



Cutting the Clutter

Create a clean, tidy space that you'll want to come home to, with these ideas for organizing and eliminating excess.

By Connie K. Ho



LEFT, FROM TOP: PHOTOGRAPHEEU/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; MVSUALSHUTTERSTOCK.COM; TOP RIGHT: CARLA NICHIA/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; BOTTOM ROW: COURTESY OF OCEAN ESTATE SERVICES



Using vertical space, like the kitchen cabinets shown in this room designed by Payton Addison, help stow away clutter and keep it out of sight for a streamlined look.

It's been said that home is where the heart is. Here, children grow from small tots to strapping teens while young couples grow from naive parents to expert wranglers. And, over time, homes become filled with family memories—but also lots of material possessions. With school back in session for fall, it's inevitable that the clutter grows as kids' backpacks, homework and sports gear once again enter the mix and are left strewn about the entryway, living room and dining table. But with a little organization, and by weeding out some unnecessary goods that have piled up, homeowners can declutter their space. While this makes it easier to navigate through rooms and find things once buried in the piles, a tidy abode can also have a positive effect on one's mental and emotional state.

Many Americans report higher stress levels when their home isn't clean and organized, and scientists have even shown that clutter can impact our ability to focus. Dr. Gayani DeSilva, a psychiatrist at the Laguna Family Health Center, has seen the negative impact a cluttered space can have on patients. She notes that there's not one solution that fits all, but she encourages people

to start by completing simple tasks.

"I tell them to look at it one square foot at a time," DeSilva says. "Don't put any pressure on yourself, but if you feel up to it you can do one more foot. The next day, do one more foot, and pretty soon it'll all get done. Most people have to take it in small chunks just to get started, and then the chunks can get bigger and bigger as they get more comfortable."

WHAT TO TOSS, WHAT TO KEEP

Professional organizer Tanya Bond of Laguna Hills-based Functioning Spaces agrees that it's important to take small steps when organizing a space. Apart from recognizing the clutter, Bond says individuals must be ready to make a commitment to change the space and be ready to let go of items. The organizing process can range from weeks and months to years.

"You have to dedicate time to it," Bond says. "The goal is to minimize, and minimizing is actually what leads to successful organization."

When it comes to items with sentimental value, Bond has a few useful tips in organizing those possessions. One piece of advice is

to save the items that mean the most to you. If there are gifts from family members that bring up certain memories, choose one or two from a set and donate the rest. Another tip is to pick a price point: If the item can be bought below a certain price if needed later, then it's not necessary to keep.

"We will still be the same person whether or not we have those items," Bond says. "Memories will not be lost just because something has been given away."

She also suggests finding a partner, spouse or friend to help in the decluttering process, but, if it's too much work, it may be time to call in a professional. "You can sit down, go through your belongings together and, just by having someone there, hold you a little more accountable," Bond says.

When trying to determine what items to donate, Bond advises keeping a few charities in mind. Picking a nonprofit with a cause that means something to you—and, thus, knowing your items will go to good use—can help to let go.

Bond notes that items should only be put in a sell pile if the person is really good with time



An organized space can have a calming effect; clutter can increase stress and impede our ability to focus.

GET ORGANIZED

Investing in the right storage pieces, like these items available at local stores, can help corral clutter.

The **GOOD GRIPS POP CONTAINER**

by OXO can be used in the kitchen, mainly for dry goods such as flour, cereal, rice, nuts and snacks. The 4-quart container keeps food products fresh, visible and organized, \$18.99, at Coast Hardware. (949-497-4404; coastacehardware.com)



Designed by Theresa Arns for Menu, this **TURNING TABLE** is a great example of furniture that can be utilized as an organizational piece while keeping the look of a space in mind. The side table's top lifts off to reveal storage space for TV remotes, magazines, sunglasses, books, tablets, phones, chargers and more, \$600, at Vertigo Home. (949-494-7547; vertigohome.us)



The Cape Cod Coffee Table features shelves for baskets to stash remotes and other items, \$795, at Cottage Furnishings. (949-497-3121; cottagefurnishings.com)

management and is going to get rid of them at an upcoming garage sale or immediately post the item on an online sales platform. If not sold within two weeks, it should be donated.

"A lot of people think the garage sales are a great idea because they can make some money and, in theory, they are," Bond says. "But if you are unorganized to begin with or struggle with clutter, putting items aside in your garage sale [pile] is not a good idea because they're just going to sit there."

CREATING A PLAN

The next step, after clearing out items in piles, is to visualize an organization plan. Social media sites like Pinterest can inspire ideas. A professional organizer can also help provide a visual plan for how to set up a useful storage system.

Dan Ahrens, estate liquidator and home organizer at Ocean Estate Services in Laguna Beach, also has experience with decluttering. The company works on a variety of projects including downsizing, organizing and managing estate sales, and Ahrens notes that the process can sometimes be emotional.

"The projects are really overwhelming a lot of times," says Ahrens, who often brings a large dumpster to the site. "A lot of people keep things around they haven't used. If you're not getting use out of the items, then they're occupying space and that should be devoted to other things that you do enjoy and would like to have access to."

Ahrens encourages creating a space that is

open and comfortable, similar to how the space in a hotel room might be a laid out in a neat and tidy fashion.

"If you go to a hotel or a restaurant, you're not going to see stuff displayed all over the place," Ahrens says, emphasizing the importance of minimalism. "It's easy to navigate through ... and things are well thought out."

ROOM BY ROOM

A slightly different game plan may be required for tackling each room in the home. For example, the kitchen is one of the spaces where families often gather, but items tend to pile up. Payton Addison of Payton Addison Interior Design Atelier in Laguna Beach, emphasizes the need to have the right equipment.

Addison works on many new home construction projects and collaborates with clients to figure out what works best for their lifestyle. She has worked on kitchens that have incorporated features such as wine cellars to organize wine bottles, cabinet drawers designed to keep cutlery stored neatly away and even cabinets configured specifically for cookie sheets.

"When your workspace or your living space is cluttered, then your mind is cluttered," Addison says. "When you come home, it should be your sanctuary, and it should be nice and organized and clean and fresh."

She recommends looking at the logic and functionality of spaces. "If you're in your kitchen, for instance, your knives should be in one drawer," Addison explains. "Everything should be very



The first step to decluttering is deciding which items to keep, throw out, sell or donate, followed by implementing an organizational system with drawers and bins for each item to be stored, like in this crafting room transformed from the messy space at left to the tidy room above by professional organizer Tanya Bond of Functioning Spaces.

methodical, and it's almost like building a puzzle."

Making use of vertical space for added storage is also key, as is creating a specific spot for everything to go: folders, trays or standing file boxes for each kid's homework, for example. A rack by the door for storing shoes, hooks for hanging jackets and cubbies for backpacks provide places to immediately stash things upon entering the home.

And when you bring in mail, go through it right away, tossing advertising mailers into the recycle bin and putting bills to be paid in a designated box or tray.

Claudia Morales of Claudia Interior Design in Laguna Beach, believes in streamlining the look of a space. She advises buying furniture, whether an antique trunk or a sideboard, that can hold items such as books or DVDs. Some pieces, like

ottomans, can double as storage space with a seat that also serves as a lid to keep toys or blankets tucked out of sight.

Another idea: Antique cabinets can serve as storage systems for office supplies. "You can still organize things in it and make it look attractive," Morales says.

She also reminds homeowners to look at the scale of items and how they get laid out in the space. It is good to measure the piece to make sure it's not too large or too small for the room. This will help create plenty of storage while preserving a functional space that's also pleasing to the eye.

"It's extraordinarily satisfying to be able to create spaces for my clients that they have never dreamed about before," Morales says.

For those attempting to organize the bedroom,

closets are a necessity to manage wardrobe and accessories. Sheldon Harte, founder and principal of Harte Brownlee & Associates in Laguna Beach, notes that it's all in the details. He regularly works with his clients to individualize the experience, whether that's organizing clothes by style or color.

"Everybody has somewhat different focuses," Harte says. "There's no one true way that everybody does it."

However, everything should have its own place in a closet, Harte notes. "If you're organized and efficient, you're going to have less clutter and [be able to] store more things," he says.

In the end, organizing your house is not only practical to make sure you can find things, but can provide a sense of peace—helping you to fully enjoy the sanctuary of your space. **LBM**