



Sara Emslie

# BEAUTIFULLY SMALL

CLEVER IDEAS FOR COMPACT SPACES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
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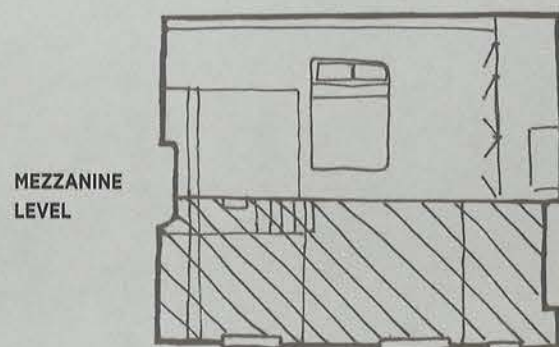
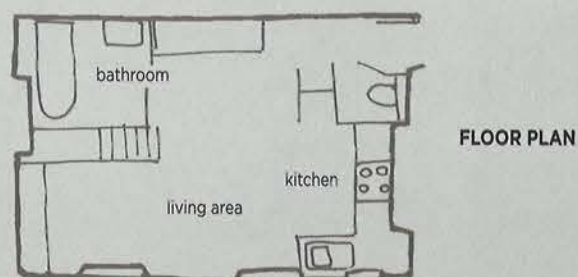
**RIGHT** A display of ornate candlesticks and antique silverware offers a rich flavour and some elegant charm to an essentially minimalist interior.

**FAR RIGHT** To make good use of the space available, two spacious cupboards have been built into the area under the stairs.

**OPPOSITE** A linen tablecloth transforms a basic table and set of chairs into an elegant entertaining area. The furniture pieces are folded flat and stored in a cupboard when not in use.



## FLOOR PLANS



**THE SPACE** Apartment in the La République area in the 10th arrondissement of Paris.

**THE OWNER** Thierry, hotel manager.

**THE SIZE** 32 square metres/  
344 square feet.

## LIGHT AND BRIGHT FIRST

IMPRESSIONS OF THIS TINY, TOP-FLOOR PARISIAN APARTMENT ARE, SURPRISINGLY, OF SPACIOUSNESS. AN ABUNDANCE OF NATURAL LIGHT FLOODS IN FROM THE SOUTHWEST THROUGH THE LARGE WINDOWS THAT RUN THE LENGTH OF THE OUTSIDE WALL, OPENING UP THE INTERIOR AND MAKING IT FEEL SIGNIFICANTLY MORE SIZEABLE THAN ITS COMPACT 32 SQUARE METRES/344 SQUARE FEET.

On further inspection, it is clear that the effect of space and light is not just thanks to the apartment's naturally sunny aspect but also to some clever architectural and interior design details that make full use of the roof space and accompanying high ceilings.

The apartment has been home to its owner, Thierry, for more than 20 years, and was originally purchased as a basic studio without the now much-valued additional roof space, and when the La République area was less gentrified than it is today. Despite having outgrown the original space, Thierry was reluctant to leave this vibrant, much sought-after and







**LEFT** Thierry's sectional sofa is a versatile seating choice. As a single, joined unit, the corner configuration creates a space for relaxing and acts as a partition between the entrance hall and the open-plan living space. The sofa also converts into a chaise longue and separate chair.

**RIGHT** To compensate for the lack of a separate dining area, Thierry has incorporated a small pedestal table and two high chairs into the kitchen corner. This small-space solution is streamlined and fuss free.

very central part of Paris, which lies close to the key stations Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est, and minutes away from the newly redesigned and bustling Place de La République. The only option was a total remodelling of the interior.

Familiar with the space's positives and negatives, Thierry had his own ideas as to what was needed. Keen to have a separate bathroom, a fully equipped kitchen and as much cupboard space as possible, the only other specification he gave to architect Sylvie Cahen was to create a neat, simple aesthetic and a

practical interior that was easy to live in. As a hotel manager, Thierry is well versed in the benefits, practically and stylistically, of good storage, as well as all those other little design and build details that make small spaces really perform.

Working with Sylvie's ideas, the first step to maximizing the full potential of the place was to purchase the roof space, previously part of the communal area of the block of apartments and used for storage. This allowed Sylvie to strip back the entire space, removing all the partition walls and leaving just the bare



**"MY APARTMENT IS LIKE MY IDEAL HOTEL ROOM, PLUS A KITCHEN CORNER. ALL I NEED IS AT HAND, EASILY REACHABLE, EASILY STORABLE."**





**THIS PAGE** The built-in box elements were designed to be lower than the structural beams to give the impression that they are movable and that there is something behind them. This adds to the illusion of spaciousness.

**“I HAVE TRIED TO AVOID FRAGMENTING THE SPACE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE BECAUSE THE EMPTY SPACES ARE AS IMPORTANT AS THE CONTAINED ONES. THE STRATEGY WITH SUCH SMALL SPACES IS TO APPLY A HOLISTIC TREATMENT TO THE LAYOUT.”**



**LEFT** The brown tones of the wood of the stairs are in total contrast to the pale grey of the rest of the interior. This allows the structural shape and function of the staircase to stand out, leading the eye upwards and into the roof space, creating a real sense of space.

**BELOW** A bank of full-height cupboards with hanging rails, shelving and shoe racks was installed to satisfy Thierry's enthusiasm for plenty of storage.

skeleton of the space. Capitalizing fully on the position of the windows and the rectangular shape of the structural frame, the empty shell was redesigned to contain two 'boxes': one for the kitchen, which sits on the light-filled side of the room; and one for the bathroom, which is tucked away from the windows, and below a mezzanine level that extends across the entire length of the space.

The mezzanine consists of two connecting platforms, with the lower section being home to a valuable work space, and the slightly higher one designated the sleeping area, with a bank of additional and much-used storage cleverly tucked in at the far end of the bedroom space.

The redesign certainly ticks all Thierry's requests for storage, with ample closet space concealed behind the run of cupboards in the main living space as well as the hallway. Even the space under the staircase is fully utilized, with additional storage space hidden underneath and accessed via simple doors for an exceptionally neat and clean aesthetic. All the constructed elements – the kitchen cabinets and the tall cupboards – don't extend right to the ceiling, but, like the 'boxes' that hold the bathroom and kitchen, have a floating space at the top, giving the impression that they are movable. This reinforces the impression that the apartment is larger and more capacious than it really is.







**LEFT** The bathroom is located in the box under the mezzanine level. It is hidden behind a sliding door, away from the main open-plan area. Since there is little natural daylight, Thierry has chosen a luxuriously dark and moody interior for a touch of boutique-hotel style at home.

**BELOW** Thierry's bed is on the mezzanine level, tucked under the sloping roof. The architect has incorporated additional low-level storage cupboards at the far end of the eaves.



The design objective was to create a small space that gives the feeling of being a far larger one, and to preserve as much of the unity of the space as possible. This meant paring back and keeping detail to a minimum, so the furnishings, materials and colours used throughout are limited but well considered. A modular sofa acts as a natural partition between the entrance and living space and is in keeping with the rest of the décor, while the low-level media/storage unit that sits in front of it is equally unobtrusive in style. Warm natural wood flooring seamlessly connects the spaces and the stairs, and a clever combination of white and light grey are used on the walls to great effect.

Despite Thierry's initial desire to decorate the entire apartment in bright, pure white, on Sylvie's recommendation it was finally restricted to the kitchen area and the two facing walls, and a serene shade of dove grey was used on all the custom-built constructed elements, such as the cupboards. It's a subtle off-white tone that, depending on the intensity of the light, displays numerous different variations in hue throughout the day – light in the morning, darkening with some cloud cover and resonating further in tone towards the evening – bringing an additional sense of atmosphere, warmth and mood to this nicely elegant and beautifully contained little space.

**"WHEN A SMALL SPACE IS RATIONALLY ORGANIZED AND NICELY DESIGNED, IT CAN BE REALLY COMFORTABLE AND PLEASANT."**

**THIS PAGE** Without the extra roof space, the original interior was cramped. What had once been the storage space for the entire block of apartments was purchased by Thierry and transformed by his architect, Sylvie, into a split-level mezzanine area for his office space and bedroom.





**RIGHT** Appliances specifically designed for compact interiors have been used to good effect, allowing the tiny kitchen to be a fully functioning cooking area. There is even room for a space-saving drawer dishwasher.

**FAR RIGHT** The structural beams create natural partition walls between the kitchen and the bathroom beyond.

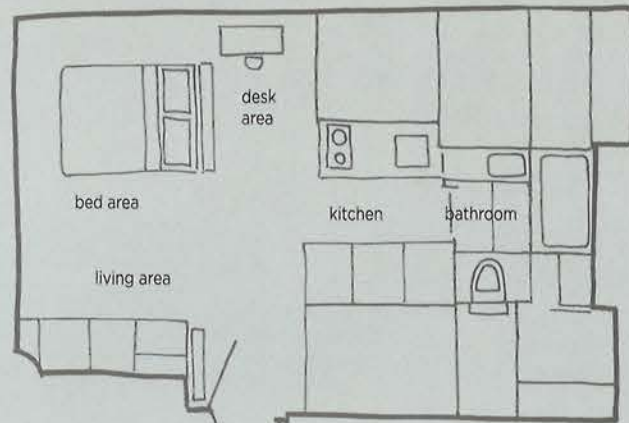
**OPPOSITE** The triangular apex of the roof space and natural low ceilings dictate the layout of the studio. The architect has designed the different areas according to the amount of head height each requires, to maximize the space's potential.



## CHIC PETITE

WHILE THIS PINT-SIZED PAD IN THE SIXTH ARRONDISSEMENT OF PARIS CERTAINLY SHOWS WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED WITH EVEN THE MOST DIMINUTIVE AND AWKWARD OF SPACES, IT ALSO SERVES AS A STARK REMINDER OF THE COST OF INNER-CITY LIVING, AND THE IMPACT ON AFFORDABILITY OF A MUCH SOUGHT-AFTER LOCATION.

### FLOOR PLAN



#### THE SPACE

An apartment in the sixth arrondissement of Paris.

#### THE OWNER

Audrée, student.

#### THE SIZE

16 square metres/  
172 square feet.

Situated in the heart of St-Germain-des-Prés, a fashionable central Paris district that's home to many of France's intellectual and artistic thinkers, this tiny studio lies just minutes away from the boutiques, restaurants and cafés of Boulevard St Germain – a highly desirable part of the Left Bank where property comes with a somewhat less-than-desirable price tag.

While its suitability, defined by its size, is clearly limited to sole occupancy, for its owner Audrée, a student at the Sorbonne, it is perfect. Situated just a few minutes' walk away from the university and the Jardins du Luxembourg, it is in close proximity to an abundance of lively and popular cafés, including Parisian institutions such as Les Deux Magots and Café de Flore.





AUDRÉE: "THIS PLACE WAS PERFECT FOR ME, AS I AM NOT TOO TALL. IT IS IDEAL FOR A STUDENT LIVING ALONE...IT IS PRACTICAL TO LIVE IN; TO SLEEP, TO EAT, WORK, ETC."



**OPPOSITE** The apartment has several large Velux windows that allow daylight to flood into the various spaces. The light-wood flooring and white walls have been chosen to accentuate the impression of space.

**LEFT** Audrée's furniture choices are perfect for such a small space. A light-reflective glass-topped dining table doubles as a desk, and can be extended in size when required. The Perspex/plexiglass chair and stools, sometimes used as side tables, are airy in feel.

**BELOW** Due to the studio's awkward size and shape, the only way to accommodate cupboards was to have them custom-built. Two full-height ones are for Audrée's clothes and shoes, while a run of smaller ones are ideal for student files and books.

Despite its small size, the space delivers on both practicality and style. The compact apartment is kitted out with all mod cons and offers everything needed for student living: a desk – which doubles as a dining table – and plenty of storage. While the space doesn't allow for a great deal of privacy nor a separate bedroom – a low-level couch is also the bed – this in itself provides an appropriately bohemian feel to the place, and seems a fitting backdrop to Parisian student life.

The original space, at the time just attic storage in what is a historic 17th-century building, provided architect Sylvie Cahen with something of a challenge. The existing structure of the sharply pitched roof with its low supporting beams couldn't be altered, and so it dictated the layout to a large extent. The solution was to create clearly defined living spaces, determined by the amount of head height each one required. The central part of the space, which offered the most height, was reserved for standing activities (showering, cooking and







**ABOVE** Sylvie, the architect, has utilized the structure of the beam to create a barrier between the lounging/sleeping area and the rest of the space. It also makes a shelf for a table lamp and tealight holders.

**ABOVE RIGHT** The rafters that form part of the structure of the sharply pitched roof create some interesting angles, as well as little 'windows' that make it possible to look right through the space, enhancing the sense of openness.



**OPPOSITE** Without space for a separate bedroom, Audrée has incorporated a low-level daybed that doubles as a bed for sleeping in at the opposite end of the studio from the kitchen and bathroom. It is furnished with pillows and cushions in her restrained pink, grey and red colour palette. The low bed and the architectural structure of the space create an almost cathedral-like loftiness.

walking), while the sides, with restricted height, were allotted to sleeping and storage space, leaving the intermediate areas for sitting activities such as eating or studying.

The open-plan layout was intentional; its sole purpose to keep everything within reach and sight, thereby maximizing the sense of space. The original windows were removed and their positions altered to increase the amount of natural light – and successfully so, because, despite its minuscule proportions, this really is an incredibly light-filled space. Sylvie points out that the apartment feels connected to the sky, as the views extend up and over the Parisian skyline and the tower of Saint-Sulpice church to the clouds beyond.

Sylvie further enhanced the luminosity of the interior with a considered choice of materials and colours. Clean whites play a major part, complemented by a subtle but clever

**SYLVIE:** “I WANTED TO CREATE A FLUID SPACE WITH A MULTI-FUNCTIONAL QUALITY. FOR EXAMPLE, THE DINING AREA BETWEEN THE SLEEPING SPACE AND THE KITCHEN CAN ALSO BE USED AS AN OFFICE AND WORK SPACE.”







**OPPOSITE AND BELOW** The dark grey colour scheme allows the shower space to recede almost out of sight when viewed from the other end of the room. Every piece of space has been used, with a tiny alcove built in for soaps and lotions, and a recessed bench area for storing towels.

**RIGHT** A cantina-style door creates sufficient privacy between the bathroom and the rest of the interior.

**BELOW RIGHT** An appropriately small sink has been inset into a bathroom cabinet, which matches the cabinets in the kitchen for a seamless visual transition between the two spaces.



range of tonal shades of white and grey. The dark grey bathroom is visually distinct from the rest of the predominantly white space and recedes nicely out of sight from the opposite end of the room. The incredibly compact but fully functioning kitchen has been furnished with white high-gloss units and light-reflective work surfaces, which add to the sense of space. The whitewashed oak flooring and white-painted walls and beams further emphasize this, and are broken only by tiny splashes of colour in the form of accessories and textiles. Furniture has been carefully chosen, with an extendable table and a 'see-through' Perspex/plexiglass chair and coordinating stacking stools.

For Audrée, this tiny apartment is the perfect little home. Both pretty and practical, it offers just enough space for entertaining and relaxing with a few friends once their studies are done.

