



FEATURE STORY

Space-Smart Apartment Living

Apartment renovations can be extremely effective, even on a tight budget, writes Sharon Newey

Any apartment, no matter how old, will start out all sparkly and new but can quickly become scruffy. It's partly a symptom of people living in a more confined space where walls are easily dinged and carpets worn.

Renovating an apartment is relatively easy and is often merely cosmetic. Often there is little to be done structurally as most purpose-built apartments were well laid out when first conceived and built. Many bodies corporate will also have quite strict rules about what can be done structurally or externally, even if the building was a retrofitted office or warehouse space in the first place.

If you are changing the structural elements of the apartment, keep the bedrooms small so that the

living areas can be larger.

As always, adjust your renovation style and budget to your likely tenants. If the apartment is larger, in a good area and warrants a little extra expense in the likelihood of attracting better rent and more careful tenants, then go for it.

More often than not, it will be a case of providing an attractive interior and using fairly bullet-proof materials in the kitchens and bathrooms so that they don't mark too quickly. Don't go too cheap or down-market. Firstly, you may be competing for tenants with other landlords in the same building. What you provide, in the form of clean, bright interiors and perhaps a furniture package, may be all that sets you above the competition. Better to do that than drop your rental price.

Using good-quality paint and materials will ensure the apartment looks smarter for as long as possible. This will save having to refresh the interiors more regularly,

which means it will be out of action, not earning and costing more in terms of materials and tradespeople at more regular intervals. Do it right and well once and have it last longer.

The overall standard of the apartment building may also determine how much money and time you spend on a renovation – there's little point doing an expensive fitout in a building that has a scruffy foyer and lift area. If these areas are proving to be a turn-off for prospective tenants, lobby the body corp about the maintenance of common areas.

If installing a new kitchen is part of your renovation plan, think hard about how the kitchen is going to be used. Do you need a full traditional kitchen? Who is your likely tenant and will they eat out a lot, simply heat up pre-prepared meals and be there only for breakfast? Do they actually need an oven, or just a microwave and bench-top oven? This will save you a bit of cash. Use a front-loading washing



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machine and stack it in a cupboard with the dryer.

Tips for decorating small spaces

Keep the colour palette light and bright by using a warm off-white, for example, Resene Thorndon Cream (a more modern cream than good old Spanish White or Pearl Lustre), on both the walls and ceilings.

Use simple window treatments, like roller blinds that disappear behind pelmets or become a sleek roll when retracted. Consider using block-out fabric if there is light pollution from outside, ie a street light or light from a neighbouring building. If you use curtains, use sheer or light fabric so that they don't look too heavy. Hang the curtain rod up next to the ceiling to make the room appear taller. Use fabrics colours that blend with the walls – Resene have a range of curtains that are designed to work with their paints. See www.resene.co.nz/curtains.

Don't block the light.

Covering every window with blinds or curtains can make a small room feel close-in and small, and privacy isn't always an issue when the apartment is high up, and not facing another building. Light always makes a space seem larger.

Keep kitchens streamlined and simple by using plain cupboards that are either handle-less or have slim handles, the same benchtop material throughout and an integrated refrigerator. Most appliance manufacturers have slimline or smaller models of cooking appliances as well as dishwashers and fridges.

Keep the flooring simple, using at most just two types of covering – a hard and a soft. You don't need a foyer defined with hard flooring (tiles or timber). Just use carpet right from the front door. With most apartments you're not walking straight out of the weather so the carpet is not going to look dirty and worn so easily.

Recess bathroom storage into a cupboard behind

the wall mirror. Use a pedestal basin or a vanity that doesn't sit on the floor to make the room appear larger. Use large floor tiles laid diagonally for a greater illusion of space.

If the rooms don't already have recessed lighting, consider installing it to de-clutter the ceiling. Track lighting aimed at the walls will visually push them back and make the area feel bigger.

And if you are furnishing the apartment:

Many apartment tenants expect a level of supplied furnishings, which can range from just the appliances and whitewear to all of the furniture. There are rental packages available or you can buy your own.

Square dining tables take up less space than round ones. Or if the apartment is very small and you are replacing the kitchen, include a place at the bench for sitting on bar stools, or extend the bench if you can to include a table area.



Top 10 from Resene

Resene Tea	
Resene Half Tea	
Resene Quarter Tea	
Resene Spanish White	
Resene Alabaster	
Resene Half Spanish White	
Resene Black White	
Resene Pearl Lusta	
Resene Quarter Spanish White	
Resene Half Pearl Lusta	

Fold-away beds are also good for very small spaces. Have a look at www.hiddenbed.co.nz.

Use arm-less sofas or those with a slim or timber arm. Don't use bulky pieces of furniture or too many pieces. Furniture that is blocky and low to the ground makes a room appear more crowded whereas sofas and chairs with legs that sit higher off the floor allow your eye to look 'under' these pieces and add to the sense of space.

Strategically place mirrors to maximise the light in your property and to make rooms appear larger.

Nicely neutral

Apartment colour schemes tend to be fairly neutral, says Karen Warman of Resene. She recommends these colour families for the walls, using either a darker or lighter shade on trims, joinery and ceilings for a tone-on-tone effect.

"We tend to find in Auckland the colours are cooler, while the South Island tends more towards the creamier or warmer hues," says Warman.



Furnishing a profit

A little refurbishment can go a long way for apartment owners. In 2012 Impression Real Estate worked on a renovation for an apartment owner which showed just how effective they can be, bumping his gross yield from nine percent to 10.5%. As purchased, the apartment was very tired and grubby. The renovation included a new kitchen, tiles, carpet, paint, blinds and furniture.

ORIGINAL YIELD

Cost of apartment	\$160,000
Rent per week before refurbishment	\$320
Total annual return (assuming 45 weeks occupied)	\$14,400
Yield	9% gross

NEW YIELD

Cost of apartment	\$160,000
Cost of refurbishment	\$12,000
Total cost of apartment (purchase price + makeover)	\$172,000
Rent per week after refurbishment	\$400
Total annual return (assuming 45 weeks occupied)	\$18,000
Yield	10.5% gross