THE JEWEL BOX

SHANNON CRAIN CREATED HER OWN LITTLE PARADISE IN A DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA, RENTAL

STYLING: ELLY POSTON

BEFORE

600

SQUARE-FOOT STUDIO APARTMENT

Low-key Luxe

WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

WHEN SHANNON CRAIN FIRST LAID EYES on this studio apartment, it was banana yellow and cobalt blue. As an interior designer, she knows that every color has a place, but she was certain that these two in particular did not belong in an 1882 Georgian apartment in the historic section of Wilmington. The colors, of course, didn't worry her. Repainting would be easy. "I was focused on the glorious windows and the fact that they opened onto a roof where I could grow herbs," she says. Crain worked backward, beginning with the end in mind. She decided how she would use the space and then followed her own strict rules as to what was allowed in. "Every piece had to be multifunctional, and I had to absolutely love it," she says. Now a designer at Fern Santini Design in Austin, Texas, Crain is wistful for her jewel box former home. "It was strategically located within biking distance of my office and my favorite coffee shop," she says.

GROUND CONTROL
Rugs are key to defining separate areas within one room. Here, a sisal layered with a hide corrals the sofa and coffee table, creating the living area. Crain (shown above) sometimes uses her simple desk as an extra table.

BEFORE
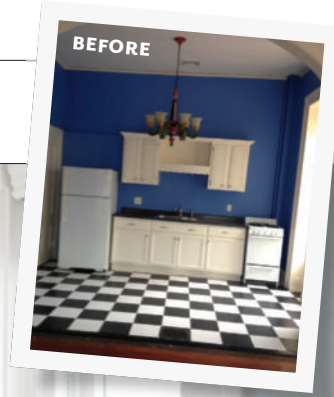
CUSTOM TOUCH
Small-space dwellers need to work every inch. These two floating shelves create more storage and help anchor the upper cabinets.

CLEVER DISPLAY
RIGHT: Nicely arranged jewelry and hats double as decor. **BELOW:** Transferring dry goods into canisters turns a china cabinet into a pretty pantry. **BOTTOM:** A sturdy book stack works as an adjustable end table next to the desk.

6 SMALL-SPACE FIXES FROM THE DESIGNER

1 PROBLEM: Squeezing your entire life into one area
SOLUTION: "Create zones to meet your basic needs—eating, sleeping, dressing, and living. I measured everything and drew an elaborate floor plan before moving in furniture. The kitchen was easy. Focus it on cooking and eating. The main room took more experimenting. I didn't want the bed to be the focal point, so we pushed it against the wall so it's out of the way and feels more like a daybed."

2 PROBLEM: Too many bold paint colors
SOLUTION: "One soothing cream (Benjamin Moore Halo) made the living room and bath flow together. To set the kitchen apart, I chose a complementary hue—Gray Owl, also by Benjamin Moore—that's also soft yet surprisingly cheerful."

3 PROBLEM: No dressing room and no pantry
SOLUTION: "Demand that your pieces multitask. My chest of drawers is also my vanity, and my desk serves as a sideboard for entertaining. One of my favorite moves was converting a china cabinet into a pantry. It's perfect for storing groceries and allows me to stash my appliances—blender, grinder, chopper—behind closed doors."

MULTIPURPOSE SURFACES
The mantel works as a makeshift nightstand for stashing books and a small lamp.

4 PROBLEM: Minimal closet space

SOLUTION: "Make it work. My shallow closet was not at all efficient for storing dresses, long skirts, or coats but became extremely useful once I installed shelves in the bottom half for holding shoes and hand-bags. Everything is in plain sight—which means no more shoving things in the back where they're as good as gone. Above the shelves, I hang tops only."

5 PROBLEM: Competing focal points

SOLUTION: "Make windows the star. There's no reason to be loud with color when the room's architecture can speak for itself. However, I did highlight the 12-foot-tall windows with blue curtains hung just below the ceiling in the living space. In fact, you can actually give the illusion of a higher ceiling by hanging window treatments from the ceiling, not the top of the window frame."

6 PROBLEM: Wasted natural light

SOLUTION: "Reflective surfaces seem to expand rooms by bouncing around the light. I have a mirror hanging over the fireplace as well as inset mirrors on my closet doors. Clear pieces also help save visual space. My chandelier shines great light but is practically see-through when it's off. The acrylic coffee table is functional and almost floats in the room." SL