

PRACTICAL MAGIC

Come inside a designer's modern home that stands up to kids and pets.

BY MARA BRAGG

Since launching her design business in 2004, Liz Levin has renovated her own new digs—a Federal-style townhouse in Washington D.C.—with her husband, Jesse, with whom she welcomed the arrival of their daughter, Julia. Levin has also built a reputation for modern, livable designs with a sophistication that doesn't fade when kids and pets join the picture. Her company, *Liz Levin Interiors* (lizlevininteriors.com), now scores repeat business from satisfied customers as their families expand and move. "I've grown up with my clients," she says.



TAKE IT FROM THE TOP Victoria Hagan fabric panels dress up the dining room window with a bold, large-scale motif. The curtain rod hangs higher than the actual window for an even grander effect.

1,500-SQUARE-FOOT TOWNHOUSE

- **STRUCTURE:** Federal-style townhouse
- **DECORATING STYLE:** Eclectic modern
- **NUMBER OF RESIDENTS:** Three
- **RENOVATIONS:** Gutted two upstairs bathrooms; replaced kitchen appliances, added new backsplash; updated lighting
- **BIGGEST DESIGN CHALLENGE:** Growing the size of their family without gaining additional living space in their home
- **BEST SMALL-SPACE SOLUTION:** Double-duty functionality of furnishings in the multipurpose office/playroom/guest room
- **BIGGEST ADVANTAGE TO SMALL-SPACE LIVING:** Making each room special rather than just filling spaces with furniture
- **BIGGEST DISADVANTAGE:** Lack of extra bedrooms for guests
- **WISH LIST:** Open up wall between dining room and kitchen to gain one large and more social living space
- **HOMEOWNER SUGGESTION:** Hire a cabinetmaker to build furniture or storage units to fit your space, claiming unused areas



MAGNIFY SPACE

When a single wall in the living room was wallpapered in Frutto Proibito from Cole & Son's Fornasetti collection, it married the beige and white palette with lush accents and made the room look bigger right away. A mirror breaks up the pattern while adding space-defying depth.



PINT-SIZE PERFECTION The side table in the nursery, above, with its child-friendly curved edges, can be ordered through lizlevinesting.com.

PLAY WITH SCALE The nursery's animal theme began with a large giraffe, right, which visually increases the sense of space in the room. The oversize bear resting atop the armoire serves the same trick-the-eye purpose.

PAINT THE TOWN RED Levin fell in love with the vivid Merlin wallpaper from Albert Hadley, below right, fancying the design even more when it was installed upside down! Bright red accessories carry through the theme of the multipurpose room (office/guest space/playroom) without going overboard.



But her work hasn't left Levin with a case of big-house envy. In fact, her appreciation has deepened for her family's living quarters, which are tucked neatly within a compact 1,500 square feet. And Levin notes that not all of her clients are supersizing either. In what she sees as a trend stemming from today's economy and environmental concerns, Levin says that many of the families she works with are upgrading to only slightly larger real estate—from a townhouse to a modest single-family home, for example. "The tide could be turning," Levin forecasts. "Not everyone is yearning for a giant house in the suburbs."

Making Room for Baby

The Levin home pairs the best of walkable city living with outdoor suburban enjoyment. The three-level townhouse has good bones inside and a deep backyard that increases the living space during warmer months and provides room to roam for dog Sophie. The townhouse was built in 1968, and the floor plan is more open and feels less compartmentalized than older properties they toured. Even so, Levin dreams of creating one big open space where the kitchen and dining room are now divided by a wall. This setup served the couple well during pre-baby, dinner party days, concealing cooking messes from guests, but their family needs have changed since Julia was born nearly three years ago.

The guest room became a nursery and visiting in-laws now stay in a hotel. The ground floor "catchall" room can accommodate guests in a pinch, but day-to-day it doubles as an office and playroom. Also boasting multiple functions, the living room is a spot for entertaining, sitting beside the fireplace, watching television and playing. Stylish containers are "semi-stealth" toy bins that contain kid clutter without making it obvious. Limited space means that Levin must buy selectively and purge regularly. The payoff? "My living room is always pulled together," she says.

Use Pattern with Panache

Every nook in her home is its own jewel box, another benefit of small-house living. "You can focus on details and make each room truly special," says Levin. As a design professional, Levin is more apt to take risks. Undaunted, she plays with proportions—big, splashy wallpaper patterns; large wall art over a tiny child's table; a jumbo stuffed animal atop an armoire—knowing that small rooms can live large. On the off chance that she finds a decorative change jarring, Levin is smart enough to follow her own advice to clients: Live with it for two weeks and then reevaluate.

kid & pet approved

Upholstery is your first line of defense," advises interior designer Liz Levin, who offers custom furniture with stain-resistant Nano-Tex technology at lizlevinnest-ing.com. She recommends washable slipcovers and vinylizing fabrics and says that Mr. Clean Magic Eraser works wonders. For more stylish finds that will stand up to messes of all kinds, from pets to kids to accident-prone guests, try these picks:

▲ Dreamy Fabrics

Stop rushing to hide the dog bed when the doorbell rings. Instead, coordinate with a room's existing color scheme or add an unexpected pop of pattern, as you would with accent pillows on the sofa. Salsa Stripe is from bowsers.com.



▲ Smooth Operator

The gracefully rounded edges on this coffee table eliminate sharp corners and the need for awkward child-proofing products. Matching nesting tables conserve space, while see-through acrylic creates a weightless effect that's key in small spaces. Peekaboo tables are from cb2.com.



▲ Floored!

The functionality and bold style of these colorful, scrubbable and UV-treated indoor/outdoor rugs are impressive. If only all rugs could be hosed down outdoors to chase away sticky spills. Pond Stripe and Marina Stripe rugs are from dashandalbert.com.



▲ Up to Scratch

Busy admiring sculptural lines, no one will guess they're actually eyeing a cat's scratching post. Wood tones and a minimalist design blend with the most refined décor—no shaggy carpet in sight. The Wedge is available by special order through catlvin.com.



▲ Shine On

Light cast from a pendant above lends a relaxing ambience, and worries about electrical cord entanglements are cast aside. Hang two of the cotton shades at varying heights for playful appeal. Eden Pendant Lamp is from cb2.com.



▲ Not off Limits

Cats are welcome to climb on, and in, this scratch-resistant sisal ottoman that blends seamlessly with your décor. Customize the cube's legs and color, keeping in mind the color of your cat's fur. Available by special order at catlvin.com.

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