

## The Downsizing Dilemma

*Should we sell now, or will the market rebound?  
Smaller house or condo?  
Retirement residence or live-in caregiver?  
Donate it all or call an auctioneer?*

Believe it or not, there's a common solution to all these questions – **downsizing!**

A major life decision is daunting enough at any age, but for seniors, the ability to process the changes required to embrace a new life can be hindered by age, disability, bereavement or our universal reluctance the change. However, taking the major first step – and achieving it on your own terms – not only accomplishes that first step; it allows you the flexibility to take subsequent steps much more easily.

Let's look at a real-life example. Vera and her husband bought their two-storey, centre-hall plan house in 1948; raised their family, made friends, business and church connections, and proudly maintained their home over the years. Even after her husband died, Vera updated windows, roof and carpets, but a trip to the basement laundry room ended in a broken hip, a long hospital stay, and much less confident Vera. Her world now consisted of bedroom, bathroom, kitchen and living room TV and armchair. Family suggested a retirement home; others said there's space for a live-in but she couldn't bring herself to live in a smaller house, and didn't want to be crowded by another person living in. Here's how we tackled her problem.

### Design

The first step was to deflect the focus from wanting to live in a large house, to recognizing how Vera was really using her home now, and designing an environment to enhance the realities of her life.

- assess the areas of the house actually being used now, noting the furniture, equipment and functions
- identify zones of activity, rather than actual rooms
- plot zones onto an imaginary floorplan to experiment with the flow of activities
- use floorplan to calculate the amount of square feet are actually needed
- the resulting floorplan should enhance the flow of daily activities; bathroom closer to bedroom; food preparation near the eating area; TV accessible from both chair and bed.

### Designate

Like most people, Vera had chosen her furniture for a specific purpose, so we had to step back and assess each piece on its own merits.

- separate the furniture being used now from its potential function
- for example, a bedroom chest of drawers or can armoire also hold a TV; nesting end tables can be split up; a china cabinet can hold books; a mini-unit can replace a large stereo set; a flat-screen TV can be wall-hung, freeing up surface space
- place the furniture on the floorplan, based on its new function

### De-clutter

Everyone dreads the idea of de-cluttering! "That's not clutter – that's my stuff – and I need it!" When the actual need for an item becomes clear, it's much easier to let it go. Vera's arthritis meant her former needlework was no longer possible – so yes, the sewing room wasn't needed, and the sewing machine

could go, too. Using her desk as a side table and the bookcase for the stereo meant the den's function was covered off, too.

- once pieces are re-purposed, old functions, and the clutter they supported, can be seen and dealt with:
  - o the tea wagon becomes a coffee table, so the silver tea service goes to a granddaughter
  - o the new mini-stereo means the turntable and speakers can go, and the records donated
  - o clearing out the armoire reveals five identical sweaters, two of which can go to charity
- the furniture that no longer has a clear function can now be easily assessed to sell, give to family, donate or re-purpose

## **Discover**

Vera's options had become so much clearer! Knowing exactly what she needed for her current life, she realized she could fit into a small condo and what floorplan she wanted; a retirement home suite and the layout she required; and de-cluttering and discarding unused furniture revealed lots of space for a private caregiver suite. All the options were available to her now.

Which option did Vera choose? It really doesn't matter! The downsizing process allowed her the freedom to make a clear choice, participate in all decisions, and make choices based on a sound analysis of her unique needs. Vera was able to come to terms with this stage of her life, its limitations and its possibilities. And that is – **delightful**.

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