

Seamless downsizing: Navigating the transition to a cosier retirement lifestyle

As the nest empties and retirement beckons, many people find themselves contemplating a significant lifestyle change by downsizing to a smaller, more manageable home – however, the decision to embrace a cosier living space comes with both exciting opportunities and unique considerations.



Source: Supplied.

“Moving home ranks very high on the stress scale no matter one’s stage of life or the reason for the move, but it can be especially traumatic when downsizing as it involves coming to terms with leaving behind a lifetime of memories and parting with cherished possessions,” says Cobus Odendaal, chief executive officer of Lew Geffen Sotheby’s International Realty in Johannesburg and Randburg.

“There are also more factors to consider and decisions to be made once you’ve decided to make the move; from what to keep and discard to which type of property to move into as well as calculating monthly costs into the equation.

“Very often, people who have lived in their current homes for many years have no idea what suitable and affordable property options are available, nor which areas will offer them the best value for money.”

He says that in order to transplant one’s life into a new, smaller home with the least amount of stress, it is crucial to plan ahead, so if you are even considering the possibility of downsizing, now is a good time to gradually begin the process by

getting rid of things you haven't used in years.

"Start the process slowly and research property options in areas you like, as well as the potential moving costs," Odendaal says.

He offers the following tips for making a seamless home and lifestyle transition:

- **Assess your lifestyle needs:** Consider how you envision spending your retirement years. Are you seeking an urban setting with easy access to amenities, or does a quieter suburban or rural environment appeal to you?

Think about your hobbies, travel plans, and social preferences to determine the type of community that aligns with your aspirations.

- **Right-sizing your space:** Downsizing is not just about reducing square footage; it's about finding the right-sized space that meets your needs and enhances your lifestyle. Evaluate your daily routines and prioritise the features that matter most.

Do you need extra bedrooms for guests, or would a cosy one-bedroom suffice? Consider open floor plans, efficient storage solutions, and spaces that can adapt to various activities to maximise functionality.

- **Financial considerations:** Downsizing often comes with financial benefits, including reduced mortgage payments, property taxes, and utility costs. However, it's essential to carefully assess the financial implications of the move.

Factor in potential relocation costs, real estate market conditions, and any additional expenses associated with the downsizing process. Consult with financial advisors to ensure that the decision aligns with your long-term financial goals.

- **Decluttering and streamlining possessions:** One of the most liberating aspects of downsizing is the opportunity to declutter and streamline your possessions. Take inventory of your belongings and determine what items hold sentimental value, what you genuinely need, and what can be part of a fresh start for someone else.

Embrace the decluttering process as a chance to curate a home filled with items that bring joy and purpose.



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- **Adapting to low-maintenance living:** The allure of downsizing often lies in the promise of a lower-maintenance lifestyle. Choose a home with features that require minimal upkeep, such as a smaller yard, energy-efficient appliances, and durable, easy-to-clean materials.

Consider communities with homeowners' associations that handle exterior maintenance, allowing you to focus on enjoying your home without the burden of constant upkeep.

- **Accessible design for aging in place:** As retirees, it's wise to plan for the future by incorporating accessible design elements that support aging in place. Look for homes with features like single-storey layouts, wide doorways, and step-free entrances. Consider lever-style door handles, walk-in showers, and well-lit spaces to enhance safety and convenience as you age.

- **Proximity to healthcare services:** Healthcare accessibility becomes increasingly important as we get older. When downsizing, consider the proximity of your new home to healthcare services, including hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies. Access to quality healthcare contributes to a sense of security and ensures that medical needs can be addressed promptly.

- **Embracing community connection:** Downsizing doesn't mean sacrificing community connection so if you are a sociable person or couple, look for neighbourhoods with vibrant social scenes, community events, and amenities that align with your interests.

Consider the availability of clubs, classes, and recreational facilities that foster a sense of belonging and provide opportunities to connect with like-minded neighbours.

- **Planning for long-term comfort:** As you search for the perfect downsized home, prioritise features that contribute to long-term comfort. Invest in quality furnishings, comfortable seating, and an interior that will allow for a layout that accommodates potential mobility changes.

Consider future-proofing your home with technologies that enhance safety and convenience, such as smart home devices and age-friendly modifications.

- **Emotional considerations:** Downsizing is not just a logistical process; it's an emotional journey. Acknowledge and embrace the emotional aspects of letting go of a larger family home. Take the time to say goodbye to the memories while eagerly anticipating the new chapter that awaits. Seek support from family, friends, and professionals who understand the emotional nuances of downsizing.



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- **Exploring new hobbies and interests:** With newfound time and a downsized space, you now have the opportunity to explore new hobbies and interests. Choose a home that accommodates your passions, whether it's a dedicated art studio, a cosy reading nook, or a space for gardening. Downsizing is a chance to create a living environment that aligns with your evolving interests and aspirations.

- **Utilising professional guidance:** Consider hiring a real estate agent who has experience in senior living or downsizing. Professionals can assist with market research, provide valuable insights, and guide you through the intricacies of selling and purchasing a home.

Odendaal says that although not everyone looks forward to downsizing, it actually marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter and has several compelling advantages.

"The financial benefits include freeing up a considerable amount of money each month that can be put to good use, such as boosting your retirement fund, decreasing debt or saving for an overseas family holiday," says Odendaal.

"It also frees up time to do more of the things you enjoy but seldom had the chance to do as compact homes generally require less maintenance, which means home-owners can get out and enjoy life rather than spending weekends mowing the lawn.

"By carefully considering these factors, you can navigate the downsizing process with confidence and create a downsized haven that embodies comfort, convenience, and the joy of a simpler, more intentional way of living."