

13

WAYS TO SPRING-CLEAN YOUR SPACE—AND MIND

Enlisting mindfulness to conquer clutter will not only give you a tidy, well-ordered space, but it will also help clear your stress levels and polish your mental health.

by Stacy Baker Masand

WHEN THERE'S A MAGIC CIRCLE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOR OR A MEDLEY OF BANDS STRUNG ACROSS THE REFORMER AT GOLD LINE PILATES IN PASADENA, CA, "I AM THE LIKELY CULPRIT!" laughs founder and CEO Melissa Woolf. "My mother's nickname for me is 'Messy Missy.' I always joke that nobody is allowed to call me Missy. But Messy? I won't be offended by that!"

Even though she knows she's not a natural organizer, "I rarely admit it out loud because there's a stigma that the opposite of organized is dirty, lazy, inefficient or scattered. Even so, I totally get that many of my colleagues and clients like to be more organized. And it is always my goal to make my studio a safe and comfortable place for everyone." So **tk years ago**, she reached out to Abbey Claire, a local professional organizer.

Organization is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. The end goal is not a spotless studio; it's a setup that enhances the space's usefulness and tranquility as well

as the contentment of its users. "I started by asking Melissa her goals for the space," says Claire. "Flow and energy were her priorities, rather than having things perfectly 'ordered' and labeled," Claire says. "We decided on a plan of action, and ended up by sorting items by usefulness and relevance."

"Abbey was the perfect match for me and my studio," says Woolf. "She realized that I'm not a hospital-corners kind of person, but I did have ideas about the flow of the studio. She is a Pilates practitioner, so she had a leg up in understanding how the studio should be arranged from a practical and aesthetic standpoint. She put together flexible but functional systems that even 'Messy Missy' can adhere to."

"Since Abbey has worked her magic on us, I believe it has improved the studio's overall image as a competent, put-together, serene and professional place. From a client perspective, I can really see how her changes increased productivity and diminished noise."

CLUTTER INCREASES STRESS HORMONES

Messy, disordered spaces not only translate to taking longer to find what you need, they can also lead to feelings of stress or being overwhelmed, says Chantale Bordonaro, the founder and CEO of San Francisco-based Simplicity Source.

Research backs her up: A 2012 study by UCLA's Center on Everyday Lives of Families found that families whose homes had lots of clutter experienced higher cortisol levels. The study also showed an increase in stress levels when it came to getting rid of items with sentimental value or perceived value.

"I'm a huge believer in decluttering because it allows us to have an environment where we can be present," says Erika Bloom, founder of five locations of Erika Bloom Pilates, including in New York City and Los Angeles. "There are so many items we hang on to because they have a connection to

the past, to a memory, to a person or to a future wish. One of the principles of Buddhism is that we should be living in the moment, not focusing on the future wishes or past concerns."

Her Pilates studio is minimalistic, reflecting her belief that cleanliness and organization "allow the mind to find clarity." She points to the visual impact of environments on how we feel and think, even subconsciously. "The cleaner and more organized your space, the more you can find an emptiness in your mind that allows for presence in your body," she says.

"In order to feel more calm and at ease with your environment, you need to find the balance of what an organized space and mind mean for you," Bordonaro says. "It can help you feel more zen and leave you more time to enjoy life itself more." To help you free up mental and physical space, we asked top experts for their best tips on tossing clutter and getting organized.



1. THINK ABOUT SPOT-FIXING. Organizing an entire home—or even multiple rooms—all at once can seem overwhelming. Andrea Maida, founder of Pilates Andrea in Solana Beach, CA, creates cleaning "themes" to stay focused. "In one organization session, the theme of the day was 'drawers,'" she says. "I organized and decluttered every drawer space in my home—kitchen, hallway, bedroom and bathroom." That way, you're less likely to get overwhelmed and give up.

2. DO A MINI TIDYING SESSION. "Make sure you're done organizing one place before you move on to another because it always looks worse before it looks better," advises Bordonaro. "If you start with the top of your desk, don't also work on your files. Finish the desk, reward yourself, move on to the files." The worst thing you can do is to run out of time or energy when the desk and the files are half done and messier than when you started.

3. THINK OF A MANTRA. Mantras can keep you stay focused on your end goal, and why you're decluttering in the first place. Maida's go-to motivator? "A place for everything, and everything in its place." To that end, she evaluates every item before she commits to keeping it. "Do I need it? Does it please me in some way? How did I come to own it? Does it hold an emotional component when I look at it?" she says. "Also, I don't advise throwing away items that aren't yours. Trust me on that one." (Yes, that even means even your spouse's Little League trophies.)

4. REFRAME YOUR THINKING. When you think of decluttering as something that's empowering versus a punishment, your whole mind-set will change, says Bordonaro. "Remind yourself that you deserve to have nice things, not socks with holes, towels with stains, workout gear that doesn't perform anymore," she says. "When you hold yourself to this standard, you're showing self-respect and self-love. By surrounding yourself with things that are beautiful, that work, that streamline your life, you're not just making your life more efficient and less stressed, you're reflecting a state of mind about your life that you can take with you to the outside world."



PHOTOS BY BIGSTOCK



5. UNCLUTTER WHEN YOU'RE UNFOCUSED. You know those times when you're feeling unproductive or can't concentrate on work? Instead of jumping on social media, Bordonaro suggest setting a timer for 15 minutes and tackling some clutter—a messy desk, a junk drawer or a laundry pile. It helps you refocus your energy, prevents you from wasting time and revs your momentum for getting back to work.

6. BLOCK IT ON A CALENDAR. Bloom puts a day of organizing on her calendar once every month or two so she stays ahead of the clutter, rather than doing a little every day to stay organized. If you don't have an entire day to dedicate to organizing, carve out an hour every Saturday morning for a few weeks until the project is done, suggests Bordonaro.

7. DECLUTTER BEFORE ORGANIZING. The majority of us organize in reverse order. "Most people decide to get organized, then go out and buy a bunch of organizing supplies, only to get home and discover they don't fit their space or needs," Bordonaro says. If you declutter first, you can cut the amount you need to organize in half, which means you need to purchase fewer containers.

8. SWITCH TO CLOTH. Speaking of containers, plastic organizers are great for storage, but they're not very eco-friendly. Bordonaro organizes her eco-conscious clients' homes using fabric containers that are both chic and sturdy.

9. CUSTOMIZE YOUR SYSTEM. Consider how your brain works, and try to organize according to your natural ways of thinking, whether you're tackling a pantry, garage or filing cabinet. Take spices: Some people organize them alphabetically, some by flavor (salt versus sweet versus spicy), others by cooking genre (say, Thai versus French). "For some people, when they sort according to how they use the spices, it's more efficient," Bordonaro says.

10. PRIORITIZE BY HOW YOU USE THINGS. If you never use the toaster, don't keep it on the counter. Or if that set of napkin rings you use once a year takes up valuable drawer real estate, consider exchanging it for what you do use every day, says Woolf. "For me, premium storage space should house the most frequently used items." For instance, in her Pilates studio, Woolf gives frequently used balls and bands the premium, most convenient storage locations.



PHOTOS BY BIGSTOCK



11. TRASH YOUR SNAIL MAIL. Maida makes her entryway a place to streamline incoming mail. "Keep a small recycling basket nearby, and the junk mail can go right in!"

12. ATTACK YOUR BOOK PILES. Another item Maida is ruthless about is books, which can stack up and collect dust, only to never be read again. To breathe new life into them, she passes them onto friends or donates them to her local library.

13. KNOW WHO WILL USE YOUR DONATION. Whether it's clothes, furniture or other household items, someone else can probably use what you don't want. "When you have a place in mind where you're going to donate, it's easier to let go," says Bordonaro. She points to a non-profit in San Francisco called Scrap, where people can donate anything from office and art supplies to textiles and construction material. Instead of it going into landfills, those items are used in free or low-cost workshops for kids or sold at reduced prices. **PS**



How to Become a Mindful Shopper

With new trends popping up all the time and social media constantly reminding us of what we don't have, it's easy to get in the "more is better" zone—especially when a new pair of shoes or bag is just a click away. But becoming more mindful as you shop isn't as hard as you'd think with these simple tips.

TRY "NO SHOPPING" MONTHS. Pilates teacher Andrea Maida follows several blogs that impose "no buy" and "low buy" months throughout the year, which means you can't shop unless you're replacing products that run out. Impose your own "no shopping" month, and if you need inspiration or community support, ask friends to join in.

HOST A SWAP...WITH CONDITIONS. If you're in the mood to shop, instead think about swapping with friends who have the same fashion sense as you (and wear similar sizes). "It's a fun way to help each other declutter," Maida says. Just make sure you give away more than you take home, she adds.

CREATE "HAND-ME-DOWN" CIRCLES. Studio owner Erika Bloom started creating these for her friends who also have younger kids. She organized boxes labeled by age and sex in her master closet; when they're filled, she gives them away to other parents.

DON'T TOSS YOUR T-SHIRTS—REPURPOSE THEM. Professional organizer Chantale Bordonaro advises her clients to use their stained white Ts, which resale shops don't want, as filler in decorative pillow covers instead of buying inserts. Or try them as cleaning rags.

INCREASE GOOD VIBES. Repair or restore items you love instead of buying replacements. "I recently had clothing that needed to be repaired or altered as well as boots and shoes to clean up," Maida says. "The process of returning these things to their former glory was extremely satisfying and energizing."



ASK WHY YOU WANT SOMETHING. Before Bloom buys new products, she questions why she truly needs it. "Living in New York, it's hard not to get sucked into the consumerism when there's always a new handbag or item of clothing you have to have," she says. So before pulling out her credit card, "I do a lot of self-reflection. I ask myself why I need this particular handbag when I already have three. Ninety-nine percent of the time I realize I don't need it."

DON'T GET SUCKED INTO A GREAT SALE. It's always tempting to buy what you don't need when it's a great price, but Bloom says that's when you get into trouble. Before hitting a sale, she creates a list of "holes" in her wardrobe or household items she needs, so she doesn't buy things she doesn't need just because it's a deal.

AVOID "CHARDONNAY SHOPPING." Bloom suggests not browsing online after you've had a drink—it's just too hard to resist temptation. Even if it's just one glass.