



Kate Dougherty's room at WVU's Lincoln Hall is always neat, clean and organized to make the most of the space. She keeps her bed in the narrowest part of the room, creating more space and a roomier feel by the window.

Dorm rooms, tiny apartments offer challenges

BY KATIE McDOWELL



Billy Wolfe/The Dominion Post photos

Dougherty, of Baltimore, keeps towels and toiletries out of the way, stored in plastic bins.



Dougherty, a sophomore, makes the most of the extra storage space in her closet, stacking food items, out-of-season clothes and luggage on the roomy top shelf.

The Dominion Post

So you're finally on your own, out from under your parents' roof. You've got your own place now, one you can outfit any way you like. Trouble is, it's a far cry from those spacious apartments and airy, wide-open lofts you see on TV all the time.

But just because your new digs are tiny, doesn't mean they have to be cluttered, dim or dingy. It's easy to make the most of a small space, you just have to start with a plan and make the most of your creativity, said Julie Mills, owner of All Squared Away, a Morgantown professional organizing company.

"My motto is, you don't have to be perfect, you just have to find a system that works for you," Mills said. "You have to start with a plan, first and foremost, and separate your needs from your wants. Plan out your space

here are some tips to keeping a positive flow in your home, from feng shui master David "Phoenix" Nutter. According to Nutter, "feng shui — meaning 'wind and water' — is the ancient Chinese art and science of placement. The goal is that if you balance and bring to harmony the energy in an environment, you balance and bring to harmony all of the inhabitants of that environment."

1) Less is More — It is easy to get a small space cluttered when you hold onto things that are not important. Rate your stuff on a scale of 1 to 10. "A 1 is something you would have no trouble tossing, like an electric beachball. A 10 would be something absolutely necessary, like your laptop," he said. Toss

and make the most of all of it."

The smaller the space, the more important it is to keep clutter at bay — nothing will make your dorm room or apartment seem smaller, or messier, than having things lying around, filling up corners, countertops and coffee tables.

But that doesn't mean you have to junk up your place with ugly filing cabinets and milk crates. There are lots of decorative elements you can use that will double as storage space, Mills said.

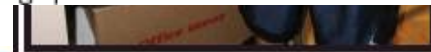
For instance, decorative baskets can serve as both a design element and a storage container. Brightly colored leather totes can serve as a storage container. SEE SMALL, 2-E under the coffee table, holding personal items, books, magazines — anything you want — while also creating a color palate around which to decorate. Mills suggests looking at discount stores, like TJ Maxx and anything rated below 7.

2) Living Energy or Positive Energy — "Just one perennial plant or a small fish bowl in a small space can make a difference. Or have a small tabletop water fountain. They create negative ions, which give a space the same good feeling that you get when you walk outside after a thunderstorm."

3) Power Symbol — "Have something that makes you feel good, strengthened, or empowered in sight of your entrance door, be it a statue, framed picture/painting, vase, etc. This way, you are empowered to start your day, as it would be the last thing you see when leaving your space and you would be re-empowered upon entering your space after a long or stressful day."



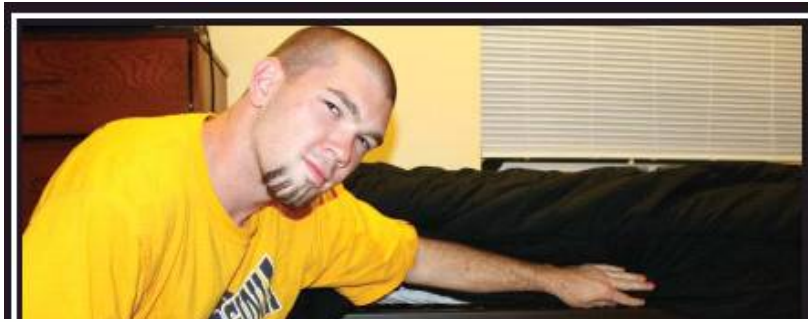
Kenneth Hall, a 19-year-old sophomore from Reston, Va., uses a hanging shoe rack to keep things neat and organized in his closet and to keep his shoes from cluttering up the floor.



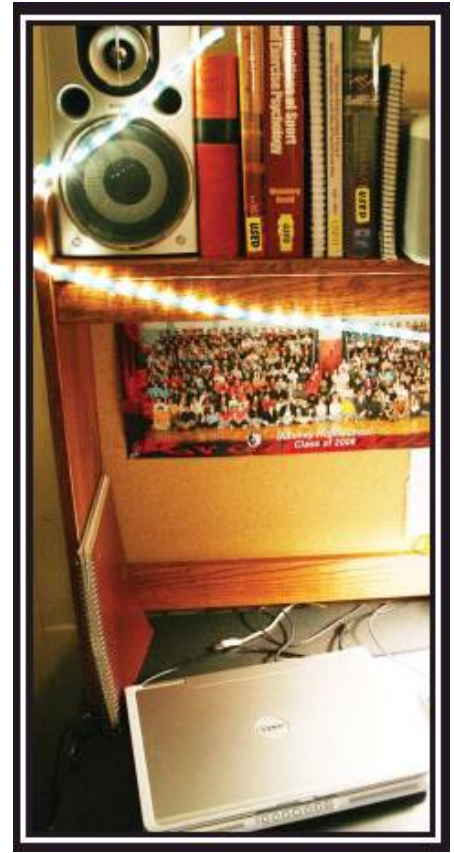
quick tip

Use empty suitcases to store rarely used items.

Dougherty uses decorative lighting on her computer desk to bring more light into her Lincoln Hall dorm room.



Hall makes the most of his space by storing video games in the extra storage area under his bed. The bed frames also have drawers underneath for even more storage.



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Gabe's — both often carry items similar to pricier versions found in home-decor catalogs like Pottery Barn and Crate & Barrel.

"The key is to buy items that are dual-functioning," Mills said. "You're only limited by your imagination."

Kate Dougherty, of Baltimore, knows the importance of doubling-up when it comes to home fashion and function. Dougherty's room at WVU's Lincoln Hall is small and narrow and doesn't offer much in the way of "spreading out."

To make the most of her space — and the natural light — she's moved her bed away from the window, in front of the mirrored closet doors. This allows her to place her desk, computer, TV, dresser and various storage bins in that wider area of the room, rather than forcing them to the narrower center of the room.

She uses small bins to store her towels and other toiletries, and makes the most of her ample closet space by stacking her suitcases, food items and other non-everyday essentials on the high shelves inside. (Mills recommends storing rarely-used items in empty suitcases). She uses her windowsill to display pictures of family and

friends, and has also created a large, framed collage of pictures — thus freeing up even more surface space by not having them out in individual frames.

When it comes to decorating she keeps it simple — a colorful bedspread to create a focus, some lights around her computer desk along with a couple of lamps, photos and a WVU blanket on the wall to show her school spirit. She said she makes her bed every day and always picks stuff up off the floor — otherwise the room seems smaller.

Kenneth Hall, 19, of Reston, Va., and Ben Smith, 18, of Edelsburg, Md., share a room at Lincoln Hall and agree that space is at a premium. But by using the extra storage under the beds, stacking things in their closets and using organizational tools like shoe racks and double hangers, they've managed to keep the area neat and uncluttered.

Mills said catalogs and the Internet are a great way to get ideas for your small space. For instance, there are sites like [organize.com](#) and [spacesavers.com](#) that offer all manner of ingenious ideas and items that are as attractive as they are practical.

On a tight budget? That's OK, she said. Feel free to browse catalogs and window shop at stores

that are too expensive for you. If you see an idea or item you like, jot it down and then comb discount stores, flea markets, auctions, thrift stores and tag sales for something similar. You'd be surprised at what you might find. Stores like IKEA are also great for getting ideas and finding inexpensive items.

"It's all about finding a concept you like and then making it your own," she said. "Be thrifty and creative. A can of paint can do wonders for something you've found in a thrift store."

And don't be afraid to enlist your friends. You never know — one or two of them might be handy enough to help you build a Murphy bed, or create a wall-unit bookshelf — both massive space-savers.

The experts at Home & Garden TV, and many decorating books also suggest using your collections as decor. Are you a purse hound? Try hanging your most colorful and eye-catching bags on a wall creating a focal point for the room and freeing up room in your closet. Do you dig old suitcases and hope chests? HGTV suggests stacking vintage suitcases and chests, then using them as an end or coffee table. And don't forget, you can even store things inside them.

"Creating focal points in your small space can make it seem more interesting and spacious," writes Anne Krueger for Home & Garden Television ([hgtv.com](#)). "Paint one wall a darker color, create a pool of light with a low-hanging light fixture or assemble artwork on one wall to create an uncluttered gallery effect."

It's all about using what you have — not spending a lot of money. With style and planning even the tiniest apartment or dorm room can have big appeal.

"Be creative with everyday household items," Mills said. "And utilize every space. If you have a bike, hoist it up and hang it on the wall — it'll save space. Use the backs of doors for storage — there are all kinds of storage units you can hang on the backs of doors. Think collapsible — especially for things like hampers and other storage containers. And buy a shredder."

A shredder, Mills maintains, is one of the most important pieces of equipment for an organized home. All that junk mail — catalogs (after you've combed them for ideas, of course), credit card offers, advertisements — adds up fast. And it can eat up your counter and coffee table space — and create a cluttered mess — if left unchecked.