

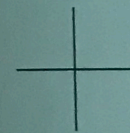
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JANUARY 2018

PROJECT DECLUTTER

HOW YOU AND YOUR CREW CAN
SUCCEED AT DECLUTTERING THE ENTIRE HOUSE—
ONCE AND FOR ALL.

BY PETRA GUGLIELMETTI
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHNNY MILLER

THINK OF DECLUTTERING as the ur-resolution, the one move that makes all other goals more achievable. The whole-house, whole-family plan in these pages is designed to save time (fewer closet excavations) and aggravation (no more pantry landslides). It might also erase guilt, since clutter reminds us of the decisions, big and little, that we've dodged. More shelf space is lovely, but more mental space is the real game changer. What will you do with yours this year?

1

THE PREP Confer with your team.

"It's essential to get everyone in on the process to ensure buy-in. Without collaboration, it's unlikely anyone will honor your unilateral decisions on where things live," says New York City-based professional organizer Andrew Mellen. Spark your family's interest by transforming a key shared space, like the mudroom. "Organizing is contagious—usually the less interested parties just need to see progress in one area to get on board," says Jordan Marks, cofounder and owner of It's Organized, with locations in New York City, New Jersey, and California. Ask everyone to share ideas on how your home could function better. Then divvy up jobs based on strengths: If your husband loves to wheel and deal, he can sell items on Facebook;

your teenager can drive things to the recycling center; your 5-year-old can test the pens in the office.

Plan your attack.

Ask your family which areas bother them most on a daily basis. They'll see the most meaningful result from tackling these pain points first. Reserve blocks of time to work—up to an hour a few times a week or a two-hour weekend stretch. Put them in the family calendar and stick to them; consistency is what matters most.

Take a "before" photo.

Look at it on your phone whenever you need motivation to tidy up. Or make a print—your family might think twice about dumping mail on the clean kitchen counter if there's a reminder of past messes hanging on the fridge.

Kids' Room

PRO TIP

Make storing collections part of the room's decor. Use a magnetic knife holder to corral Matchbox cars.

Decluttering Tips & Tricks

- **Set rules like at school:** Once you're done playing with something, return it to its rightful home.
- **Use clear bins** so kids can see what goes inside. Keep them small; bigger bins become dumping grounds.
- **Place a hamper in their closet** where they can toss clothes they've outgrown. When it fills up, make a trip to the donation center.

ORGANIZING ESSENTIAL



Instant Print

Give little ones a visual clue as to what goes where. Snap a photo and print a stick-on label for bins.

TO BUY: HP Sprocket 2-in-1, \$160; store.hp.com.

TO BUY: Eket storage combination with legs, \$130; ikea.com/us. Half Dot rug, \$299 (4 by 6 ft.), and Wood and Wire gray cube bins, \$29 each; landofnod.com. Steri-lite large flip-top bins, \$22 for 6; amazon.com. Our Tall Shoe Boxes, \$4 each; containerstore.com. Magnetic Strip bulletin board, \$13, and Mighties magnets, \$8 for 8; threebythree.com. One World Denim Globe Pouf, \$248; michelevarian.com.

2

THE PURGE Get in a zone.

Set a timer each time you dive in—this will remind the group that you're on a schedule and will help keep a steady pace. “Shut off visual distractions—texts, TV—and put on music or a podcast you can zone out to,” says Melissa Maker, author of *Clean My Space*.

Sort and edit.

Bring three sturdy bags into every room: one for trash, one for donations, and one for items that would be better stored elsewhere. Large, opaque garbage bags you can tie closed discourage peeking or rethinking. For bulky housewares and furniture, use bright dot stickers (the kind you see at garage sales) to mark the categories. First sweep up anything that's a no-brainer (worn-out shoes, obsolete sports equipment), then sort items, keeping like with like. In the entryway, group each person's belongings. In the closet, keep blouses together and pull-overs in their own pile. As you work, identify what else you can get rid of. General rule: If you haven't used something in a year, it should go.

Move things out of sight.

As the bags get full, remove them from the space. Ask your teen to make a run to the dump and donation center or, if you're planning to host a garage sale, create a temporary “declutter zone,” says Washington, D.C.–based organiz-

ing expert Rachel Rosenthal. Items that should live in other parts of the house can move there, too, but don't worry about giving them a perfect home just yet. Delegate the task or make finding space for them your next mini project.

Assign every item a home.

It's the cardinal rule of professional organizers: Every item needs one home. When the item is not in use, it's in that home. Think about storage options you already own that you can repurpose and have family members help come up with creative ways to store things. If you need to purchase storage containers, make a detailed list first to avoid overbuying. The last thing you want is to introduce new clutter.

Label, label, label.

This step is crucial in helping everyone remember exactly what goes where and maintain the new system, especially in heavy-use areas like the pantry, playroom, and mudroom. You can make temporary labels with a marker and bright tape or use a label maker for a longer-lasting ID.

OUR EXPERTS: Sally Augustin, PhD, environmental and design psychologist **Elspeth Bell**, PhD, psychologist specializing in clutter issues **Jacquie Denny**, cofounder of the online auction site Everything But The House (EBTH) **Molly Graves**, cofounder of The Neat Method **Isha Gupta**, MD, neurologist at IGEA Brain & Spine **Debra Johnson**, Merry Maids home cleaning expert **Ellen Madere**, professional organizer in Old Lyme, Connecticut **Melissa Maker**, author of *Clean My Space* **Jordan Marks**, cofounder and owner of It's Organized **Andrew Mellen**, professional organizer **Rachel Rosenthal**, organizing expert **Beth Penn**, author of *The Little Book of Tidying* and founder of Bneato Bar in Los Angeles **Gail Saltz**, clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the New York Presbyterian Hospital Weill-Cornell Medical College **Mimi Shagaga**, Beverly Hills-based clinical psychologist



CLUTTER HOT SPOT

Establish drop spots right at the door: a change jar, a sunglasses tray, key hooks, and an umbrella holder.

PRO TIP

Employ a large basket to corral in-and-out items, like store returns and sports equipment.

Entryway

Decluttering Tips & Tricks

- Use a boot tray to create boundaries for footwear. Whatever doesn't fit should go in a bedroom or closet.
- Designate a hook, bin, or basket for each member of the household. If their area gets full, they're responsible for returning items to their own closets (or a coat closet).
- Off-season items should be cleaned and stored out of the way; use a covered rolling rack in an attic or basement if you don't have a spare closet.

ORGANIZING ESSENTIAL



Extra Surface

No room for a console in your entry? Corral out-the-door items in this wall-mounted mesh basket.
TO BUY: Estique key hook and organizer, \$15; umbra.com.

TO BUY: Yamazaki Home plain pole hanger, \$70; ahalife.com. Yook key hook and organizer, \$10; umbra.com. Hay Kaleido tray, \$25 (small); moma store.org. Classic hamper, \$128 (tall); thelittlemarket.com. Zinc boot tray with liner, \$40; crateandbarrel.com. Yamazaki Home Slash umbrella stand, \$50; ahalife.com.



**CLUTTER
HOT SPOT**

Everyday-use appliances can live on the counter. Others should be stashed in a cabinet, pantry, or nearby closet.

PRO TIP

Keep cooking essentials handy on a tray near the stove. Whatever doesn't fit belongs in the pantry.

Kitchen

Decluttering Tips & Tricks

- **Think of central cabinets and drawers as prime real estate.** Only your most-used items should live in the quick-reach areas. The rest live higher up or farther back.
- **Use divided inserts** to separate categories within drawers. Apply museum gel to the base to hold them in place like built-ins.
- **In your junk drawer,** make use of multi-tiered inserts to compartmentalize the space and keep it from becoming a black hole.
- **Bring order to the refrigerator** by employing acrylic bins to corral awkwardly shaped packages on the shelves.
- **Allocate 15 minutes** each week to determine what stays and what gets recycled from the family command center.

TO BUY: (This page) Everyday kitchen tool set (top right), \$100 (15 pieces); oxo.com. SmorgasBoard, \$75 for set; ilovehandles.com. Lattice stool, \$398; michelevarian.com. (Opposite page) Hay pepper grinders, \$35 each; momastore.org.

ORGANIZING ESSENTIAL



Partitioned Tray
Prevent utensil pileup and make use of every inch of drawer space with an expandable divided insert.

TO BUY: Expandable bamboo utensil tray, \$30; containerstore.com.




PRO TIP

Create a nonfridge spot for displaying art, homework, and schedules, like a magnetic board.



KEEP IT TOGETHER
Schedule family organizing sessions and maintain your to-do list with the Cozi Family Organizer app from Time Inc. (free for iOS and Android).

 Experts debunk the top excuses for keeping clutter at realsimple.com/excuses.

TECH FIXES
FOR CLUTTER



ArtKive

Photograph kids' artwork; share online or print books.



CampusQuilt.com

Turn your collection of old tees into a useful keepsake.



Fotobridge

Scan old photos in bulk and share or print books.



Genius Scan

Digitize papers so you can empty that overstuffed file cabinet.



Poshmark

Consign clothing items right from your phone—mall brands included.



Stuffstr

Keep a record of your things and get help determining where to direct unwanted items.



ThredUp

Send in batches of clothes for online consignment, without having to take photos.



Truxx

Find a local guy with a truck to help haul stuff to the dump.

Bathroom and Linen Closet

Decluttering Tips & Tricks

- **Discard toiletries** you haven't used in a year (unopened ones can be donated to homeless and women's shelters). And don't hoard hotel minis if you never pack them when you travel.
- **Stash towels at eye level**, since you'll be reaching for them frequently. Hand towels and washcloths can be rolled and stowed in baskets to prevent toppling stacks.
- **Illuminate the contents** by installing stick-on, motion-activated lights.

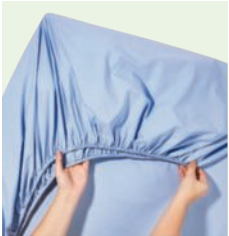
TO BUY: (Clockwise from top left) Dash throw in neon pink, \$88; thelittlemarket.com. Brooklinen wool throw blanket, \$229; brooklinen.com. Calvin Klein x Pendleton Peter wool saddle blanket, \$285; calvinklein.us. Classic Core sheet set, from \$99; brooklinen.com. Organic cotton towels, \$50 for 3-piece set; grundamerica.com. Waffle bath towels, \$49 each; parachutehome.com. No.10 Fabric Fresh, \$16; thelaundress.com. Spectrum metal wire storage baskets, \$13 each; bedbathandbeyond.com. Chandler woven collapsible storage, \$22; potterybarnkids.com. Mr Beams wireless motion-sensing LED Stick Anywhere lights, \$30 for 3; homedepot.com.



PRO TIP

Package sheet sets within one of the matching pillowcases to keep everything together in a neat stack.

HOW TO FOLD A FITTED SHEET



1

MAKE POCKETS

Hold the sheet in front of you with a hand in each top corner. Bring corners together and flip the right side over the left to create a pocket. Repeat on the bottom end.



2

FOLD IN HALF

Place a hand in each pocket, then bring the points together and tuck the right side over the left to create one pocket.



3

LAY ON A FLAT SURFACE

With the elastic edges facing up, fold the gathered part of the long edge over to make a straight edge.



4

FORM A RECTANGLE

Fold in half lengthwise to create a long rectangle.



5

FINISH

Fold the long rectangle into thirds, and you're done.

3

POST-CLEANSE

Reward yourself.

Plan a little treat after each work session and offer kids stars on a chart to earn a trip to the movies or the ice cream place. Layering in pleasure keeps the organizing process feeling uplifting and transformative, not like drawn-out drudgery. Just try not to reward yourself with a shopping spree (new clutter!).

Fight future clutter.

Take an “after” photo to capture what you'll strive to maintain. Adopt a hands-full mantra: “Never leave a room empty-handed, because chances are there's at least one item you could return to its rightful location,” says Maker. When shopping, think about where new purchases will live and what you can get rid of to offset them. (That's the stickier cardinal rule of professional organizers: One in, one out.) Molly Graves, cofounder of the San Francisco-based The Neat Method, suggests blocking off an hour once a season for a “space lift,” in which the family goes through each room, donation bag in hand.

ORGANIZING ESSENTIAL



High-Tech Label Maker

Design labels on your smartphone (emojis and all), then print them from this compact machine.

TO BUY: DYMO

MobileLabeler, \$140; officedepot.com.

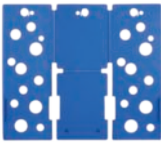


PRO TIP
Style flat surfaces with a few objects you enjoy to discourage them from becoming landing strips for clutter.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: ICONS FROM NOUN PROJECT: LAFS, STUDIO FIBONACCI, CHRIS HOMAN, ICONATHON, JIVAN, THREE SIX FIVE, ROCKICON, MELLO



ORGANIZING ESSENTIALS



Laundry Helper

Use a folding board to create uniform shirt stacks and “file” them vertically between spring-loaded drawer dividers (above).

TO BUY: BoxLegend T-shirt clothes folder, \$20; amazon.com.



Visual Cue

Color-code hangers in a shared closet to help differentiate family members' belongings.

TO BUY: Real Simple slimline flocking suit hangers in aqua, \$20 for 40; bedbath andbeyond.com.

TO BUY: (This page) Bamboo deep drawer organizers, \$30 for 2; containerstore.com. Silver rope hamper, \$99; potterybarnkids.com. Calvin Klein x Pendleton Peter wool saddle blanket, \$285; calvinklein.us. Billy lounge chair and ottoman; Liz O'Brien Antiques, 212.755.3800 for info. (Opposite page) Peek 6-drawer dresser, \$1,999; bludot.com. Sea-grass basket, \$128 (short); serenaandlily.com. Custom rug, \$599; abchome.com for similar. Vases; The End of History, 212.647.7598 for info.

Decluttering Tips & Tricks

- Hang all clothes facing the same direction and arrange like items together so you can easily see what you have (and need).
- Use an acrylic letter file to stash clutch purses upright on a closet shelf.
- If you're consigning pieces online and they haven't sold in three months, donate them. Keep them separate from your closet in the meantime.



CLUTTER HOT SPOT

Prevent discarded clothes from piling up on the bedroom chair. Place a basket next to it where those items should land (out of sight) until they can be sorted.

HOW TO DEAL WITH SENTIMENTAL CLUTTER

“More things fall into the ‘sentimental’ category than people are prepared for—we imbue all sorts of objects with meaning,” says Gail Saltz, MD, clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. As you come across memorabilia you just can’t get rid of, “set it aside as homework,” suggests Beth Penn, a professional organizer in Los Angeles and the author of *The Little Book of Tidying*. Later, work with a family member or impartial friend to determine what’s worth the real

estate. Keep only those greeting cards with a meaningful note, not just a signature; choose one object from a group (your grandmother’s china, for example) as a memento to display; or take photographs of a collection before donating it. As for kids’ treasures, “it’s developmentally appropriate for kids to hold on to objects as they learn to navigate their environment,” says Elspeth Bell, PhD, a psychologist in Columbia, Maryland. Model organization yourself and make suggestions to help them learn to prioritize favorite things.

Bedroom