



Brooklyn Design Challenge: The Railroad Apartment

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There are a few different types that show up regularly in Brooklyn apartment hunts—the loft, the railroad, the brownstone (to name a few). They all have their charms, and their challenges. Who hasn't griped about a lack of closet space, a wall that's just a tiny bit too short for the couch you love, the way noise travels from the kitchen to the bedroom when there's no walls, or that weird corner that doesn't really serve any purpose other than to collect junk and dust bunnies?

We talked to local interior designers for tips on how to enhance different apartment types, whether you're a renter or a homeowner, and we'll be bringing you their best suggestions over the next couple months in this series.

First up, the railroad apartment. Ubiquitous throughout much of Brooklyn, they're basically a straight line of rooms, one after another. In some places a railroad has a long hallway that runs along the outside of these rooms, or two entrances at either end of the common, exterior hallway. But for the most part, when you're talking Brooklyn railroads, it means you have to walk through one room to get to the next. This can be great for couples, and terrible for roommates, since one roomie usually has to walk through the other's room to get to the rest of the apartment.

Beyond dating awkwardness, railroads are difficult because of their lack of closets, small rooms, and compartmentalized layouts. Interior designer **Dionne Rivera** knows firsthand how challenging railroads can be—she's been living in one in Park Slope for more than a decade with her two children.

Lowcost tips: For renters and anyone with a limited budget, she recommends simple fixes to weird spaces. Radiator covers improve the look of a room and can turn a dead space into a shelf, she says. Also, go tall with your furniture to maximize the vertical space. Lots of railroads have high ceilings that can become wasted space if you don't look to the sky for storage. Find a tall particle board armoire or cupboard to put in a room and then cover it with barkcloth wallpaper or something offbeat. "I have one that I covered with old sheets of music and then varnished," she says.





More Storage: **Katherine Hammond**, an interior stylist in Prospect Heights, suggests taking out closet doors that open (“and prevent you from putting anything in that area”) and replacing them with sliding closet doors instead, so you can move that bed or chest closer to the wall. **Marshall Wilson**, who also **blogs** about his own design finds, is one of her favorite custom cabinet makers, and often makes these doors for her. With his help, she also found a creative way to hang clothes in a tiny kids’ room within a railroad, by installing a cute clothes tree (pictured at top) right onto the wall. (The kids liked it so much, they decided they didn’t want to cover it with clothes, so the hooks were never installed.) “And make sure the closets are extremely organized,” says Hammond, who designs custom solutions herself. If you’re on a budget, she likes the Elfa system from The Container Store.



Investment: If you have more to spend, Rivera advocates for lots of custom built-ins. Most standard shelves are 12” deep, in a narrow railroads she says go tall, all the way to the ceiling, with shallower, 9” shelves. And, she’s come up with a solution for those interior windows that often connect rooms within a railroad, for airflow. “I have a woodworker who makes custom windows with panes of frosted glass that look great,” she says. Janusz Mioduszewski built her windows and her built-in shelving and office area, and can be reached at 516-776-2956 or miodekj@yahoo.com. “He is really amazing and I would highly recommend him,” she says.

For Kids: “There are some amazing models of Murphy beds these days,” Rivera says. She likes **Resource Furniture**, especially their Murphy bunk beds.

The Hallway: While classic New York railroads lack one, there are plenty of railroad-style apartments with a long interior hallway. To open up that narrow space, Hammond suggests using one light color for the walls, trim and doors. You can even paint the floor the same color. “It will make the hallway seem much larger and all of the doorways less obvious.”

Special challenge: The roommate problem. This one is tough. Many railroad rooms are quite small and often the doorways (which may lack doors) are near the center of the room, making it difficult to set up a wall or screen for privacy. If you do have the space though, Rivera likes **Raydoor** for their functional and beautiful temporary walls and sliding doors, and minimal impact on the apartment.

Sent by Annaliese and Nicole. Photos from top via **Kat Howard/Apartment Therapy**, courtesy of Katherine Hammond, and courtesy of Dionne Rivera.



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