The 22 x 34" rugs come in ivory, linden green, dream blue, Persian violet, mocha, deep coral, red and black.

Find it: Pier 1 or www.pier1.com

Buy it: regular price is \$25, on sale for \$15 (save 15 percent with student ID).

Site to click on:

www.dormbuys.com

This site has just about everything you could possibly need for a **dorm** room or small apartment at reasonable prices. The items are compact, trendy and most come in bright colors.

Item we didn't even know was manufactured: Wonder Washer. Powered through an electrical outlet, it has a seven-liter capacity and claims to wash small loads in just 15 minutes. It's plastic, weighs eight pounds and measures 14 by 14 inches. Claims to be the perfect alternative to going to the laundromat when you have a small load or delicates to wash. Buy it: \$60.

Have to have it: Personal Party, a small, compact blender that comes in Caribbean blue. Buy it: \$34.98.

The basics: Mattress pads, sheets, towels, comforters, storage boxes.

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