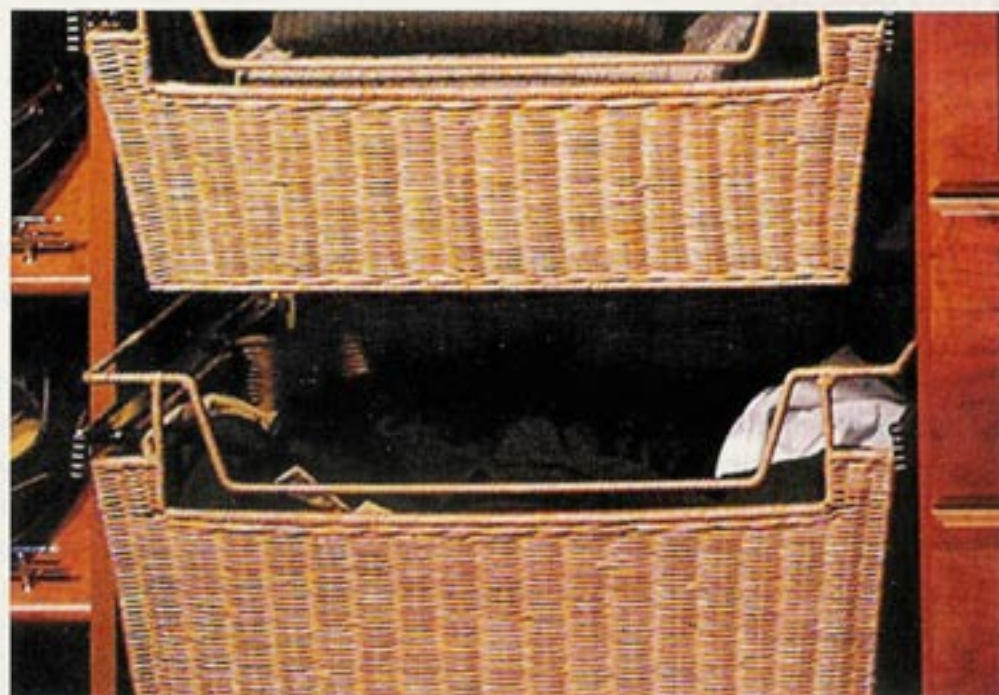
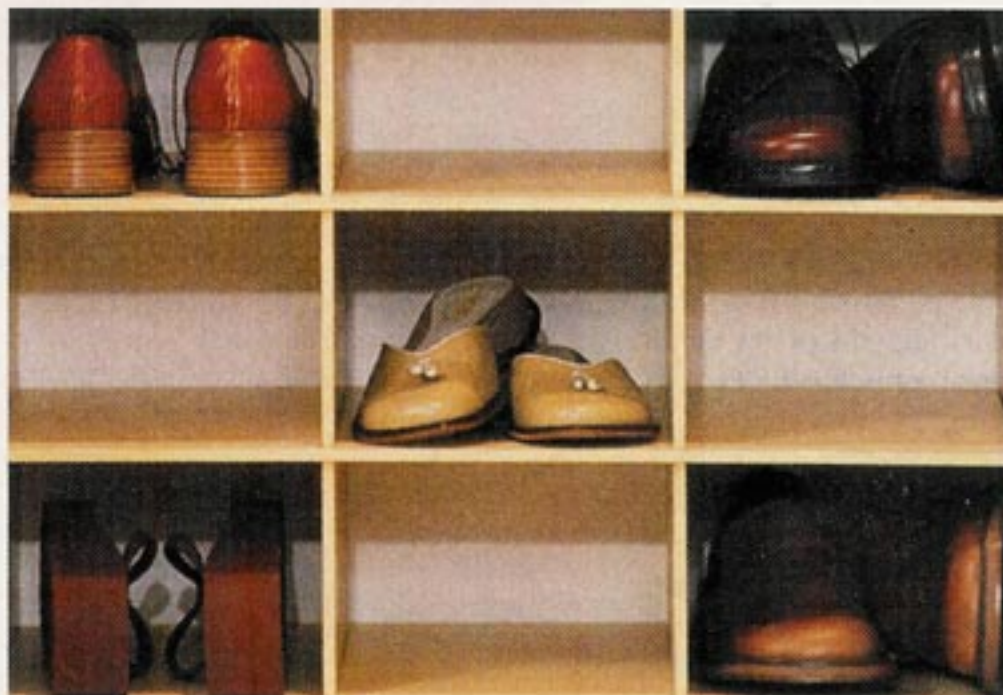


in pursuit of Simplicity

Fulfill the urge to purge. Organizing your space will revitalize your life!

by Diana Mirel





Drowning in clutter? Hyperventilating at the mere thought of the chaos lurking behind the closet door? Suffocating in an endless pile of junk mail littering your gorgeous new condo?

If this sounds all too familiar, it's time to come up for air and breathe life into your living space. While de-cluttering your home or office may be daunting, maintaining an organized space can revitalize all areas of your life.

"Being unorganized creates so much stress and you lose so much time when you're not organized," observes Tamara Wiley, professional organizer and owner of Amphora. "Life's too hard as it is. Organizing just helps make things happen a little more easily, a little more smoothly and with a little more control."

Inspired, yet? We thought so...

LIVING RIGHT

Living or working in a disorganized environment can wreak havoc. "Your house is a reflection of your life," says Peter Walsh, organizer on TLC's Clean Sweep. "If you feel overwhelmed at home or buried in stuff, that's going to reflect in your life."

Living with clutter can affect your relationships and mentality. "I often ask people what their bedrooms are like," explains Peter. "If it's full of clutter and disorganization, then it could have a negative impact on your relationship. Having less clutter and having an organized, breathing home really enhances your life. Socially, you feel more open to entertaining and having guests over. Psychologically, you'll feel better."

GET GOING

As with any difficult task, organizing begins with a positive attitude. "You have to be emotionally prepared for the fact that this is a tough exercise," advises Peter. "A good attitude is absolutely fundamental to be able to wade through a lot of clutter, particularly clutter that's been accumulated over time."

It's crucial to start small with clear, easy-to-achieve goals. "To get the process started, figure

out a task and stick with it," suggests Tamara. Begin by focusing on one room or one area in a room, like the cabinets in your kitchen, your makeup drawer in the bathroom or your closet in the bedroom.

Professional organizer and owner of Organized With Style, Karli Bertocchi, recommends first focusing on things you use most often. For example, she recommends sorting out items in the kitchen by putting everything in like categories. "Weed your stuff out," she says. "With utensils, you don't need two or three of everything; get rid of the rusty or damaged ones."

Don't want to brave a major sorting project solo? Enlist an honest friend to help. "Start with someone who is a de-cluttering buddy," says Peter. "It should be someone who's not emotionally involved and someone who will give you an objective opinion—someone who will honestly say, 'That jumpsuit from the '80s is never going to come back in style.'"

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

One of the biggest problems in home organization is parting with items that hold an emotional value or connection. Taking inventory of what you're up against will help you open your mind—and clear out your home. "Look around and ask yourself, 'Have I used this in the past 12 months?'" suggests Peter. "Then, look at each room and ask, 'What is the function of this room? Does the stuff you have in this room help with that function or impede it? If it helps with the function, that's fantastic. But if not, you really need to reorganize that space.'"

If you're emotionally attached to certain items in your home, treat them right—or let them go. "What you have should be honored, displayed and respected," says Peter. "If you have a whole lot of stuff not displayed appropriately and not honored, then you need to start rooting that out of your living space so your home can behave as it should."

If you have a hard time getting rid of something you've had for a long time, you don't have to go cold turkey. "If you can't part with things, pack them up in a box and get them out of there," says Karli. "Give yourself a date, maybe six months, and then come back to the box. If you haven't needed or desired those things, it's time to go. You can give yourself time to part with things."

JUST TRASH IT

Often people's first thought when organizing their home is to rush to the nearest organizing store with the thought, "A closet organizer will be the answer to all my problems!" If only it were that easy.

"One of the biggest things people say to me is that they don't have enough space," says Peter. "But, overwhelmingly what I see is that people have too much stuff. Before you buy organizers the first step is to purge."

To begin the purging process, start sorting. Tamara recommends creating three piles: one to keep, one to throw away and one I-don't know pile. Although you don't want to end up with an I-don't-know pile, it's important to keep the sorting process quick to help stay focused. Then at the end, revisit the I-don't-know pile and make decisions.

When it comes to purging your clothes (a major source of clutter for many of us), pay attention to what you wear and what you need. "If you haven't worn something in a year, get rid of it," advises Karli.

Sounds so simple, right? Unfortunately parting with clothes that we *might* still wear can be tough. To determine what you wear most often, Peter suggests putting all your clothes on hangers facing the same way and turning them the other way when you wear them. After six months, you'll see very clearly what you've worn and what you haven't, which should help you make a decision about what items you no longer need.

X MARKS THE SPOT

After you have purged, it's time to figure out what to do with all the stuff you're keeping. Peter begins home organization by creating zones within the living space based on the function of each room. For example, finding a zone for mail (another top clutter causer) will instantly clean up mail littered throughout the house. "You need to determine the zone where you keep your mail," says Peter. "It's not on the bedside table, not in the bathroom, not on the kitchen countertop, not on the coffee table. The mail has to have a home."

Similarly, in the bedroom Peter suggests determining a dressing zone, where you hang your clothes, put your clothes away and where the hamper is. This will help avoid having clothes sprawled across the bathroom floor, in the hallway leading to the bedroom or draped over the living room sofa. "If you think of each room or each function in your house in terms of zones, it will keep stuff in that area, keep the place organized and help you identify the items that need to be in that area. It makes finding things easier and, most importantly, it makes cleaning the area a dream," encourages Peter.

KEEP IT CLEAN

After completing an organization overhaul, you'll likely feel like remodeling your entire home. "Everyone gets inspired [after organizing] because it's such a relief to get rid of all these things and make decisions," says Karli. "People are ready to redo everything."

But this is no time to fall into old unorganized habits. Clearing your house of clutter doesn't give you a green light to bring in loads of new items that will eventually pile up into new clutter. Having an organized home is an ongoing process. "It's not something you've solved today for the rest of your life," says Tamara. "Staying organized takes discipline and it takes time."

Think of organizing as part of your daily life. "It's about routines," says Peter. "If you have a clutter-free house and if your stuff is in zones, it's very easy to clean your home. It will take you less than five minutes to clean a room."

Upkeep is key. "You have to set aside time daily to keep your space organized," says Karli. "You have to keep on it." ■

QUICK TIPS

FILING IS FUN? "Setting up filing systems gives people a handle on what to do with all their stuff," says Organizing With Style's owner, Karli Bertocchi. "Filing is such an unfun task that you've got to make it fun. Files in your favorite color that are fun to look at and are easy to use are much more likely to be used than army-green hanging files that are beat-up. It's a small thing, but it makes a difference."

SIMPLIFY YOUR BILLS. Buy a 12-month accordion file, recommends TCL's Clean Sweep host Peter Walsh. "When you pay your bills drop them into that month's file," he says.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER. "My favorite thing in my house, which I actually saw in a magazine, is hanging a clear shoe sorter in the front hall closet to hold mittens, hats, sunglasses and all that stuff that mounts up at the front door," says Tamara Wiley, professional organizer and owner of Amphora.

TRASH UNWANTED ITEMS ON THE SPOT. For instance, deal with mail immediately rather than letting it build up. "I open the mail every day over the garbage can," says Karli. "People need to make

a decision about their mail and take action—read it, send it, copy it, file it or toss it. It takes time, but if you do it once today, you won't have to do double duty tomorrow."

OWN SEVERAL WASTEBASKETS. If trash receptacles are available, then unwanted items will quickly find their place. Place a wastebasket in every room, even in closets. "There should be a receptacle in your closet for dry cleaning bags or tags from new clothes," says Diane Snow, a Chicago-based professional organizer and owner of Arrange A-Z.

UNIFORMITY IS GOOD. Especially when it comes to multiples of necessary items, such as towels and clothes hangars. "When you have uniform hangars and your clothes are hanging the right way, your closet will always look neat," promises Diane.

ITEMIZE A ROOM'S FUNCTION. Make a list of everything you do in each room, Diane recommends. For instance, in the kitchen, a client might not just prepare meals there, but also check the kids' homework, pay bills, retrieve phone messages and visit with guests. "Have a dedicated space for that specific activity," she says. ■

Got Junk? Sell It on eBay

If one woman's trash is truly another woman's treasure, then the almighty treasure hunt has traditionally been yard sales. Not so much anymore. A little website called eBay is changing all that. Just how effective is the virtual secondhand store? TLC's Clean Sweep host Peter Walsh put eBay to the test in a "Cash in the Closet" experiment, which compared selling things on eBay versus holding a yard sale.

eBay enlisted the Karon family and the Malia family, who both live in Barrington on the same street and had similar things to give away. The Karon family gathered things to give away on eBay using an eBay Trading Assistant, who came in, assessed the for-sale items and posted them on the web site. Meanwhile, the Malia family organized a garage sale. The next time you entertain the thought of hosting a yard sale, consider these results of a few of their similar items...

The Karon Family

(used eBay Trading Assistant)

- Burley bike trailer with walk 'n' roller kit (children's stroller attachment for a bike): \$255
- Three pairs of women's New Balance running shoes: \$51
- Used Ethan Allen denim couch and matching chair: \$157.50

The Malia Family

(held a garage sale)

- Baby jogging stroller: \$60
- Three pairs of women's New Balance running shoes: \$4.50
- Wicker headboard and dresser: \$30 ■

Photo: This Page Courtesy of Closet Organizing Systems

