

IN THE KITCHEN WITH MARTIN YAN

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# Slim solutions

**“It’s important in a small space to have a seamless to the materials. One hardwood floor, one paint color ... then it seems like all one space.”**

—TIM CLARKE



On a beachfront full of houses, narrow is normal. This Manhattan Beach home—whose living room measures 22 feet wide and opens onto a small deck—offers typical space-planning challenges. Interior designer Tim Clarke responded by stripping away layers of architecture. “The ceiling is pushed up against the roof—there’s barely room for can lighting,” he says. “We did everything we could to make sure every inch was maximized.” Then, Clarke worked out a floor plan that took into account the view and the bronze fireplace.

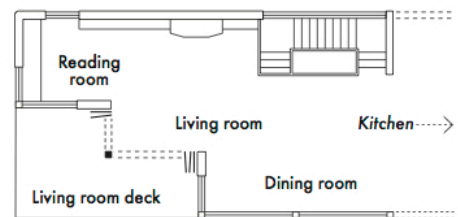
“I try to make the house feel just as good on foggy days as on sunny ones.” —*Joanna Linberg*

**DESIGN** Tim Clarke, Santa Monica; [timclarkedesign.com](http://timclarkedesign.com).

## DESIGNER TRICKS FOR CHALLENGING SPACES

**1. Vary furniture size.** Clarke mixed the scale of the furnishings relative to one another to keep the room from looking blocky. He chose one big foundation piece, the sofa, then added seating and accents that are progressively smaller.

**2. Let light travel.** The clerestory windows are hard-working, despite their small size. That’s because balanced light sources are especially important in narrow spaces for even light distribution, Clarke says. A mirror hung opposite a window can fake the effect.



STYLING: MICHAEL WALTERS; ILLUSTRATION: MARGARET SLOAN



**Small talk with Tim Clarke**

The designer and author of *Coastal Modern: Sophisticated Homes Inspired by the Ocean* (Clarkson Potter; \$50) shares his way of getting the most out of every space.

**Q: What's the first thing someone should know about designing a small space?**

A: I try to look at spaces in different ways—just because a room is “the living room” doesn't mean it has to be. I lived in a duplex once that had an amazing living room, but the bedroom, where I spent more time, was terrible. Finally, I put my bed in the living room because why would I spend all my time in the worst room of the house?

**Q: How do you take the most advantage of windows?**

A: Fabric is sometimes all at the same level—waist-high and down—because that's where furniture sits. If your room or window is size-challenged, mount curtains high to give you a vertical column of softness.

**Q: Please settle this for us: Do small rooms need a light wall color to make them seem bigger?**

A: Not necessarily. A small, dark room painted a light color or is a small, dark room painted a light color. It doesn't do anything. If the room is already dark, paint it dark. The walls will recede so you're almost not aware of them.

**Q: You're a huge art proponent. Does a room's size change what you'll put on the wall?**

A: Hallways and small rooms are good for gallery-style walls because you're up close to the art and can really see it. In a bigger room or one where you're seated far away from the wall, something giant in scale is better appreciated. ▽



**3. Be subtle with pattern.** Layers of textures in the pillows and antique rug keep this room interesting without relying on a bold pattern, which can knock a room out of balance. “If you're trying to make a small room not feel small, it's better to not have anything be the star,” Clarke says. “Everything should be in a supporting role.”

**4. Look for leggy pieces.** Open furniture (like the side tables, coffee table, and even the slatted vintage chairs) is another space-defying trick. “They have a sort of transparency to them,” Clarke says. “You can see beyond them so it doesn't stop your eye.”

**5. Fool the eye.** Avoid covering wall space with furniture, especially in a narrow room like this. “As opposed to

building bookshelves, we floated the shelves (page 54) so you can see the back wall,” Clarke says. “It gives the illusion the room is as wide as it can be.”

**6. Treat the outside like the inside.** With the doors to the deck open and folded back against the exterior walls, it feels like the living room and deck are one. Clarke chose outdoor furniture that completely meshes with what's inside.

**7. Embrace oddities.** Clarke creates smaller spaces within a room, whatever its shape or size. Here, he turned a nook into a “reading room” with a window seat and chairs. “You don't need a lot of square footage to do it,” Clarke says. Rather, get creative with the parts of a room's layout that already feel a little separate.

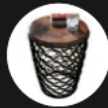
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