

A good fit

Keys to right sizing into a smaller space

The kids are grown and on their own and you've decided to "right size" into a condo, apartment or retirement community. Sounds good on paper, but just how do you take years of living and its accumulated stuff and make it all "fit" your new life?

You consult the experts and someone who has done it.

Time to go

Idelle Idelman lived in her bi-level home in Northbrook for 30 years. Recently she traded the 1,700-square-foot of her home for a 1,055-square-foot apartment at Sedgebrook of Lincolnshire, a retirement community.

"I wanted to take everything with me, but I knew I couldn't," she says. That everything included lots of artwork.

"It made me really happy that my family laid claim to some of my artwork and collections so they weren't sent off to helter-skelter land," she says.

When it came to the rest, Idelman was practical. Her grandson took furniture and she took basic cookware since she would have her meals at Sedgebrook. She sorted through everything else and then had a garage sale. Some

moments gave her pause.

"I threw out a lot of photographs from the '30s," she says. "I was crying the whole time I was doing it, but I knew no one in my family would be able to identify the people in the photos so there was no point in keeping them."

She also got help from Joseph Jania, interior designer and move-in coordinator at Sedgebrook.

"He came to my house and helped me decide what to take," she says. "He told me that I should make my life as sweet and simple as possible."

Jania also helped with the transition by involving Idelman in the decision-making for her new place. "He assisted me in color choices for the floors, the granite and the paint," she says. "It was all completely customized."

Less is more

Jania serves as a catalyst in the move process, and facili-

tates the transition as well.

"I help tackle the task of sorting through all their stuff," he says. "I offer advice about what to keep, give away, sell and donate. I help arrange the sale, donation or removal of unwanted items and recommend reliable packers and movers."

In giving advice to his clients, Jania goes with the reliable "less is more."

"Pick the pieces that you absolutely cannot part with," he says. "Then look to family to take other pieces. Now is a great time to help those grandkids with furniture for their college or after-college places."

Leslie Stern of Leslie M. Stern Design Ltd., Chicago, has been an interior designer for 28 years. In that time she has worked with many seniors.

"I have assisted them into moving and downsizing to a smaller house, a condo, independent living or assisted



Designer Leslie Stern suggests a color scheme of three colors for the whole space.

living facility," she says.

The hardest part of downsizing, in her experience, is getting clients to part with some of their furniture. "Many times they cannot separate from their belongings," she says.

Stern begins by making a list of all of their existing furniture. She then creates a floor/furniture plan of the new interior, selects what is most appropriate for the move with the existing furniture.

"One can use existing furniture as long as it fits in the floor plan comfortably and functionally," she says.

She also suggests acquiring a few new key pieces, such as a piece of furniture or artwork.

As a move-in coordinator, Jania says, "It's all about making the space work for the resident. It's rethinking the space and getting the most out of the areas that are needed."

Right size decor

To make the most of smaller spaces, Stern says to begin with a color scheme that you can live with and design

around. If you stay with just three colors for the whole space, the space will feel larger and less busy.

"If you want to stay with your existing color scheme, you can add one additional color that you didn't have in your previous space and it will give a whole new feeling," she says.

Next, Stern suggests using small prints and solids for fabrics. "You can incorporate a larger pattern on a focal point piece such as a rug, or a key piece of furniture as in the living room sofa."

As for existing pieces of furniture, she says to reupholster some in a different fabric, color or stain to give a whole new look.

Stern says it's important to watch the scale of the furniture.

"The smaller the furniture is in a room, the larger the room feels. You may not be having large dinner parties in your new space, but having smaller, more frequent gatherings. So, you don't need that large

dining room table. Instead, acquire nesting tables that can be used in a more flexible fashion with entertaining or everyday use."

Using less furniture also makes the space feel larger, she says.

Cognizant of safety, Stern says that instead of area rugs, which can cause an older person to trip, use a flat broadloom wall-to-wall carpet or a hard surface such as a wood or bamboo.

"A solid on the floor will unify your room and also give you a cleaner, simpler and more expansive appearance to the room," she says.

Another space enhancing tip, Stern says, is to design with floor tiles or furniture pieces on an angle. This also gives the feeling that a room is larger.

Last, Stern says to make sure your new space has plenty of lighting on the task, and in general and accent areas.

"Good lighting will create a more expansive and welcoming space in the evenings," she says. ■



Stern says to watch the scale of furniture, using less to make space look larger.