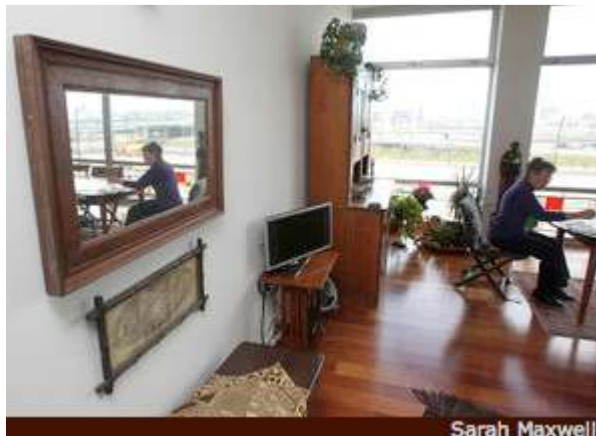




Sarah Maxwell - Urban Pioneer Uses Her Living Space Efficiently

by Sally Friedman
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There's a twinkle in her eye when Sarah Maxwell explains that she "upsized" her living space recently. After a July move, the place she calls home went from 700 square feet to an expansive 800 square feet.

She insists she really doesn't need all the extra space.

Maxwell, a retired Fordham University professor, earnestly believes small is beautiful. And she is living out that credo as an urban pioneer at Philadelphia's Riverfront condominiums on South Front Street.

She was the first person to occupy one of 20 units set aside for seniors in the complex, which also has 20 units for non-seniors, bringing together older and younger generations under one roof and creating a mixed-age "community"

within the downtown area.

"I was ready to move into a senior residence in the Philadelphia suburbs when I heard about this concept. I knew it was what I wanted," says Maxwell, whose last home was in Valhalla, a suburb of New York.

With the move, she became part of Friends Center City Riverfront, a nonprofit entity committed to helping its members actively engage in city life. She actually purchased her unit from Friends Center City, which arranges taxes, insurance, and maintenance, among other things, and provides social and cultural activities and ongoing health-management services.

Maxwell knew Philadelphia well from studying at the University of Pennsylvania for her undergraduate and MBA degrees decades ago. Then she ran a successful advertising agency before becoming vice president of marketing for Aramark.

"That was the era when I lived in a seven-bedroom home in University City with our four children, so I knew what large spaces were all about," she says. "It took a full three months just to clean out the excesses in the basement when I moved. I realized then that I didn't want unnecessary spaces or unnecessary things in my life."

One of the attractions of her current space was not only its compact size, but its connection to the world beyond its walls.

"In Valhalla, I felt cut off from things, but on Front Street I look out at trains and planes, Route 95, the river, and the Ben Franklin Bridge. It's a marvelous view of the world, and I feel linked to all that vitality. It's never dull!"

Nor has Maxwell's life been.

With a Ph.D. earned at Florida International University, she became a national expert in marketing, with a specialty in pricing, and entered academic life at Fordham. Maxwell also is the editor of a book, *The Price Is Wrong*.

She has traveled widely and in the latest chapter of her life is a botanical artist, a passion she discovered while living and teaching in China.

Maxwell's space reflects a life well lived, and a taste for vintage furniture and accessories with not just interest and charm, but also practicality.

"The heart of this place is actually the table where I eat, work, paint, and entertain," explains this 73-year-old dynamo, who surrounds herself with unique art and artifacts.

There's an old dry sink that serves as a room divider between the kitchen, where Maxwell bakes bread most days, and the living area.

A Hoosier cabinet bought for \$8.50 on South Street back in 1950 rests against a back wall and provides welcome storage. Wonderful rugs, including a Berber from Morocco that rests under the "everything" table and an Indian Oriental style, provide accents on a sweep of Brazilian walnut floor.

Lighting glows from Tiffany-style lamps, and accent pieces are scattered throughout the space: an antique child's wooden wheelchair, three native masks from three countries, a statue of St. Francis nestled in a corner, and a collection of bowls are all conversation-starters. A quirky old Fairbanks scale reigns over one corner of the expanse.

"It was a small miracle," Maxwell says of the stained-glass window insets that have followed her from Florida to Valhalla and now to Philadelphia and have fit into windows in every location, bringing vibrant color with them. It is in front of those windows that she does her delicate, painstaking botanical art, which she was recently asked to demonstrate at the Philadelphia International Flower Show to hordes of interested spectators.

Up three steps is a loft bedroom that Maxwell has turned into a kind of urban cocoon. An Amish-style quilt dresses the bed, a corner hutch and rocking chair warm the space, and art of all sorts climbs the walls. One striking bedroom accessory: a fetish piece from Zaire of a male figure that represents the sanctity of the contract, with well-placed, punishing arrows offering an ominous suggestion of what happens to those who violate those agreements. Even the unit's bathroom, where its owner has created a focal point by suspending many colorful necklaces from a curtain rod, is a reminder that she knows how to create both the practical and the aesthetic. Her small living space in Philadelphia has reinforced what she hoped it would.

"This is tiny, but it's home for me. I'm part of a caring community in the larger world," she says, "and I realize just how much that matters."