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THE NIGHT BEFORE



In a Southwest Washington apartment overlooking the Potomac, the sleek dining table, on casters, can be set for entertaining at a moment's notice.

THE MORNING AFTER



When it's time for work, John C. Straub, above, has yards of storage and even a paper shredder behind those floor-to-ceiling doors.

PHOTOS BY MARK FINKENSTADT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Turning Tables in the Dining Room

Let's get real about the dining room.

If you don't like to cook and almost never entertain, why give over valuable space to a large table and six or eight empty chairs?

If your style tilts totally casual — dinners at the kitchen counter, in front of the TV or out by the grill — a ceremonial dining room seems utterly extraneous.

If you live in tight quarters where every inch counts, a rarely used space makes no sense at all.

"It's a room that needs to metamorphose," says architect Sarah Susanka, author of six books about living in small, well-designed homes.

By ANNIE GROER

Washington Post Staff Writer

For John C. Straub and his wife, Harriet F. Adams, that means sleek floor-to-ceiling doors that, when closed, look like minimalist white walls behind a gleaming black table that seats six. With a slight push, the six three-foot panels pivot open to reveal shelves, drawers, a sound system, a desk and a work chair.

"I'm used to an executive desk, so when I have a lot of

paperwork, all I have to do is swivel around and spread out on the dining table," Straub says.

The design by Washington architect Simon Jacobsen functions so well that Straub gave up the downtown office he used for his work as president of the Future of Russia Foundation. "People come over for dinner and unless we open the doors, they have no idea what's back there."

Susanka has watched this trend grow. "When I started writing in 1996, I observed that most people were building dining rooms because they were supposed to; all the real estate

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