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## Decorating Small Spaces... to Accommodate Cats!

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Being an animal lover, I longed to keep a cuddly, furry creature for almost as long as I lived in New York. However, tenant rules forbade me until I finally moved to a tiny one-bedroom (think a bachelor with a wall down at one end to "create" a one-bedroom) up in Harlem. It was a pet-friendly building, and so I adopted two very pretty, very naughty kittens. I didn't know about the "naughty" part until they had been living with me for about a week. Oh well.

The challenge was, of course, decorating such a small apartment and accommodating the cats. The bathroom was much too tiny to fit a full-sized litter box, and I certainly didn't have enough high surfaces for them to jump up onto and survey their catdom. I didn't fully understand the importance of the latter until I came home one day in time to catch one of the kittens do a standing jump from the floor up to the top of my floor-standing flat-screen television, balancing perfectly with all four paws on the narrow surface it offered. Needless to say, my heart stuttered as I saw the television falling over in slow motion. In my head.

The first thing I did was run out to Ikea and buy six 11 3/4" LACK shelves in bright red, and put them up at varying heights with some strong, sturdy wall anchors (very important, as they'll be bearing quite a lot of weight as the cats play), and set them up along two walls in the living room at varying heights. The bright, bold colour played beautifully against the plain white renter's walls, and didn't seem out of place in a space I had filled liberally with colour. I would go so far as to say the two walls looked like a very eccentric piece of art... but that's a matter of opinion. Before I had even finished installing them, the cats had already claimed them, bounding from one to the other in a joyous frenzy (especially when I didn't reprimand them), and finally settling down on one for a well-deserved nap. Deliberately placing two of the shelves above the level of the top of the television ensured that they wouldn't use it again as a perch.

It bears noting, I think, that the top of my fridge doubled as a perch for them as well. I never discouraged this, as even before I bought their ledges, the fridge would keep them out of my hair while cooking in my Pullman-style kitchen. The little ones have brought this habit into our current house (where we have a lot more space), and have been ingenious enough to use the box of Magnotta wine we keep atop the fridge as a second, higher perch.

Of course, now I couldn't put any breakables or ornaments out on shelves or atop other pieces of furniture, as they were guaranteed to become cat toys. My solution was to invest in a pair of all-glass display cabinets, like this one from Ikea. Very modern and streamlined, the transparent sides let plenty of light in, and doesn't take up much space in even the smallest of living rooms. You do need to take the precaution, however, of using the straps included to secure these to the wall: cats won't usually jump onto a transparent surface (or so it has been my experience), but if a cabinet has a solid top, it is fair game. The straps worked quite well enough for my cabinet to survive the occasional jump (they were too fond of their shelves to bother with the cabinet much).

And now the litter box. I have come across "disguised" litter boxes online in the past, but I have to admit, I'm not a fan. Not only do they look rather fake, but they also appear rather space-hungry. Instead, I bought one LACK end table of sufficient size to accommodate the litter box beneath, and placed both at one end of my couch. Please note: this only works with a litter box that has a good filter on it, but I'm assuming you'd have that anyway as odour control is particularly important in small spaces. I've never been one to match every piece to another: there's no need to do so if you like variety, as long as you keep to the same colour scheme. This means the colours of the pieces should be similar, not identical. I paired the brown-black LACK end table with a re-purposed nightstand in a lovely, rich walnut colour for the other end of the couch. The look was slightly asymmetrical and looked perfectly right.. with the bonus of providing storage at both ends!

As you can see, it is possible to keep cats out of some amount of mischief and live quite comfortably with them in a small space, as long as you make the effort to put in some cat-friendly furniture. Most cats do very well in space-challenged apartments: what they need is vertical venues in which to vegetate. Try saying that fast five times!

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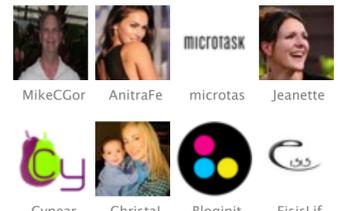
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