



## Closet fantasies

It's not how much space you have, it's how you use it, writes **Peta Tomlinson**

**B**eing content with one's home environment is not so much linked to the size of your space, but how well it is organised. It's often said that storage is one thing you can never have enough of. But with space being at a premium in Hong Kong – where homeowners are now often finding that a 700 square foot flat will only have 500 sq ft of usable space – simply building more cupboards may not be an option.

Improvisation is called for. Here's what works for some:

**Think outside the square** Joanne Ooi, co-founder of Ooi Botos Gallery, Hong Kong's first art gallery featuring contemporary Chinese art, was short on places to store her collectables. Architect Johnny Wong of FAK3 designed for her a floor-to-ceiling circular cabinet that not only houses a range of daily necessities – Ooi's computer, her son's electric keyboard, the vacuum cleaner and so on – but also becomes a feature of the living room. Custom made with dark wood and industrial steel, the round cabinet rotates 360 degrees, putting everything at the user's fingertips.

Ooi says she loves this storage feature because, with her design background, she "can't stand the clutter" of prosaic, functional objects. "Unlike conventional living rooms, I refused to let the television dominate the overall sense and configuration of the room."

**Utilise vertical space** Walls aren't just for artworks. Australian designer Jennifer French found lots of useful ways to use "dead" space during her time in Hong Kong – among them, lining the wall leading up a staircase with racks for CDs and DVDs. This shelving need only be 100mm deep, so it won't feel intrusive – and may sometimes even be recessed into the wall cavity itself. French, of Inside Out Colour and Design (now based in Sydney), also uses space under the stairs for closets, cupboards and drawers. She says the accoutrements of modern life make it essential to find a place for everything, or we will be overcome by clutter.

Extrapolating the vertical space theme, who says bookshelves have



**Clos-ette closet (top); pool table/dining table (above) by Fusion Tables**

to stop at arm's reach? US designer Kelly Wearstler brought home libraries back into vogue with her full-height design housing books, trinkets and treasures. A Hong Kong contractor should easily be able to replicate such a design. Add a sliding ladder for easy access.

Shanghai-based designer Danny Kuo invented the StairCASE (below right) because he believes building vertically is more efficient. "The focus of storage furniture will be on height rather than width in the future," says Kuo. The pull-out lower compartments of his floor-to-ceiling StairCASE (bottom right) ensure top shelves can be accessed safely.

**Demand double duty** Why settle for a furniture item that serves only one purpose? Finding furniture that is pleasing to the eye and also doubles as storage is a great way to get rid of clutter. A window seat can have either drawers or a lift-up lid. One of French's clients found a chaise longue that had a storage chest inside the seat. "We had it reupholstered to co-ordinate with the bedroom furniture and it became a great place to read as well as to store blankets and winter clothes when not in use," she says.

Kuo created a double duty wooden desk that provides a slim and efficient work surface when you need it, and slides back to cover the

mess when you don't. The design of this clever "Double Desk" (right) also allows for a second desktop to double the work space if required.

Belgian company Fusion Tables has designed an innovative, multifunctional dining table that transforms in seconds into a high-quality billiards or games table (below left). US company Taylor Gifts sells an ottoman that converts from a footrest to a guest bed, or can roll away altogether when floor space is needed. Today's Murphy Beds – the original hideaway bed that folds up neatly against the wall – come with optional slide-out shelves, bedside table and computer workstation. One design, the Desk Murphy Bed, allows the user to leave personal items such as a laptop, printer and books on the desk even when the bed is pulled down.

**Control your closet** It's design, rather than size, that matters. Melanie Fascitelli, "the closet guru of Manhattan" who founded the Clo-ette consultancy in New York, says every inch counts when space is tight. Her designs (above left) reflect this philosophy.

"We've even put the ceiling to work when we are trying to fit an important, large wardrobe into a tight space," Fascitelli says. "Innovation in functional space design is the key to working in cities such as Hong Kong, London in New York, which have tight spaces and often low ceilings."

Her top tips are to fit a T-bar to increase hanging space in a dead corner, or install framed Lucite shelving to see up into the high storage. A shallow wall space is useful for mirrors and hanging ties, belts and handbags. "We have all done a lot of hanging features on ceilings in Hong Kong spaces with use of suspension devices for storage," Fascitelli says.



**StairCASE by Danny Kuo**

**Try custom-made** Canadian homemaker Lisa Tong had to be creative with storage when she moved from spacious Toronto to Hong Kong. When children arrived, her Island East house remained the same, "but the contents kept growing".

Tong lists her Hong Kong solutions on her website, but cites a custom designed bunk bed for her daughter's room as the cleverest. Storage nooks and crannies are

tucked into stairs to the upper bunk (instead of the usual rung ladder), above and below the bed, with hanging space, shelving, drawers and "peek holes" all incorporated. The bunk bed was custom made by Majestic Furniture & Interior Design at a cost of HK\$18,000, but she says it was worth every cent.

"My children love the bed – it's like their own secret play area," says Tong, who also had the scaled-down mattress custom made.



**Double Desk by Danny Kuo**

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