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SMALL SPACES

Generation Y makes room for dual-use furniture

By CHRISTINE BRUN CREATORS SYNDICATE

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SECRET COMPARTMENT: Jeffrey Braun designed "The Hidden Agenda," a coffee table/chest made from exotic wood that slides open to reveal a place to store items and is ideal for small-space living.

The new truth is housing trends will be leading millions of Americans toward more compact living situations, which in turn will drive new emphasis on dual-use furnishings.

Petite housing is not a new idea, though the rise in popularity definitely is tied to current economic realities. There have been tiny models at other times in history. Have you ever seen a

collection of small cottages built in a square surrounding a common patio?

Because these were popular in the 1930s and '40s in Los Angeles, they have been a part of Hollywood films for what seems like forever. In the 1984 film "Swing Shift," the character played by Goldie Hawn lived in just such a court.

Most charming is these hut-like homes often share flower beds, trees and lawns. They often have names and appear to exist in a protected universe all their own.

Members of Generation Y, sometimes called millennials, are gobbling up unusually petite rental spaces that are 500 to 600 square feet. As long as the place is wired for every possible electronic gadget and the building shares the more social functions, such as laundry, game rooms, exercise and juice bar, no one seems to care they are living in closet-like places. It is fairly obvious traditional furnishings will not work well in such paired-down living models.

In the photo is a coffee table/storage chest made from exotic wood that slides open for access and closed to hide items not currently in use. Designed by Jeffrey Braun, a film art director turned interior designer and furniture maker, it is called "The Hidden Agenda." Braun is based in Seattle and has an affinity for urban living. He designed "The Hidden Agenda" with a nod toward the special effects seen in the film world.

Loren Sherman of New York City is another urban specialist and furniture inventor. His incredible "Table Bed" is one of my favorite examples of

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flexibility and smart design.

As a freestanding piece, this transforms from a bed to a dining table and work surface. Introduced at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in 2000, this solution allows one to eat, work and sleep in a studio or small apartment. It's multiple-function design remains unique nearly a decade after it was first unveiled.

There are much older examples of dual-use furniture. The traditional blanket chest or cedar chest is a classic. At once storage for linens and clothing, it serves as a bench at the foot of the bed. There was a time when every respectable bride left home with a chest.

My new book, "Small Space Living," includes many resources for hardworking furniture — from tables that work at coffee-table height and dining height to folding wall beds that hide inside cabinetry.

A traditional version of a dual-height table is made by Lorts (www.lorts.com), and a contemporary version is manufactured by Hydra Designs (www.hydradesigns.com). Both tables make use of a hydraulic lift similar to those used in adjustable computer armchairs.

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