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# Smart storage solutions

*Struggling to find space for all your belongings? Read on for our top 10 ways to create storage in the unlikeliest of spaces, so you can banish the clutter and create a sleek, streamlined home in the process* **Words** Katy Dunn

**W**illiam Morris said: 'Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.' But then he didn't have the tealight temptation that is Ikea. We could all do with cutting down the clutter. Yet before considering how many concealed cupboards to build, maybe considering how many bin bags to buy might be more appropriate? Once the chaos of 'stuff' has been pared down to the beautiful, the useful and the sentimentally-impossible-to-throw-away, it's time to think storage. And not just storing what you have, but to think ahead about what you'll inevitably accrue in the future. It would be nice to think we have a sustainable one-in, one-out attitude to belongings but in reality, who does?

The accumulation of 'stuff' and where to store it is a necessary aspect of modern lives and it's never too soon to start thinking about 'how much?' and 'where will it go?' when planning a home.

## Under the stairs

Stairs. They're essential yet they take up so much space. However, you can make them work harder for you, if you're still designing your home, by building storage into the staircase. This could mean that beneath the tread of each stair is a pull-out drawer, or that the storage is part of the structure, as in this London apartment (far right) of interior designer Isas Sastraada. 'I like open storage to show your mess in an organised way,' he says. A stair like his would cost around £11,000 if made from solid wood, but costs could be halved by using MDF.

If you have wide stairs, building shallow shelving for paperbacks or similar small items which steps up the wall alongside the staircase will create a wall of books. Another idea is to organise the space in understairs cupboards with compartments and shelving, so that you don't have to tunnel to the back every year to find your Christmas decorations. A truly efficient solution is these pull-out panels from Chiswick Woodworking (right). Something similar would cost around £2,800.



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*left Installing a set of shelves behind the door of this bathroom turns a dead space into the perfect spot for storing towels*

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## Using dead space

*left This flight of stairs is also a spacious bookcase  
far left Pull-out under-stair drawers make excellent use of what is often an inaccessible dumping ground for infrequently used possessions*

'Most people would be amazed at how many voids there are in flats and houses which can be transformed into storage,' says Mark Dyson of Enclosure Architects. These include under floors, around baths, under sinks, around door frames – particularly effective for book and CD storage – and within stud walls. There's around 10cm of precious depth within a stud wall which could be particularly useful in the kitchen for recessing a shelf to house tea, coffee and sugar by the kettle, or inserting a recessed cabinet in the bathroom to store your toiletries.

In this scheme (above) by Storp-weber-architecture, the dead space behind a bathroom door has been used for shelving to store towels. Raising the shelving unit off the ground leaves the floor visible and thus keeps the feeling of space.



## Concealed panels

'Storage comes down to two approaches,' says architect Jonathan Clark. 'You either make it a feature of the space or you integrate it so that it disappears.' For those of a minimalist persuasion, it's a no-brainer. 'We frequently borrow strips from the backs and sides of rooms and turn them into full-height, full-width storage walls,' says architect Mark Dyson of Enclosure Architects. 'It reduces furniture clutter and allows for rooms with clean and clear geometries, giving the impression of greater scale and comfort.'

Bespoke furniture designer Tim Newbold of Domus agrees: 'Storage walls are a great way of storing lots of stuff without feeling like you have tons of cupboards. In a living room it could house TV, DVD, digibox, amp, hi-fi, open bookcase and hidden desk, but all that is seen is a tranquil series of simple panels.' A general rule of thumb for a high-quality bespoke solution is around £1,000 per metre.

A tip from architect Paul McAnearny on bringing this figure to a more manageable level is to use off-the-shelf carcasses from somewhere like Ikea and front them with bespoke high-quality lacquered doors.

Architect Ian Hogarth of Hogarth Architects agrees: 'While there is a good case for spending money on quality drawers and wardrobe fittings within, say, a master bedroom, there is no need to spend large sums to house less day-to-day items.'

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*right These floor-to-ceiling storage walls by Paul McAnearny Architects are perfect for a minimalist look, providing maximum storage space while keeping the room free from furniture and clutter*



## Stylish screens

If you want to separate two areas in your home, a storage wall with integrated cupboards is ideal. In this loft apartment, the storage partition opens into the kitchen and dining room – useful for serving food and for setting the table. You can use the same

principle for an en-suite bathroom. The partition wall could hold toiletries and make-up and be accessible from both bathroom and bedroom. A storage screen like the one pictured could cost from £1,200 for painted MDF to £2,000 for a laminated high-gloss finish.

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*right The storage partition in this loft apartment by Jonathan Clark Architects holds crockery and can be opened from the kitchen and dining room*



## On display

*left Storage doesn't have to be hidden; arranging similarly shaped items, such as books, CDs and records in open storage can make an attractive display*

'How you arrange your storage has a lot to do with the hierarchy of your possessions,' says design consultant Mark Garside of Crystallise. 'Some things are worth showing off.' Open storage has the practical element of easy access and if done properly it can be a feature in its own right. When lots of similar items are displayed together on banks of open shelving they appear attractive and yet calm and organised through the repetition of shape in different colours – books and CDs for example, as pictured in Paul McAnearny Architects' design (left); or different shapes and sizes of the same colour such as matching pans and crockery in the kitchen. 'For display storage, the latest generation of LED lights also provide great opportunities for dramatic lighting,' adds Ian Hogarth.

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*left Jonathan Clark Architects added a split level area for the kitchen in this flat in London, freeing up space underneath for valuable storage*



## Up high

If your home has high ceilings make the most of them for storage. Install floor-to-ceiling cupboards and keep lesser-used items on the higher shelves. In bedrooms it might be out-of-season clothes on shelves above your hanging rail or spare bedding; and in the kitchen that once-used juicer you can't quite bring yourself to get rid of. Architect Jonathan Clark suggests that for a large bank of cupboards it might be worth designing a custom-made slot to house your step-ladder.

Don't forget the powers of suspension. We've all seen pots and pans hanging from hooks, but how about bikes? If your bike really must come into the house, devices such as pulley systems, priced from £6-£50 (bikecare.co.uk, bikestoragesolutions.net, cyclestore.co.uk) or simple wall-attachment devices like the Cycloc (£60) can keep a bike out of the way in a high-ceilinged hallway leaving the circulation route unobstructed.

Another creative way to create storage space in a high-ceilinged room is to make use of different levels. In this flat (left), the kitchen area was raised 1.4m off the ground to create easily accessible storage underneath.





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## Moveable designs

Storage doesn't necessarily have to stay put. In a small room, the benefit of having storage that can be wheeled out of the way is obvious. In a kitchen this could be an island unit that you can push to the side, or move close to the cooker if you're following a recipe, or in a bathroom a small trolley on wheels can move from under the sink to next to the bath for easy access when bathing.

On a grander scale, part of this wardrobe and storage wall by Storp-weber-architecture actually rotates on a central axis. It divides a large room into two bedrooms for two boys and negates the need for a corridor to the back room. If they wish to be left alone they can block off the main entrance to both rooms. Both beds are built into the wall with flaps and doors to join or separate the two spaces. Something like this would cost around £6,500 for the whole unit.

*this picture and left The ultimate in space-saving solutions, this rotating wall contains storage space and beds, and also acts as a room divider*



*right Fitting storage behind bath panels makes use of the space and keeps the bathroom looking clean and uncluttered*

## Dual purpose

If you're boxing in pipework, hot water tanks, sinks or baths, why not integrate storage at the same time and make your construction do two jobs? Half-depth units are handy in the kitchen or bathroom for storing the things you use all the time – meaning you're not searching for bottles or jars hidden at the back.

In a bathroom, building steps up to the bath with lift-up treads makes it easier for children to get in and out and also creates a handy space to store their bath toys within the stair. This bathroom design by Enclosure Architects uses every inch of spare space for storage and creates a neat, clean look in the process. Something like this would take a carpenter around two days at a cost of £150-£200 per day. 'Personal recommendation is always the best option for finding a reputable tradesman,' says Duncan Frost of Aspect Carpentry. 'However, there are trade association bodies such as The Guild of Master Craftsmen and Institute of Carpenters which can give you advice.'

## Fold away for flexibility

Pots, pans and books – all chicken feed in the storage stakes. How about storing away a home office, or a guest bed? Study areas can easily be integrated into an understairs cupboard with chair, small desk and shelving above to house printer and filing. Alternatively, a home office can be built into a bank of concealed storage

*right and far right This LGM foldaway bed by Clei has an ingenious mechanism that enables you to have accessible shelves by day which swivel through 180° to allow the bed to fold out*



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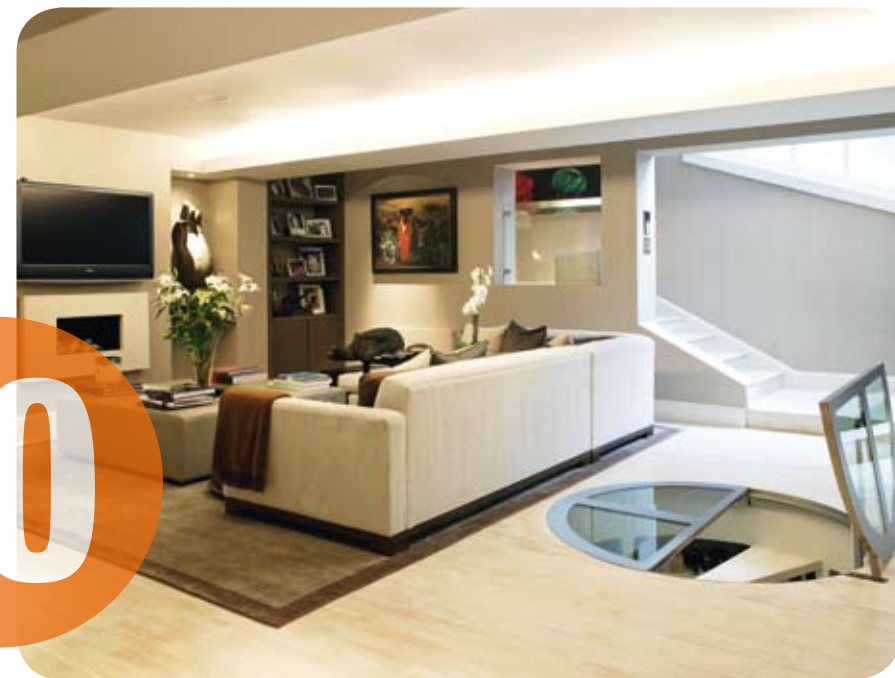
## Underfloor options

If you can't go up, go down! Victorian houses have around 30cm below the floorboards that can be used for valuable storage. A trapdoor is the most cost-effective way to access the space, although make sure it's a tight fit with no flexing or it could be liable to squeak. Be sure to build a lined box if you want to store anything porous as the area beneath ground floors tends to be cool

and damp – perfect, in fact, for wine storage.

Pictured here is a wine cellar by Spiral Cellars – a pre-cast, cylindrical system sunk into the ground beneath any ground-floor space in the house. The wine is stored in the walls and accessed by a trapdoor and spiral staircase. They cost £9,000-£20,000 depending on the size and depth of excavation required.

*right If your home doesn't have a traditional cellar you can still store your wine below ground by installing a cylindrical cellar under a trapdoor*



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## Contacts

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