

Hide and Sleep Efficiencies

A Murphy bed can transform a wee studio into a place for dining, entertaining and more

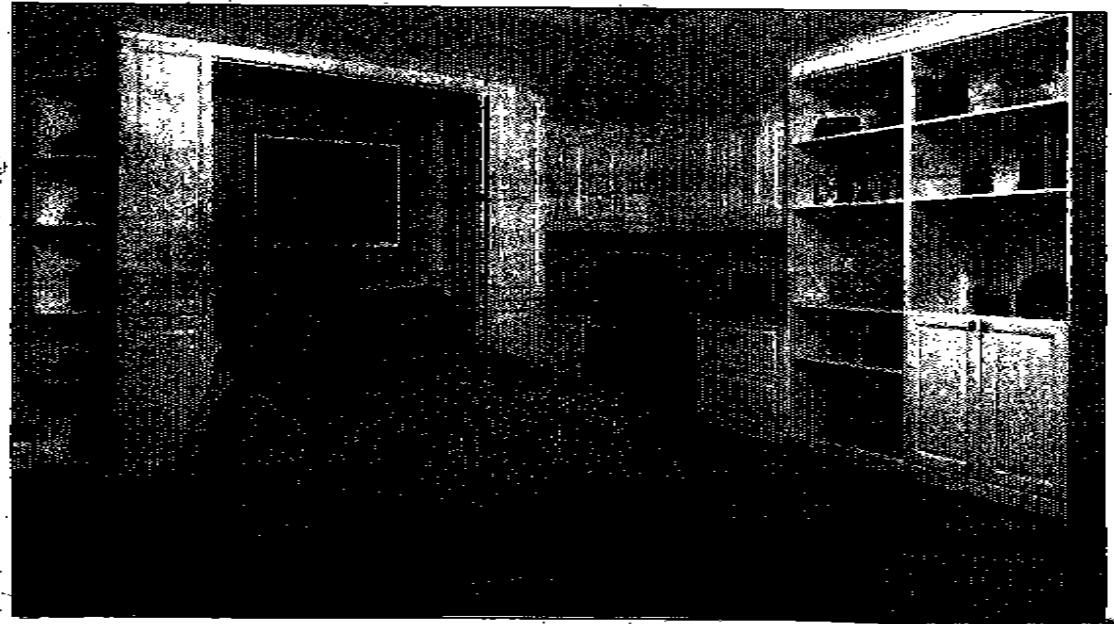
Graduate student Kora Mehta didn't really know what a Murphy bed was until she moved into her Dupont Circle studio. Now, "I'm a huge fan," she said. "It opens up the entire apartment as a living or dining room." And unlike the Murphy beds of old movies, it folds into a large wooden cabinet rather than a bed-shaped hole in the wall.

Most modern wall beds (Murphy is a brand name) look a lot like hulking entertainment centers, though you can still have one installed into a closet as in days of yore. And while the majority are more Ethan Allen than Ikea, More Space Place, a new Murphy Bed store in

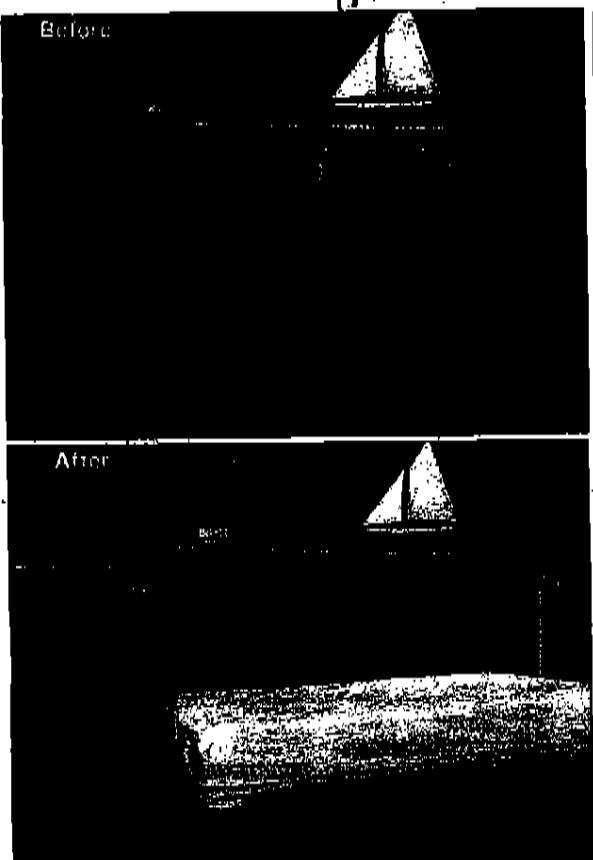
Arlington's Pentagon Row, offers a white laminate finish to match all those cheap bookshelves you bought in college.

Murphy beds have also been available in the Washington area for years at Hardwood Artisans of the Loft Bed Store (plus, they build loft beds). The Dane bed is their cheapest model, starting at around \$2,000 for a twin, with installation and mattress included. They'll install just the mechanism — you add the mattress and housing — for \$710 (twin) to \$1,340 (king).

MSP's most popular model, the Side bed, is also the cheapest,



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HIDDEN DEPTHS: The basement-friendly Side bed, More Space Place's cheapest and most popular model, looks like it could be hiding a TV instead of a twin bed.

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starting at \$1,600 with tax, delivery and installation. Flashier models such as the Library Bed, in which a queen-size mattress jukes behind a pair of sliding bookcases, can cost up to \$4,000, depending on the wood and finish you choose.

Wall beds may save floor space, but they're also big, heavy and firmly attached to the floor, wall or both. They can be uninstalled and moved, but not easily. At both stores, installation is included in the price, and you probably shouldn't go it alone unless you're a builder type.

People have lived to tell the tale, however. Emily Christensen, an engineer, salvaged a discarded Murphy bed and built it into the wall of her Foggy Bottom efficiency — without instructions. It was an arduous process that "took tons of hours," she said. "It was sitting in my apartment for a month before it was finished."

The effort was worth it, she said.

Where to Buy Murphy

HARDWOOD ARTISANS OF THE LOFT BED STORE

www.hardwoodartisans.com

→ 3622 King Street, Alexandria (Bradley Shopping Center); 703-379-7299

→ 14050 Sullyfield Circle, Chantilly; 703-803-7785

→ 2266K Rockville Pike, Rockville (Federal Plaza); 301-770-0337

→ 15005 Farm Creek Drive, Woodbridge; 703-843-1044

MORE SPACE PLACE

more.spaceplace.com

→ 1301 S. Joyce St., Arlington (Pentagon Row Shopping Center); 703-415-2500; Metro: Pentagon City

"No one knows it's there," she marvelled. "I've had parties, and people just assumed that my closet door was the bedroom door." JENNIFER KIM

Buying a condo? Learn about neighborhoods, mortgages and more with these Web sites.

BUYING TOOLS

Bankrate: All things mortgage-rate related. Check out the calculators. www.bankrate.com

D.C. Letha: Covers new area construction. The focus is on lofts, but other new buildings are listed as well. www.dclofts.com

HomeDatabase: Search for properties and agents in the mid-Atlantic area using the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), the granddaddy of real-estate listings. www.homedatabase.com

NEH Associates: Track mortgage data for D.C. and other metro areas. www.nah.com

The Land of J.E.L.: No longer being updated, but still a good source of new construction in Washington. www.jeland.com

National Association of Realtors: Find a qualified Realtor. www.realtor.org

NewsWagon: Browse classifieds around the country. www.newspaperlinks.com

Realty.com: Buying info and, of course, lots of Realtors. www.realtor.com

Washington Post Real Estate: Search the MLS, calculate your mortgage and more. www.washingtonpost.com/realstate

REMODELING RESOURCES

National Association of the Remodeling Industry, D.C. chapter: Find a local contractor. www.narimetrodc.org

National Kitchen and Bath Association: A workbook walks you through kitchen and bathroom remodeling projects. www.nkba.org/consumers

Remodeling magazine: www.remodeling.hw.net
Washington Guide to Home Remodeling: www.washingtonian.com/etc/shopping/homeremodelling.html

Washington Post, News chat: Ask the Home staff for remodeling tips. Every other Thursday at 1 p.m. www.washingtonpost.com/lifeonline

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

Federal National Mortgage

Associates: fannie Mae.com and www.homepath.com (for a step-by-step homebuying guide)
Government National Mortgage Association: ginnie Mae.gov
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Let HUD help you buy a home. www.hud.gov

RESEARCH TOOLS

American Society of News Inspectors: Learn how to find a good home inspector at www.asni.gov

Community Association Institute: The site your condo board is reading. www.caonline.org
CrimeReports: Sign up for free daily or weekly District and Virginia crime reports. www.crimereports.com

Federal Emergency Management Agency: Find out the disasters that are likely to strike your home. www.fema.gov

Freedom of Information Clearinghouse Guidebook: Learn how to compose a FOIA request — useful if you want block-by-block crime information about your potential new neighborhood. www.citizen.org/litigation/free_info. And here's where to file it: mpdc.dcgov/foia.shtml

Magalaw: Peruse condo codes all the live-long day. www.magalaw.com/top/condo.php

Realestate Crime Lab: Study crime reports for your new neighborhood. www.homefair.com/homefair/calc/crime.html

The School Report: Free school reports for all U.S. public schools. www.theschoolreport.com
U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis: Pore over state and local economic data. www.bea.doc.gov

NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

Washington, D.C. GENERAL: about.dcgov
neighborhoodaction.dcgov

NEIGHBORHOOD

Adams Morgan: www.adamsmorgan.net
Capitol Hill: www.capitolhill.org
Cherry Chase: www.cherrychasecitizens.org
Cleveland Park: www.clevelandpark.com
Columbia Heights: www.innercity.org/

Columbia Heights: www.crestwood-dc.org
Dupont Circle: www.dupont-circle.com
Foxhall: www.foxhall.org
Hillcrest: www.hillcrestdc.com
Logan Circle: www.logancircle.org
Mount Pleasant: www.mtpleasantdc.org
Old City: www.oldcitycapitolhill.org
Penn Branch: www.anc7b.org/penn-branch.htm
Petworth: www.petworthdc.net
Shaw: www.shawdc.com
Southwest: www.sawdc.org
Takoma Park: www.takomadc.com
U Street/Cadogan: www.ustrst.com/cana

Maryland

GENERAL: dcmetro.maryland.com
www.mddccommunity.com

COUNTY

Montgomery County: www.montgomerycountymd.gov
Prince George's County: www.co.pg.md.us and www.pgoc.org

NEIGHBORHOOD/CITY

Beltsville: www.beltsville.com
Bladensburg: www.porttowna.com/blad/blad.htm
Bowie: www.cityofbowie.org
Cherry Chase: www.cherrychase.org
Greenbelt: www.ci.greenbelt.md.us
Hyattsville: www.hyattville.org
Lanham: www.iguel.md.us
New Carrollton: www.new-carrollton.md.us
Rockville: www.rockvillemd.gov
Salt Pines: www.seatpleasantmd.gov
Silver Spring: www.gsscc.org
Takoma Park: www.cityoftakomapark.org

Northern Virginia

GENERAL: www.nvaweb.net
www.novaregion.org

NEIGHBORHOOD/CITY

Alexandria: ci.alexandria.va.us
Arlington: www.co.arlington.va.us and arlingtonvirginiausa.com
Fairfax: www.co.fairfax.va.us
Fall's Church: www.ci.falls-church.va.us

CONDOLiving

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but at \$91,000, her studio (or efficiency — Realtors use the terms interchangeably) was an affordable way to get off the rental track. "It's small, but it has a small mortgage," she said. A neighbor recently sold a similar unit (sans the renovated kitchen and bathroom) for \$60,000 more than Catanzano paid.

Studios are usually occupied by singles, and Washington has one of the highest rates of single-person households in the country: 44 percent, according to the 2000 Census. (Some of the area's tiny condos are original bachelor pads in historic buildings.) They're also a good bet for buyers who live in Washington part-time for business. "I have some clients who say 'I travel constantly, I really just need some place to throw my hat,'" Zanelli said.

For Carrie Simmons, a teacher, living in town trumped having a separate bedroom. This summer, she bought a studio in an Adams Morgan co-op building for \$118,000. It has just 450 square feet, but Simmons loves the location. "I'm single and I wanted to live in the city," she said. "I park my car on Friday and I don't move it until Monday."

The coziest part, though, is that it's all hers. "I know I'm not going to be here forever, but it's a good investment," Simmons said.

That wasn't always the case. "Historically, [efficiencies] were about the worst investment you could buy," said Roby Thompson, an agent with Long & Foster in Woodley Park who's been working in Washington real estate since 1987. Many efficiencies sold then didn't start gaining value until he early to mid-1990s, he said. Investors bought them to rent out, and parents bought them for their college-age children instead of paying for dorms.

In the last five to 10 years, though, a number of forces have created a hot market for small condos and co-ops. Tax breaks for first-time buyers, more flexible lending options and the high prices of larger homes have all riced up demand.

In addition, more people are buying efficiencies as their homes, rather than as rentals. In areas of downtown D.C. such as Georgetown, Dupont Circle and



ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE: Carrie Simmons painted one wall of her Adams Morgan studio cranberry and eschewed window drapes to make the room feel larger.

Logan Circle, even small studios can now sell for \$200,000 or more—a price unthinkable just five years ago.

In the past, conventional wisdom held that owners needed to hold onto a home for about five years to break even. That rule hasn't applied in the Washington

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REAL ESTATE AGENT

market of late, where more rapid growth has been the norm. "We sell a studio as fast as any other size real estate today," said Lawrence Savage, of Lawrence Savage Real Estate, a brokerage located in Georgetown.

Rey Post, a Realtor with Tuttle Taylor and Rankin, held an open house for a Kalorama studio with less than 500 square feet earlier this month. About 60 people showed up, and several submitted offers right away. It sold for more than \$10,000 above the asking price of \$169,900. But Thompson cautions against get-rich-quick expectations. "Everybody seems to think they're going to make a fortune," he said.

If the market slows down — as some say it inevitably will — properties will become more difficult to sell, which could mean trouble for owners who need to move for work or suddenly need space for two. "If you're looking at buying a studio just to buy, it's a mistake," Thompson said.

Some buildings allow owners to rent properties out, often after living in the unit for a certain amount of time. If this is the plan, weigh the carrying costs—the total monthly payments for a property's mortgage, taxes and condo or co-op fees—against how much the property could fetch in rent. Carrying costs and rents used

to be much closer but, while condo prices have skyrocketed, rents have remained relatively stable, creating a gap. Thompson warns that very small apartments can be difficult to rent, and that tenants typically don't stay more than a year or two.

"Buy for your lifestyle," Zanelli advised. He's seen owners of small condos and co-ops find clever ways to make the most of their space, like installing Murphy beds. "You're thinking 'Laverne and Shirley,'" he said. "But now they're cabinet units and they're very attractive." Furniture stores like Ikea sell tables that operate on the same principle, folding against the wall when not in use.

With help from her interior designer sister, Simmons, the Adams Morgan co-op owner, painted one wall an accent color — cranberry — to make her space appear longer, and she avoided drapes to give the windows cleaner lines. She'd like to renovate the kitchen as well — after all, she expects to stay for about five years.

"It's definitely home now," she said. DENISE KRANTEN

Live Larger Than Your Studio

Your ideas don't have to be small just because your space is. Some advice from interior decorators:

- Don't be afraid of strong color even in a very small space. It's inviting.
- In rooms with low ceilings, draperies hung from ceiling to floor give the illusion of height.
- A tiny room needn't have only small-scale furniture. A few bold pieces are better.
- Instead of expensive frames, paint colored squares on the wall to set off photographs.
- In small spaces, try using only one fabric, with touches of one or two others as accents.
- Splurge for a halogen spotlight, which is the only light that shows true color.
- Use old things in new ways, like an 18th-century fish print in a \$10 Ikea frame backed in a piece of red gingham fabric.
- If you can't afford expensive fabric, use expensive trim. JUAN KONCIUS (WASHINGTON POST)