

# **WHITE PAPER: THE SMALL SPACES TREND**



March 2011

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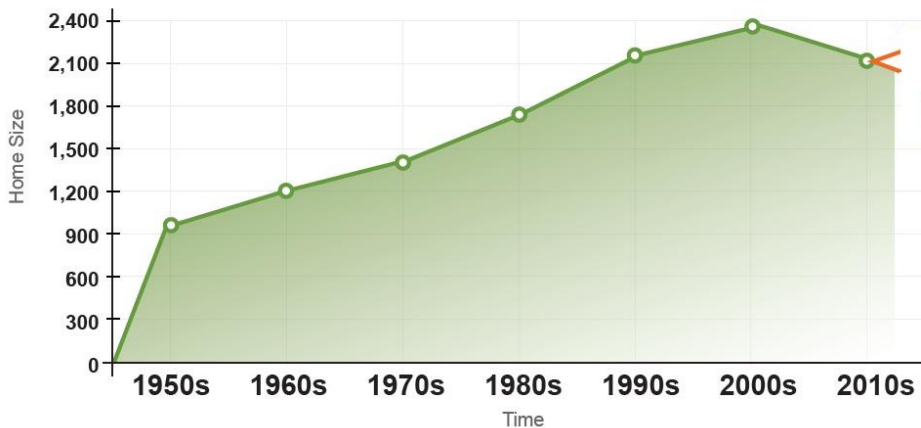
## The Small Spaces Trend

America has 'right-sized.' From 1950 to 2000, the size of the average American house increased by 230 percent, while the number of people living in it fell 23 percent.<sup>1</sup> Homes continued to grow until 2007, when the trend ended rather abruptly. Industry data clearly indicate that homes have gotten smaller and more efficient. This downsizing trend, known as the *small spaces* trend, will impact the housing market for years to come. This white paper covers the economic, demographic and environmental factors that led the average home size to decrease.

According to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), the average size of a new-single family home declined from 2,521 square feet in 2007 – the peak of the housing boom – to 2,377 square feet in 2010.<sup>2</sup> In addition, findings from an NAHB survey showed that 52 percent of builders expect smaller homes in 2011, compared to only 7 percent who expect to build larger homes. The decline will most likely continue and is expected to last even beyond the end of the recession. For instance, NAHB survey respondents believe that by 2015, the average home size will be in the range of 2,000 to 2,399 square feet.<sup>3</sup>

According to a survey by the real-estate site Trulia, more than one-third of Americans say their ideal home size is less than 2,000 square feet.<sup>4</sup>

Americans' Ideal Home Size through the Decades<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup> "The American House: Where Did We Go Wrong," *Fine Homebuilding*, December 2010/January 2011.

<sup>2</sup> "Emphasis Seen on Accessibility as U.S. Home Sizes Decline," *Home Channel News*, 12 January 2011.

<sup>3</sup> "The incredible, shrinking U.S. house", *Home Channel News*, January 22, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Perman, Cindy. "Downsizing the American Dream: The shrinking house", *USA Today*, 14 November 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Trulia-Harris Interactive Survey conducted July 22-26, 2010.

## *Opportunities in Small Spaces*

Consumers are still investing in their homes, even though their homes may well be smaller. Cooking, child-rearing, entertaining, and telecommuting will still occur within the context of a household.

More than ever, American homeowners research intently before purchasing home products because they are only going to buy products that accommodate and enhance their unique lifestyles. One study indicates that 51.7 percent of consumers are very cautious and say they spend time looking for deals on home products before making a purchase.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, consumers value quality over quantity and demonstrate this philosophy in the design and construction of their homes.<sup>7</sup>

## **'Right-Sizing' Due to the Recession**

According to a study by the American Institute of Architects (AIA), "A severe housing recession, concern over rising home energy costs, and changing lifestyles have all increased interest in smaller homes that are designed to reflect the changing lifestyles of households."<sup>8</sup>

During the economic downturn of 2009, homeowners and renters had to downsize because of lost jobs, lower wages, etc. An article on MSN Real Estate stated, "For many homeowners it is not so much a matter of downsizing as 'right-sizing,' giving up big homes with unused space and buying a home that better fits their needs."<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, new homeowners with restricted budgets opted for smaller homes. According to the *Builder* article "Consumers Rethink Home-Buying Priorities," consumers were "ready to take a step back from the McMansions or trophy homes" and buy what they needed.<sup>10</sup>

Remaining economical, many consumers have chosen not to purchase new homes. Instead, they are remodeling their old ones. Consumers buying new homes also remodel to fit their needs. A study by Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies states that "deferred maintenance, distressed properties in need of renovation, decreased household mobility and baby boomers retrofitting their homes so they can live in them as they age all support strong remodeling growth in 2011 and beyond."<sup>11</sup>

This demographic shift noted in the Harvard study contributes to the new spaces trend. Some baby boomers are remodeling their old homes, while others are moving into smaller ones. On the other hand, many Millennials, or those between the ages 20 and 30, are starting to buy homes.

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, Stephani. "Consumers' Home Priorities Shifting," *Custom Home Magazine*. 10 February 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Susanka, Sarah. Interview. [www.notsobighouse.com](http://www.notsobighouse.com). 2011

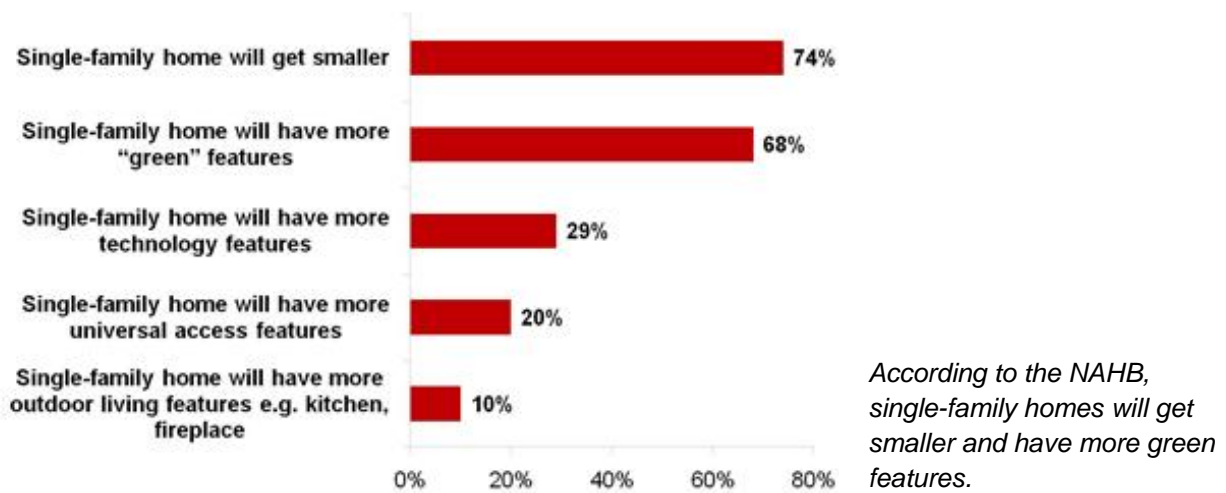
<sup>8</sup> Baker, Kermit. "While Home and Lot Sizes are Still Shrinking, Property Enhancements Remain Popular." *AIA*. 18 June 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Market Watch. "At annual builders' show, small is in." *MSN Real Estate*

<sup>10</sup> Rice, Alison. "Consumers Rethink Home-Buying Priorities." *Builder Magazine*. 22 January 2009.

<sup>11</sup> "A New Decade of Growth for Remodeling: Improving America's Housing." Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. 2011.

## Projections for Future Residences<sup>12</sup>



Another contributing factor to the *small spaces* trend is environmental awareness. Consumers' lives are becoming more environmentally-friendly. More are carpooling, recycling and buying organic. To conserve energy, consumers focus on lowering the cost of heating and cooling their homes. Stephen Melman, director of Economic Services for NAHB, believes, "smaller homes are going to be less expensive to operate."<sup>13</sup>

The economy, demographics and the environment all contribute to the *small spaces* trend. As Rose Quint, assistant vice president of Survey Research for NAHB, stated, "Combined, these factors will weigh on the consumer to purchase homes based on need more than want."<sup>14</sup>

## Small Spaces and the Housing Market

Affordability and value are top priorities for homebuyers and homeowners. According to the NAHB study "Characteristics of New and First-Time Home Buyers," the marketplace is one where homebuyers purchase smaller homes that contain fewer luxuries.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, 54.6 percent of respondents believe that it is important to get the most value for every dollar spent on products that they buy.<sup>16</sup> 'Right-sizing' and smart-spending go hand-in-hand.

<sup>12</sup> Chart from [www.federalhousingtaxcredit.com](http://www.federalhousingtaxcredit.com)

<sup>13</sup> Melman, Stephan. National Association of Home Builders. Interview. 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Quint, Rose. "The New Home in 2015." NAHB. 13 January 13, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> "Demand Seen Rising for Smaller, Less-Expensive Homes." *Kitchen & Bath Design News*. 12 January 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, Stephani. "Consumers' Home Priorities Shifting." *Custom Home Magazine*. 10 February 2011.

## Small Spaces and Demographics

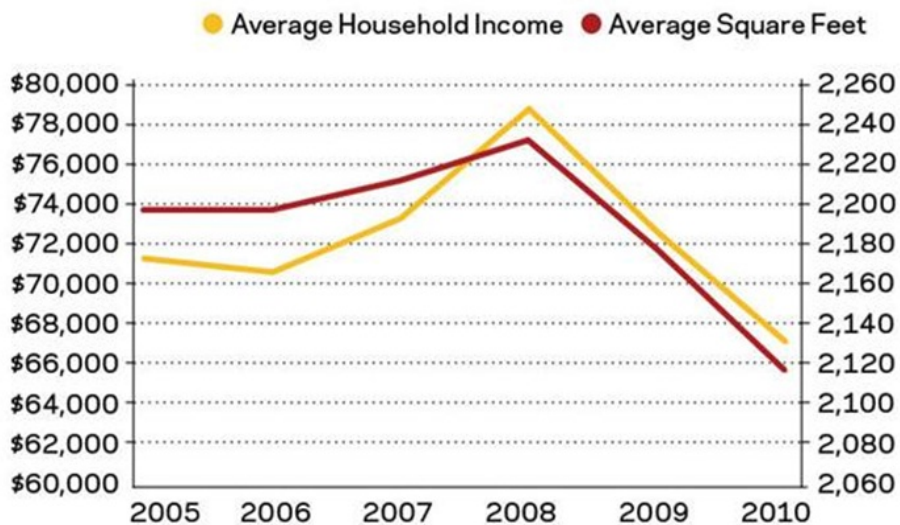
### *First-time Homebuyers*

Half of first-time homebuyers purchase smaller homes because they earn less than \$60,000 a year.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, first-time homebuyers are purchasing their homes based on what they can afford.

An NAHB study stated that 41 percent of the 8.4 million households that purchased a home between 2007 and 2009 were first-time buyers, up from 35 percent in both 2005 and 2007.<sup>18</sup> This activity was mainly generated by the homebuyer tax credit; however, the trend is expected to continue, especially as Millennials, or children of baby boomers, move into their home-buying years.

“In addition to the first time homebuyer tax credit of 2010, first time buyers have an advantage in that they do not have to sell existing homes,” said Melman. “First-time buyers purchase less expensive and smaller homes because they have no equity from an existing home.”<sup>19</sup>

Home Size and Buyer Incomes Have Declined<sup>20</sup>



*Credit: Housing Intelligence Pro*

<sup>17</sup> “Demand Seen Rising for Smaller, Less-Expensive Homes.” *Kitchen & Bath Design News*. 12 January 2011.

<sup>18</sup> “Demand Seen Rising for Smaller, Less-Expensive Homes.” *Kitchen & Bath Design News*. 12 January 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Melman, Stephan. National Association of Home Builders. Interview. 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Graph from: Smoke, Jonathan. “Not a Permanent Trend.” *Builder Magazine*. February 2011.

Many first-time homebuyers *want* to live in smaller homes. They want to live in a home that is “cozier, more organized and more economical in terms of operating costs – that includes ‘Wii-sized’ and media-centric family gathering rooms.”<sup>21</sup>

*Small* is also a relative term. According to an article in *The New York Times*, “studies have found that lower-class homes in the United States are... much larger than comparable residences in Europe.”<sup>22</sup>

### *Baby Boomers*

Census data shows that people 65 and older will make up approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population by 2050, up from 13 percent in 2010.<sup>23</sup> This segment of the population, known as baby boomers, is purchasing smaller homes because its members no longer need multiple bedrooms and large backyards. They are entering their retirement years and want to down-size, either for practicality or financial reasons.<sup>24</sup>

Baby boomers want a custom look for their small spaces, with little to no maintenance.<sup>25</sup> In addition to custom looks, *Remodeling Magazine* suggests that boomers make new purposes for unused spaces.<sup>26</sup> For instance, instead of a child’s room, they may transform that room into a home office or art studio. Whatever they transform, boomers want practical and sensible spaces for their retirement years...and are ready to invest in them.

According to the AIA, “easing accessibility through the home for older household members is a growing concern.”<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, U.S. homeowners and consumers have shifted their desires from a place of quantity to a demand for quality. They prioritize performance and

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### **GERBER’S NEW AVALANCHE TOILET CONSERVES SPACE AND WATER**

Consumers can enhance their small space’s bathrooms with Gerber’s new high-efficiency and superior performing toilet.

The Avalanche™ Gravity elongated one piece is engineered with a compact design to fit the “round front space.”

Engineered with a three-inch flush valve for quick evacuation, all Avalanche™ toilets have an effective flushing process which clears the bowl faster and more efficiently.

[www.gerberonline.com](http://www.gerberonline.com)



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<sup>21</sup> Rice, Alison. “Consumers Rethink Home-Buying Priorities.” *Builder Magazine*. 22 January 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Rice, Andrew. “The Elusive Small-Size Utopia” *The New York Times Magazine*. 15 October 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Koch, Wendy. “Formal living rooms, mansions a thing of the past.” *USA Today*.

<sup>24</sup> MacDonald, Jay. “New realty reality.” *2009 Real Estate Guide*. 4 May 2009. Bankrate.com

<sup>25</sup> Pearlman, Doris. “Doing More With Less: The Small Space Phenomenon.” [www.possibilitiesfordesign.com](http://www.possibilitiesfordesign.com)

<sup>26</sup> Hunter, Lauren. “Transformers.” *Remodeling Magazine*. August 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Baker, Kermit. “While Home and Lot Sizes are Still Shrinking, Property Enhancements Remain Popular.” *AIA*. 18 June 2010.

durability. Whether the home item is a professional performance toilet or high-quality sofa made to last several years of wear and tear, homeowners would rather have fewer, more significant belongings.

### Population and Size of Households

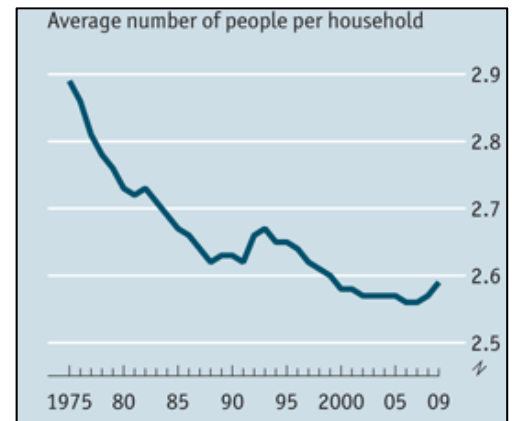
As the population grows, housing will remain crucial. It is projected that the U.S. population will rise to 322.4 million people in 2015, 336.8 million in 2020 and 422.6 million in 2050.<sup>28</sup>

Even though the population is growing, the size of households is decreasing. One and two person households represented more than 63 percent of all households in 2010.<sup>29</sup> As this statistic demonstrates, a home with fewer occupants does not need to be as large.

### Larger Houses, Fewer Occupants<sup>30</sup>



Between 1950 and 2000, the size of the average house increased by 230%, while the number of people living in it fell by 23%<sup>31</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Quint, Rose. "The New Home in 2015." NAHB. 13 January 13, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Caulfield, John. "Buyer Survey Says: Smaller Homes With More Open Spaces." *Eco Home Magazine*. 13 January 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Graph: Ireton, Kevin. "The American House: Where Did We Go Wrong." *Fine Homebuilding*. December 2010/January 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Green Graph: The Economist. 30 September 2010.

## Small Spaces and the Environment

### CERTIFIED GREEN

Carlisle Wide Plank Floors ([www.wideplankflooring.com](http://www.wideplankflooring.com)) are an example of environmentally-friendly products that consumers may purchase to enhance the look of a small space.

Carlisle practices sustainable forest management, recycles its by-products, and creates stain and topcoats that use no VOCs.

Carlisle has been awarded full Forrest Stewardship Council Chain of Custody Certification. This award means that each board that Carlisle recycles has been procured, manufactured, and distributed in accordance with the highest internationally accepted standards.

The distinctive width of Carlisle's planks make a visual impact, transforming a small space into a memorable one.



The three 'R's of conservation are reuse, reduce and recycle.<sup>32</sup>

Consumers interested in being environmentally-friendly accomplish the three 'R's by building or purchasing smaller homes. Many also conserve by investing in more green elements for their homes.

For instance, according to NAHB's research on consumer home buying preferences, homebuyers surveyed said they would pay an average of \$6,000 more for their new homes to save \$1,000 annually on energy costs.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, a *Better Homes and Gardens* study reported that 91 percent of consumers want to have energy-efficient heating and cooling systems in their next home.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to purchasing energy-efficient products, 68 percent of consumers want to save water by purchasing low-flow faucets and dual-flush toilets, among other eco-friendly products.<sup>35</sup>

These statistics demonstrate that consumers *are* spending; their spending priorities have simply changed.

Other ways to conserve are to reuse and recycle. Consumers demonstrate increased awareness of sustainable materials and use them throughout their residences.<sup>36</sup>

An article from MSN stated, "The green theme touches everything in the home, from the food we look to consume, our health concerns in the home, building – even furnishings in the home."<sup>37</sup> This statement indicates that consumers are purchasing products for their homes that will help them conserve resources.

Next, this paper will explore how the *small spaces* trend has affected home design.

<sup>32</sup> Copley, Arthur P. and Ralph B. Maust. "Today's 3 R's." *The New York Times*. 3 June 1990.

<sup>33</sup> Rice, Alison. "Consumers Rethink Home-Buying Priorities." *Builder Magazine*. 22 January 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Rice, Alison. "Consumers Rethink Home-Buying Priorities." *Builder Magazine*. 22 January 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Koch, Wendy. "Formal living rooms, mansions a thing of the past." *USA Today*.

<sup>36</sup> "Fiftysomething Trends for the Year." *Daily 5 Remodel*. 22 February 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Market Watch. "At annual builders' show, small is in." *MSN Real Estate*

## Small Spaces in Outdoor Living

As the 'leisure industry' is growing 15 to 17 percent annually, several relatable outdoor living trends are beginning to take shape. There is a noticeable shift in the design of outdoor kitchens from the traditional barbecue island and masonry kitchen island to compact modular cabinetry. Just a few years ago, an outdoor area was called a 'grilling station' and soon thereafter, the term was quickly updated to 'outdoor kitchen.'

Now the emerging phrase is 'outdoor living and entertainment centers,' signifying that entertaining outdoors does not necessarily require a large space. The trend clearly illustrates how homeowners are making the most of every square foot of their home.

A *USA Today* article titled "Downsizing the American Dream: The shrinking house" notes that one 'design trick' architects are using to make a home feel larger is to "put a direct line of sight to an outdoor space like a porch or deck. As your eye sees past the room to the outside, the space feels bigger."<sup>38</sup>

Many consumers are also interested in adding function and appeal to their outside spaces. *Builder Magazine* stated, "Thoughtfully designed exteriors and outdoor living areas convey a sense of luxury without adding to the conditioned square footage."<sup>39</sup> According to the AIA, outdoor living is the second most popular function space.<sup>40</sup>

Its study states that "Even with smaller lots, many households are focusing more attention on their properties. Low maintenance is a key goal for these property improvements, with increased outdoor living space continuing as a trend reshaping lifestyles."<sup>41</sup>

### DANVER ADDS VALUE TO OUTDOOR LIVING ROOMS

Because backyards are becoming a bigger focus as consumers are expanding outdoors, DANVER Stainless Steel Cabinetry can help increase the value of a home.

DANVER is the leading provider of stainless steel cabinetry and amenities for outdoor living.

Products include stainless steel gas grills, refrigerators, ice makers, pizza ovens, ceramic smokers/grills, outdoor bartending centers, beer dispensers, outdoor patio heaters and insect control systems.

[www.danver.com](http://www.danver.com)



<sup>38</sup> Perman, Cindy. "Downsizing the American Dream: The shrinking house." *USA Today*. 24 November 2010.

<sup>39</sup> *Builder Magazine*, January 2011 issue, pg. 181

<sup>40</sup> Baker, Kermit. "Home Offices and Outdoor Living Spaces are Top Choices for Special Function Areas in Homes." American Institute of Architects. [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org)

<sup>41</sup> Baker, Kermit. "While Home and Lot Sizes are Still Shrinking, Property Enhancements Remain Popular" *AIA*. 18 June 2010.

## Designing, Remodeling, and Upgrading Small Spaces

### Design

Consumers customize small spaces to efficiently accommodate their wants, needs and lifestyles. The trend of designing small spaces has become so popular that, in 2010 alone, the following publications were among the many to write about the trend: *Architectural Digest*, *Associated Press*, *Dwell*, *House Beautiful*, *Metropolis*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal*.

A small home is similar to the cockpit of an airplane – it requires thorough space planning, deliberate design and useful objects.

Many consumers turn to designers for tips on how to enhance their *smaller spaces*. Sarah Susanka, architect and bestselling author of *The Not So Big* books, states “Allowing rooms to be open and fluent makes them seem larger and more appealing.”<sup>42</sup>

Another tip for consumers is to purchase multi-functional pieces.<sup>43</sup> These pieces can be statement pieces that also function as organization tools. Organization is especially important in small spaces to reduce clutter. Indeed, Gale Steves dedicated an entire chapter of her critically acclaimed book, *Right-Sizing Your Home*, to cleaning and storage.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to decorating their small spaces, consumers are also investing in remodeling projects and upgrades.

### RODA BY BASCO LINE HELPS MAKE A SMALL BATHROOM APPEAR LARGER

According to *Consumer Reports*, nearly 30 percent of the 121 million adults who recently completed a home-improvement project were involved in a bathroom remodel.

An ongoing trend among remodelers is the option to rip out the bathtub and replace it with a glass shower enclosure. This frees up room, and helps make a small space appear and feel larger.

The Roda by Basco line is completely customizable, designed to create personal spaces, no matter a bathroom's size.

[www.bascoshowerdoor.com](http://www.bascoshowerdoor.com)



<sup>42</sup> Susanka, Sarah. Interview with Melissa Bennett. 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Jackson, Jennifer. “5 Tips for Designing Small Spaces.” *Decorating. House Beautiful*.

<sup>44</sup> Steves, Gale. *Right-Sizing Your Home: How to Make Your House Fit Your Lifestyle*. Northwest Arm Press. 2010.

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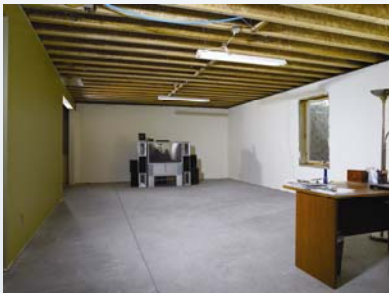
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Before:



After:



## Remodeling

This year, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, remodeling projects are rebounding significantly.<sup>45</sup> In addition to small and necessary projects, consumers are beginning larger remodeling projects, such as outdoor living areas and bathroom renovations.<sup>46</sup> Findings from a report from Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies show that "households are moving less often and therefore are more likely to focus on improvements that accommodate their longer-term housing needs."<sup>47</sup> This evidence indicates that consumers see remodeling as an investment in homes.

Homeowners are re-evaluating spaces they already own but had previously dismissed, such as closets and basements. This factors into the environmental tenet 'reuse,' which was discussed earlier in this white paper.

According to Daily 5 Remodel, consumers are oftentimes remodeling to make their small spaces more efficient. The source found that homeowners will concentrate on maximizing the usefulness of existing space by creating spaces that have multiple functions.<sup>48</sup>

The AIA gave a macro-economic reason for the increase in remodeling: "Home improvement projects often don't require financing, so the credit problems that have plagued the homebuilding markets are not as severe for home improvements....Home improvement activity was not overbuilt to any significant degree during the housing boom, so it has responded faster to the general improvement in the economy."<sup>49</sup>

Remodeling projects are likely to have a 3.5 percent annual growth rate between now and 2015, according to Harvard's study, "A New Decade of Growth for Remodeling."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Hoak, Amy. "Remodeling Projects Are Back." Marketwatch. *The Wall Street Journal*. 30 January 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Hoak, Amy. "Remodeling Projects Are Back." Marketwatch. *The Wall Street Journal*. January 30, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> "A New Decade of Growth for Remodeling: Improving America's Housing." Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. 2011.

<sup>48</sup> "Fiftysomething Trends for the Year." *Daily 5 Remodel*. 22 February 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Baker, Kermit. "While Home and Lot Sizes are Still Shrinking, Property Enhancements Remain Popular," *AIA*. 18 June 2010.

<sup>50</sup> "A New Decade of Growth for Remodeling: Improving America's Housing." Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. 2011.

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Elmira Stove Works offers "circa-1850" and retro 1950s appliances which serve as statement pieces in the kitchen, bringing life to a small space.



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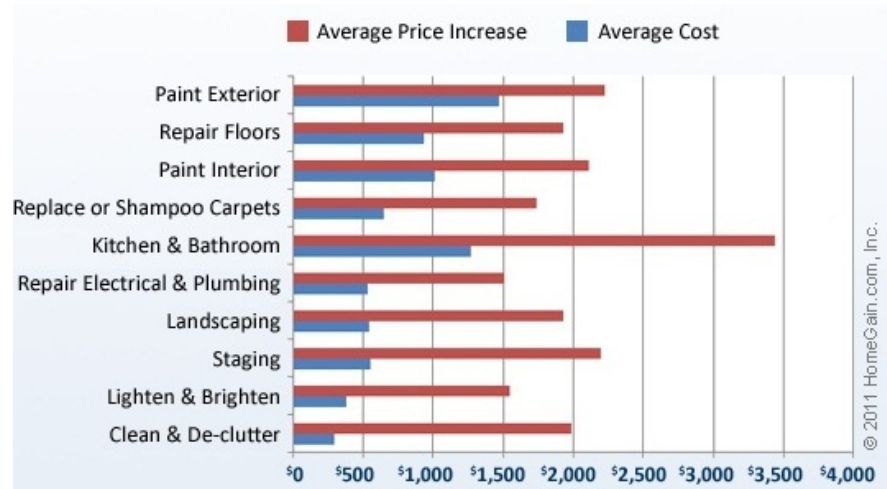
[www.elmirastoveworks.com](http://www.elmirastoveworks.com)

*Upgrading*

Would you rather have a large, dated car that does not function well or a small luxury car? Small spaces, like small luxury cars, rely on upgraded materials to provide comfort and to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. According to The Wall Street Journal, "the housing market remains a weak point in the economy."<sup>51</sup> Potential buyers often view multiple listings in each neighborhood or condominium complex they view. The residences that stand out are the ones that have differentiated themselves with high-quality materials. Standing out means selling sooner, which means fewer months of utilities, taxes, mortgages, maintenance, and HOA dues.

According to a study by HomeGain, a real estate-oriented joint partnership between The Washington Post company and others, upgrading kitchens and bathrooms provides the greatest return on investment.

Top D-I-Y Home Improvements for Sellers in 2011, according to HomeGain<sup>52</sup>



<sup>51</sup> Barkley, Tom and Jeff Bater. "Home Sales Rise as Prices Fall." *The Wall Street Journal*. 23 February 2011.

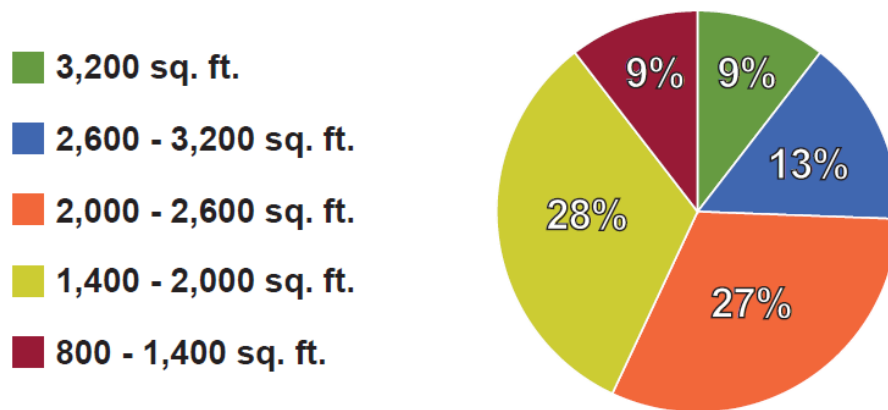
<sup>52</sup> "Homegain 2011 Top 10 D-I-Y Improvements for Sellers (National)." Homegain.com

## Conclusion

The *small spaces* trend reflects and contributes to a new way of living for consumers. As a *USA Today* article noted, “home ownership has long been a symbol of the American dream and for a while there, we supersized it. But since the recession, we’ve been downsizing it.”<sup>53</sup>

American homeowners demanded quality products to accommodate their changing lifestyles, and the home and building products industry responded in kind. The result is value-oriented, distinctive and multi-use products that make homeowners’ lives easier and spaces more usable. The market has spoken – bigger is not always better.

Americans’ Ideal Home Size in 2010<sup>54</sup>



<sup>53</sup> Perman, Cindy. “Downsizing the American Dream: The shrinking house.” *USA Today*. 24 November 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Trulia-Harris Interactive Survey conducted July 22-26, 2010

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