

CONVERSATION NOOKS

How to transform little spaces for deep connections

BY KATHRYN STREETER

If you've ever wondered what to do with an awkward small space in a home, you're not alone. Often these puzzling areas create room for vignettes, an expressive grouping — of candles, plants or photos in a nook intended for deep conversations.

Helene Landau Cartaina, owner of BDH Interior Design, says that these spaces represent areas you wouldn't naturally think of as places to visit with friends and family. Dedicated conversation vignettes can offer places for private catch-ups, for reading and resting. She says it's much more than just throwing two chairs in a corner — these spaces are brought to life with intentionality that reflects purpose.

Transforming awkward spaces into conversation vignettes brings definition to overly generous circulation areas, says Becky Walter, design manager at Sineath Construction. She describes these opportunistic spaces as "transitional" and "left over" spaces, which are unaccounted for, feeding a sense of incompleteness. Claiming these spaces to promote intimacy is especially needed with today's preference for open-plan architecture, she says.

HOW TO IDENTIFY

Cartaina suggests reimagining a lifeless landing, space under a staircase or an unused closet space as a cozy nook. Walter says to pay attention to areas in your home that have been overlooked. Ill-defined pockets where it's unclear where one space ends and another begins offer prime real estate for conversation vignettes.



VALUE ADDED

The rise in remote work, loneliness and lack of community — lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic — leaves many craving in-person experiences, something conversation vignettes allow. Cartaina says she hears this from clients. "During the COVID-19 pandemic, we primarily connected with others using screens, and we're trying to get back to real human connection," she says.

Walter has noticed a trend running parallel to today's global turbulence. "When our world feels really unsafe, we often see people looking back to simpler times and reaching for nostalgia as a means of feeling secure." How it's fleshed out in a home varies. Walter says to first identify meaningful experiences or memories that elicit feelings of comfort and security. This will be



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your guide to craft these "safe" havens — where friends can connect, a mom can nurse, or a parent and teen can have a heartfelt conversation.

As homeowners increasingly wish to age in place, Cartaina says conversation vignettes are attractive because they can adapt over time. These flexible spaces

can be tweaked as the needs of a family change, she says. "Maybe you have a small space in your home with a bench where the kids put on their shoes. Eventually, it can become a gathering point for coffee or cocktails."

HOW TO CREATE NOOKS

Create with intentionality so it's clear what the space

is meant for, Cartaina says. Baskets of toys or books on built-in benches under windows invite you to linger and spend quality time. And throw rugs offer an easy way to define a space, she says, signaling that you've entered a designated zone.

Lighting and paint also bring definition. "A really good way to define these areas is to drop a pendant over the space, to bring the layer of light down and inward so that the light alone helps to define this as a secondary space — and give it coziness and warmth," Walter says. Simply painting the ceiling and adjacent wall the same color anchors a poorly defined space.

Cartaina suggests warm wood tones, varied textures, performance fabrics and plants to bring nature indoors. Walter is a fan of daybeds and furniture fitted with casters for versatility.

Overall, keep the palette calm in these spaces, she says. "Remember, they are not the primary or 'star' space but contributors."

Skip gimmicky design layouts, Walter advises. Instead, uncover what you value because a satisfying home experience is highly personal. It may be candles with a memory-evoking scent, a pillow from your grandmother's home, or stepping well outside the box to set up pingpong on your front porch to encourage family interaction.