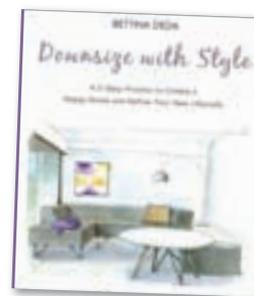




SYDNEY INTERIORS EXPERT BETTINA DEDA QUITE LITERALLY WROTE THE BOOK ON DOWNSIZING WITH STYLE, SO WHO BETTER TO CHAT WITH MATT ALLISON ON THE DOWNSIZING MOVE THAT TOOK HIS FAMILY ACROSS THE WORLD FROM A LARGE SUBURBAN HOME IN CAPE TOWN TO A TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENT ON THE CITY FRINGE IN SYDNEY.



# APARTMENT LIVING: RETHINKING SPACE

DOWNSIZING A FAMILY HOME WITH TWO YOUNG CHILDREN AND CELEBRATING A MINIMALIST LIFESTYLE ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE, AS THIS FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE AMPLY DEMONSTRATES.

STORY BETTINA DEDA  
PHOTOGRAPHY MATT ALLISON & DAVID JAMES  
STYLING MATT ALLISON & KIRSTEN RANDL KATALINIC



#### [ WHO LIVES HERE ]

Matt and Kathy Allison  
and their children Nathan (5)  
and Olivia (3)

#### THE BACK STORY

Born in South Africa but with dual citizenship (South Africa and Australia) Matt had always considered the option to live Down Under. Only when the couple had children did they decide to make the move, as they felt that Australia could offer them a simpler life, allowing their children to grow up in a vibrant, multicultural society. In 2014, the family of four moved from Cape Town to Sydney.

They had already started to reduce and let go of material possessions over the past few years – favouring quality over quantity. When they finally moved overseas, they cut back further on their belongings, giving up 90 per cent of their possessions and bringing only their custom-designed beds and Matt’s office table.

#### THE DREAM/DESIGN

The couple was looking for a fresh start. “We wanted to pare down,” Matt explains. “Rather than carting years of material possessions that moved from place to place, it forced us to confront them. We asked ourselves if these things brought joy to our lives and, truthfully, very few of them did. They were utilitarian and – shamefully – many purchases were made because we could afford it. As life progressed, our homes got bigger to the point that we didn’t own them, they owned us.”

Kathy, who works in finance, had had to commute up to an hour each day. They wanted a lifestyle change, prioritising the family and achieving a better work-life balance eventually, and Matt was aware that moving to an inner-city suburb of Sydney would mean apartment living. They were looking for a two-bedroom, two-bathroom unit close to the city, school, parks and shops. An apartment within a low-rise development in Waterloo called The Elizabeth ticked all the boxes. It’s part of a 37-unit complex built a couple of years ago during the growing gentrification of Waterloo and Green Square in Sydney’s south. The building offers great compact living with well-thought-out storage and is central to the city with excellent links to public transport.



**Far right** The soft pink rocking Eames chair is an original Herman Miller design purchased from Living Edge. It found a perfect place next to the sideboard with an artfully arranged vignette and adds a pop of colour to the muted, elegant scheme.

"Having travelled a lot I was aware that moving into the city meant apartment living. We were prepared for the change and have taken to it."



When entering through the front door the NULoom Varanas rug, imported from the US, creates a warm atmosphere in the sitting area. It is made from 100% wool and designed to mirror the traditional Beni Ourain rugs of Morocco. The patterned scatter cushion and throw echo the colours and pattern in the rug and link this welcoming space. The Normann Copenhagen Sumo Pouf functions as an additional seat, footstool or coffee table. The sofa doubles as a queen-size sofa bed; the Flip side table, by Danish brand Menu, transforms from a side table with tray into an occasional stool.





### [ MATT'S TOP TIPS FOR SMALL-SPACE FAMILY LIVING ]

#### [Banish clutter]

Everything needs a place, if you take something out, put it back where it belongs.

#### [Think cubic]

When living small think about the cubic space you have available. Can you mount a set of storage cubes or units to the wall for extra storage?

#### [Buy once, buy well]

'Quality over quantity' is a mantra for minimalists like us. Invest in a few hero pieces that will last and bring you joy rather than filling your home because it's what you are supposed to do.

#### [Size it up]

While that six-seater L-shaped sofa might look great on an expansive showroom floor, it is going to look gigantic in your 3x3-metre open-plan living room. Rather stick with a small two-seater sofa, a side table instead of a coffee table and a single occasional chair with an appropriately sized floor rug to pull it all together. Get the proportions right, and your room will look great.

#### [Buy multi-purpose furniture]

In small spaces furniture has to do double duties: a side table can be a table, tray or occasional stool like the Menu flip table.

**Above** The Menu Flip Table decorated with the Design Stockholm Candelabra together with the dining chairs from Huset take pride of place in the main living area.

#### **Opposite page**

**Top right** The chest in the entrance is a limited IKEA edition called Sprutt and became the shoe storage for the family. The green coathanger is another limited edition IKEA find, a product range that focuses on sustainable material, such as bamboo, water hyacinth, rattan and sea grass.

**Bottom left** With creativity and style, Matt created a small office corner in the loft.





The change was massive: this family of four had exchanged their three-bedroom house in the sprawling southern suburbs of Cape Town for an 89sqm apartment in Sydney. Split across three floors with a small balcony, the new home is a fraction the size of their previous house.

The loft is currently used as playroom and office but could potentially become the third bedroom, as the children get older.

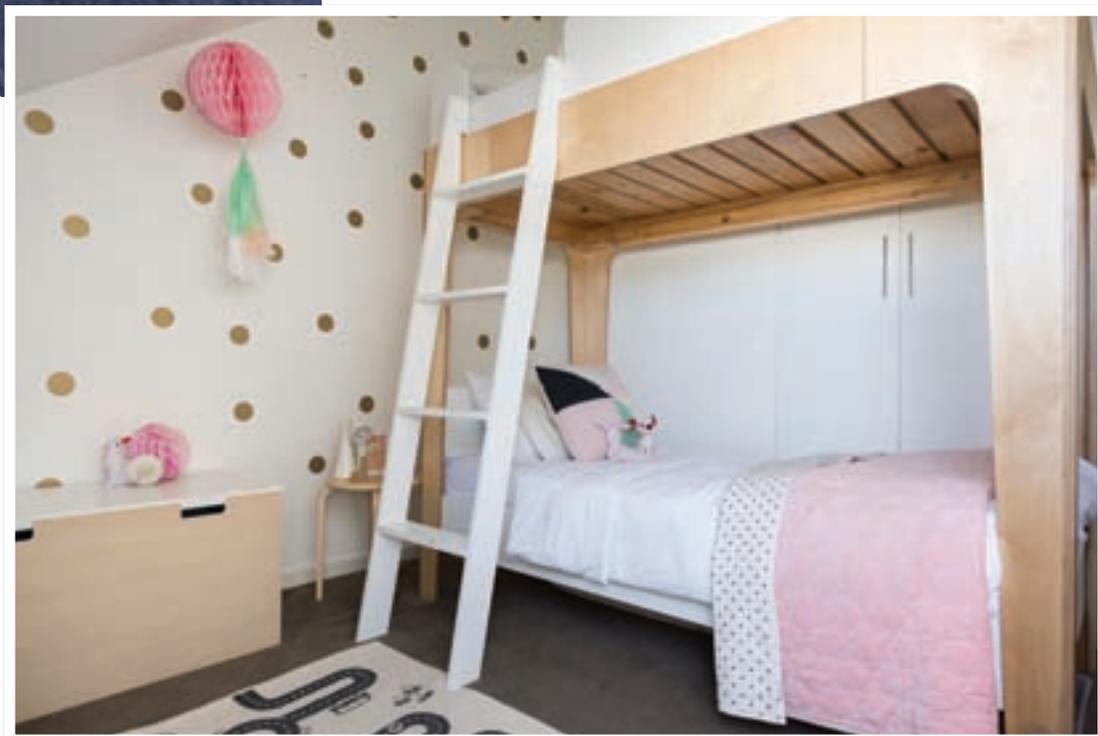
But the bus ride to the city takes just eight to ten minutes; there are cycleways and green spaces for relaxation. They love the proximity to the kids' school and live right next door to the Waterloo Library. If they want to go for a swim, there are several beaches only a stone's throw away.

#### THE WORK

The work started prior to the move. The family sold off 90 per cent of their possessions, starting an Instagram account showcasing their homewares and furniture, along with Gumtree ads and two garage sales. Whatever they couldn't sell they donated. They also recycled years of paperwork.

"We asked ourselves if these things brought joy to our lives, and truthfully very few of them did."





**Top left** The timber bedhead and the wool carpet add a warm element to the overall minimalistic aesthetic. The vintage-style scissor reading lights are one of the few items the couple brought from South Africa. The pot plant not only cleans the air but also adds a splash of colour to the bedroom.

**Top right** The loft on the third floor doubles as playroom. As the children grow older, the family might use this area as the third bedroom.

**Right** The children's bedroom continues the clean-lined look of the rest of the home with bunk beds and storage that doubles as a seat or table. There is plenty of scope to add personality without a lot of clutter.



As the apartment was part of a newly built development, Matt didn't make any structural changes but took the opportunity to optimise the storage. Being an interior stylist and very hands-on, he planned out the entire space using CAD software. On moving day, they knew exactly where everything was going. IKEA had delivered over a tonne of flatpack material, and Matt configured storage units from the IKEA Besta, Stuva and Pax ranges, which he mostly hand-assembled on his own over 48 hours, with a little help from a friend on the wardrobe.

For example, he installed an IKEA Algot shelving system inside the existing bank of storage cupboards along the stairwell to make most of the vertical space. He also selected and sourced all the furniture and decorator items – with the help of storyboards he had created for each room – and styled the finishing touches.

### THE CHALLENGES

Living in a more compact space requires very detailed planning of how to use each room. Everything needs to find a place and be returned there to avoid clutter.

The biggest challenge for Matt and his family was moving into the new home over the Easter weekend and having not enough storage options. When they found that the few furniture pieces they bought were oversized for the apartment, they went on to sell over 50 household items.

### [ COLOUR CODE ]

Wall paint: Dulux Fair Bianco half strength  
 Ceilings and trims: Dulux White on White  
 Kitchen bench: Caesarstone Atlantic Salt  
 Flooring: Silkwood engineered timber range  
 in Blackbutt from Boral  
 Carpet: Tullibrook in Mahogany from Victoria Carpets

DULUX FAIR BIANCO

DULUX WHITE ON WHITE

CAESARSTONE ATLANTIC SALT

BLACKBUTT FLOORING FROM BORAL

TULLIBROOK IN MAHOGANY CARPETS



### [ THE ESSENTIALS ]

Architect: BKA Architecture

Builder: Barua Group

Interior Styling: Matt Allison

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Another challenge was to find the right dining chairs. They wanted something original, child-friendly and not going to break the bank. Matt finally found their dream chairs at the Scandinavian store Huset in Melbourne.

### THE RESULT

The apartment pays homage to a modern Scandinavian aesthetic. Matt, a multidisciplinary creative, was inspired by the Scandinavian expression of *Hygge*, the art of building sanctuary and community, and chose a muted palette of warm whites and blond wood accents that let the light bounce throughout the rooms, giving the home a light and airy feeling. It is elegant, warm and inviting, despite the minimal aesthetic.

Matt and his family demonstrate that even with young children you can keep your home neat and tidy. As he emphasises, “We want for nothing and small-space living puts things under further scrutiny”.

**Top right** Lots of greenery is an invitation to sit on the small balcony. The plants add colour and freshness to the outdoor area.