

Closet Cases

tips for taking on your home's disaster zone

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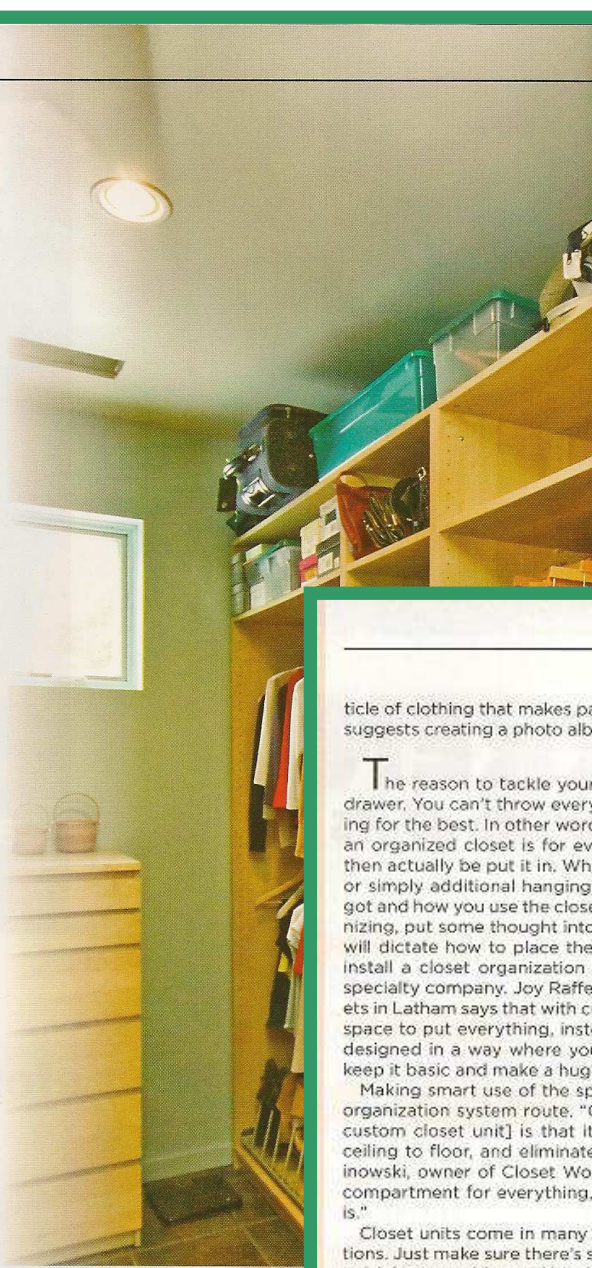
Raise your hand if you've ever looked into your overflowing closet and decided in exasperation you haven't a thing to wear. Raise your other hand if you've ever had to open a closet door just wide enough to toss in the object and quickly slammed it shut, knowing that if you opened the door all the way you'd be covered in an avalanche of stuff. Okay, now put your hands down — and know you're not alone.

Indeed, according to experts who study these things, 80 percent of the clutter in most homes is a result of disorganization rather than lack of space, which is why people typically wear 20 percent of their clothes 80 percent of the time. Simply put, for most of us, our closets are disaster zones. "Your closet should be something you love to walk into," says Sharon Schneible, owner of Organized by Sharon. "It's one of the first rooms you walk into in the morning." Debreen Oliva, owner of d.o. organize concurs: "Do you realize how much easier it would be to get dressed in the morning if you liked everything in your closet?"

Alas, but how does one begin to organize the beast? Neil Bindelglass, sole proprietor of Let Me Organize You!, suggests taking "a full day with your sleeves rolled up" to get started. Another option? Book a daily or weekly appointment with yourself, and tackle the task in increments.

Start by seeing how much stuff you really have and doing a rough sort. With clothes closets, touch every article of clothing, making an immediate decision if it stays or goes. Oliva provides a laminated doorknob hanger with a list of questions for her clients to ponder: Do I love it? Do I need it? Can I live without it? Is it flattering? Is it me? Is it out of style? When did I last wear it? Does it fit? Is it a duplicate? Would I buy it again? What is the worst-case scenario if I get rid of it? "You're not gonna be left naked at the side of the road," Oliva says. "You'll have something to wear, and you'll be fine." If you can't get past the first sweater in this process, consider hiring a fashion consultant.

Keep clothes that are one size up or down from your current size. For women, if you haven't worn the article in a year, get rid of it; for men, make that a few years. If the article doesn't make you happy, get rid of it. If it's been out of style for years, get rid of it. Getting rid of it means, unless it's dirty or damaged, do nothing to a local charity. If you feel a strong attachment to an ar-



Want to know more? Check out these helpful Web sites.

www.organizebysharon.com

www.doorganize.com

www.letmeorganizeyou.com

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organizing

article of clothing that makes parting with it difficult, Bindelglass suggests creating a photo album of the sentimental items.

The reason to tackle your closet is simple: it is not a junk drawer. You can't throw everything in and shut the door, hoping for the best. In other words, the most important aspect of an organized closet is for everything to have a place — and then actually be put in. Whether or not that means drawers or simply additional hanging space depends on what you've got and how you use the closet. In other words, before reorganizing, put some thought into how you use your closet, which will dictate how to place the items within it. When possible, install a closet organization unit, whether DIY or through a specialty company. Joy Rafferty, co-owner of California Closets in Latham says that with custom closets, "There's an actual space to put everything, instead of 'I'll just shove it here.' It's designed in a way where you want to keep it neat. You can keep it basic and make a huge difference."

Making smart use of the space is another reason to go the organization system route. "One of the big advantages of [a custom closet unit] is that it utilizes the whole closet, from ceiling to floor, and eliminates wasted space," says Jim Malinowski, owner of Closet Works of New York, Inc. "There's a compartment for everything, so you know where everything is."

Closet units come in many colors, materials and configurations. Just make sure there's sufficient lighting to easily distinguish between blue and black. If you decide to go the custom closet route here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Corner shelves are often too deep to be functional. Hang formal wear and rarely worn clothes in the corner instead.
- Drawers work best in the center of the closet, and can hold everything from undergarments to sweaters.
- Hang shirts and blouses on double rods to maximize space.
- Make use of belt racks and tie racks that slide out rather than monopolize rod space.
- Belts and ties can also be rolled up and put in a shallow drawer, or hung on the back of the door.
- To be aesthetically pleasing, use only one type of hanger.
- A laundry basket placed in the closet keeps clothes off the bedroom floor.

Having the right system isn't the only way to ensure your closet remains neat and clean. It's important to arrange your closet in a way that works for you. If you're a visual person, coordinate the clothes by color. If you're rushed in the morning, separate business clothes from casual or formal ones.

Shoe storage is a challenge but not unmanageable. Shoe racks work for some; transparent boxes with pictures attached to the front work for others. Over-the-door containers work, too. Hide out-of-season shoes under hanging clothes.

As with most things, the key to continued success is upkeep. Sift through your clothing every season. Oliva's trick is to turn the hangers on the rod backward. As you wear each article of clothing, return it to the hanger the proper way. At the end of the season, or year, you'll have a visual reminder of what has not been worn. Donate these items. And if your needs change over time, adapt your closet accordingly.

And remember that what works for clothes can be adapted for the linen closet, pantry, utility closet and front hall closet. Just clear time on the calendar, roll up your sleeves and wade on through.