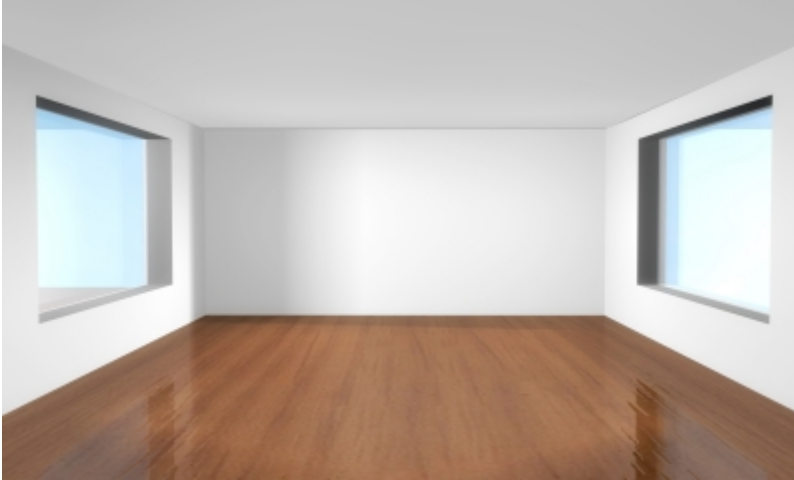


Tidy Up

Twelve Secrets to a Simplified Home

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The holidays are over. The last gift has been unwrapped, the last bottle of champagne uncorked, and you are inclined to collapse on the sofa with a good book and a foot soak. Looking around, however, you realize that you've got an influx of new things. Everywhere. And there's seemingly nowhere to put them.

Or, maybe when you look around, your feet happily soaking and now getting pruney, you realize that you have a few things that you never use, but just can't bear to part with. And then you realize that the longer you live in your existing space, the more things seem to pile up, until you are inundated with possessions. Feeling overwhelmed, you abandon your place on the sofa, and attempt to dig yourself out.

But, where to start? With some time, patience, and an eye to the neat and orderly, you can begin your renewed sense of organization with a sensible, firm plan. Here are twelve ways to make your home sleek and streamline, like a race car. Without the stripes.

1. **Get rid of it.** Take inventory of your possessions, room by room. Walk through each room in your house and take a sweeping look. Decide upon which items you want to get rid of. Go with your initial instinct, and then stick with it. Carry paper with you so you can quickly jot down each item designated for the give-away pile.

Once you've finished, place an empty box in each room of your house, and put the items on your list into every box. Finagle the boxes near the front door - or in your car, if you're really inspired - to remind you how much you want to give it all away, and also to remind you how very clever and forward-thinking you are to have finally weeded out the...well, the weeds.

The Salvation Army, or Goodwill, are fabulous organizations that take donations. You can also contact the Big Brothers and Sisters Association - they're always looking for donations, and will pick them up curbside so that you don't have to

go anywhere and can instead admire your progressively gorgeous living space.

2. **Trade one item for another.** Whenever you bring something new into the house, simply trade it for another item you already have. This will dissuade you from collecting and hoarding things, and will encourage you to have nifty, new stuff, which you'll probably be more apt to use, anyway. Practiced routinely, this will make your life more simple and manageable. And who doesn't want manageability? Or simplicity? Or nifty, new stuff, for that matter?
3. **Make paper piles.** Much of the mess found in most people's homes is made up of paper. The mountainous paper pile-up that we all wrestle with comes from the mail, store receipts, children's homework, school notices, drawings, doodles, restaurant flyers, Aunt Matilda's pancake recipe, and more. To help from getting overwhelmed, try making piles, designating each pile accordingly:
 - Papers to be filed – such as pay stubs, medical records, or social security notices
 - Papers to be immediately dealt with - such as bills, phone messages, or gift certificates
 - Papers to be put away in a designated place - such as pancake recipes, phone numbers and addresses, or photographs
 - Papers to be thrown away, or better yet, recycled
4. **Pick up everything off the floor.** Look at the floor. Disregard everything else. Ignore the dust bunnies and dog hair – you can deal with that later. Concentrate on picking everything up that doesn't belong on the floor and putting it all away where it does belong. If you don't have a place for it, then find one – or perhaps it's time to get rid of that particular item altogether. Which brings us to...
5. **Find a place for everything.** If you don't have a place to put an item, then maybe it shouldn't be in your home. If you really don't want to give it away, have it trade places with something else, and then get rid of the item with which it traded. The bottom line? Each possession within your home should have its own place to be.
6. **Find, and embrace, the negative space.** Just because you've got a huge space on the top of your bureau, it does *not* mean that you should fill it up. A room looks a whole lot messier if every space is filled, and conversely, looks much neater and more serene if you go for a minimalist look. Put away any extra things from each shelf, dresser, or table (in their designated places, of course), and leave open spaces on every surface of your home, with only a few special items strategically placed.

You'll feel more peaceful and much calmer if you are living in a house with empty space. As DeBussy said, "Music is the silence between the notes." Accordingly, the empty space in your home will be like a symphony playing in

every room.

7. **Showcase the special stuff.** Decide which things in your home are closest to your heart, and find a way to showcase them. Most people find that the items they love the most come from the people, or places, that they love the most. Put away the more impersonal things, and leave out the objects of your heart.
8. **Clean out your closets.** And do it one room at a time. Take everything out, and then decide what should stay, and what goes. Put everything you're keeping in piles, according to the type of item it is, and then put each pile back, one at a time. Keep like-items together. For example, put all your sweaters together on one shelf, sewing materials on another, and so on.

If you find that you don't have enough space for everything after you've taken it all out, consider giving away those things that don't fit. If you don't have the space for them, and you have nowhere else to put them, you may not need them anymore. And, certainly, someone else could use them.

9. **Go natural.** Find objects of nature to bring into your home. Smooth stones, pine cones, flowers, or acorns can help your home take on a warm, peaceful feeling. Place some stones or pebbles in a large bowl, or balance them in a pile, Zen-style. Add fresh flowers to your bathroom, and arrange pine cones and acorns on a decorative plate as the centerpiece for your dinner table. Be creative. Get inspired by Mother Nature.
10. **Take one room at a time.** Don't look at your entire house, or you'll definitely feel overwhelmed and want to run away screaming to the nearest B&B. Just concentrate on one room, tackle it as best you can, and then move on. If you don't have lots of time, just plan on combing through one room per day, or whatever you can manage. One a week is fine, too. Or even one a month.

Try not to put unnecessary pressure on yourself. A messy house can be daunting, but if you go slowly, it will seem much more doable.

11. **Designate, Utilize, Organize.** Sometimes things pile up simply because you were out all day - and when you come home you don't feel like mucking around with putting anything away, and would much rather sit on the sofa. And read a good book. And maybe soak your feet, or something.

To make it easy on yourself, designate a place in your house for coats, hats, umbrellas, briefcases, school work, backpacks, and shoes. Use a coat-rack and hooks, or invest in a piece of furniture expressly built for the job - like a bench with cubby holes, and accommodating hooks overhead. You'll always know where your things are, and they'll be easy to organize and store.

12. **File it away.** Create a filing system - if you don't have one already - which holds all your necessary paperwork. It can be in your desk, or a free-standing unit, like a filing cabinet. You can also lessen the need for filing hardcopies by creating files on your computer – but invariably you'll need to file some regular old papers, regardless of the sophistication of your computer system.

Once you've cleaned up your messy abode – and you *will* – do all you can to avoid getting back into the habit of gathering up, throwing down, filling in, or putting off. In other words, keep up your new habit of a clean, efficient space. If you put things away, or throw things away as they come into your life on a daily basis, then they won't pile up again. Junk mail? Recycle it that very day. Lone and lost pay stub? File it, toot sweet.

If you keep on top of things, you won't feel overwhelmed again. And then you can relax in your posh space, waving goodbye to the holiday season, and looking forward to all the good things that the new year will bring you.

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