

Living in **Style**

Get Organized!



by Rebecca J. Simmons

Before Photos Courtesy The Clutter Crew
After Photos by Heidi Reuter

Happy New Year? It's not the bubbly that will leave you with a headache hours after you've toasted in the New Year. It's all those resolutions that you're not exactly sure how to put into place now that you've taken off your party hat.

We ring in 2007 with our resolutions and a few more months of winter. Let's face it; unless you're going to Aruba for two weeks, the first month of the year can be a bit depressing.

But what if you were the best you could be? What if the new year signified a totally new you. No, not Botox or Weight Watchers. We're talking about getting organized. Categorized. De-cluttered. Labeled. Streamlined.

If this is already your life, then you should go to Aruba.

If not, the struggle for most of us is how to get there.

Yes, leggings are back in, but did you still have them from the first go round in the '80s? Your closet can be the easiest place to start that "new year, new change." Just peruse your pants; sift through your shirts. What do you really wear? Experts agree that a good rule of thumb is if it hasn't been worn in over a year, then it's time to get rid of it. And having the proper storage and the right kind of space to hold your clothes and shoes can make it easier to see what you've really got.

If you start finding clothes you didn't know you had and would probably wear if you could see them, it's probably time for a new closet. A closet makeover is easier than you think.

Earl Schmidt of The Closet Works in Wyoming has run the gamut on mini-makeovers to extreme makeovers on closets for his clients. The systems he installs can be as elaborate as a client wants, but just adding hanging space, new shelving and better storage options can help make closet organization a breeze. For a couple hundred dollars, you can change the way you get ready in the morning. If money is no object, Schmidt says, "The sky is the limit."

If your affinity for footwear means you have no more room left for your Manolos, then it's time to call in a professional. Last count, Schmidt's record for the most shoes was 180 pairs.

And Schmidt says the closet business has moved out of our bedrooms and into garages, laundry rooms, playrooms or any other place we're looking to create more room for all our stuff. "People are running out of space in their homes, and you end up with so much in your garage. It's nice to put shelves and cabinets out there and get toys out of the way."

If your current closet is just not big enough or you lack any kind of closet at all, Schmidt says that some homeowners are opting for a built-in armoire. It's placed along a wall to add the same options as a traditional closet.

Indeed, these space-saving wonders like the closet systems or built-in armoires that Schmidt installs can help you get better organized and put you one step closer to that resolution.

It's been proven that Americans have too much stuff. We are "supersized" on stuff. Junk drawers, junk rooms. We have boxes we've never unpacked, and we don't know what's really in our

garage. We buy new stuff and pile it on top of the old stuff. Maybe it's time to get rid of some stuff.

Thankfully, there are lots of businesses cropping up that can help us with this obsession with stuff. Take for example 1-800-GOT-JUNK. Run locally by Dave Wise and owned by his son David Wise, 1-800-GOT-JUNK is as straightforward as their name. "We do the one thing short of building an addition to give them more space," says the senior Wise. "We take away junk that accumulates in people's houses. Just about everyone has the corner in the garage or the basement that has accumulated junk."

The new franchise prides itself on clean trucks, uniform dress and prompt customer service. They make it easy when you just need to get rid of it. You call and they come and even offer same day service. Wise says they call it a "point and carry cleanout" and they'll make sure your things get hauled off to the trash or recycled to places like Women in Crisis or Good Will.

What if you're not sure what you want to get rid of and what you want to keep?

What if your stuff has become so overwhelming that you don't even know what you'd point at or what you'd want carried out?

Enter Vali G. Heist from The Clutter Crew. She's good at getting rid of stuff. More importantly, she will gently coax you out of stuff you don't need and make sure it gets a good home. She's very sensitive to our said attachment to "stuff" and she's made it her business to save us from, well, our own stuff.

"I started last year to help people de-clutter and take control of their lives, and organize their homes," Heist said. The business sprang up from her innate sense of organization,



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something she has a knack for and has long shared with her family and close friends. "It's something that I was always good at growing up. For the last fifteen years, I've been helping my family de-clutter their homes, reorganize and design their spaces."

You can only imagine the organization it takes when you're the director of financial aid for twenty years at Alvernia College and work for the college president's office. But when Heist's son left for college last year, she decided it was time for a change and time to give her affinity for organization a chance to be a business.

So with her zest for all things orderly, Heist, who calls herself "a woman of action," will come and put a little orderly love into your home.

Pick a room, any room. Garage? Spare bedroom? Attic? No problem. Be prepared, though. Heist is going to spend a lot of time asking you questions about what you want to accomplish and what your goals are for the space when she's done.

Sound a little deep for just domestic purging? So is the pile mounting in your spare room. It's taken most of us a long time to accumulate all those things and sometime it's harder to let go than you think.

Do you envision that spare bedroom becoming a home office and a guest room. Is the garage going to also store your husband's bird-house workshop and the family car?

Heist goes through every drawer, cupboard, cabinet, box, bin, and pile that you have. It's not for the weak and it's not a solo job. She works with the homeowner every step of the way.

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"I don't do anything by myself. Anything we remotely think we might get rid of, we talk about it. We talk it through. Sometimes they just need my objective opinion," says Heist. "It's like giving them permission to let things go. I give them five different ideas of how to get rid of it. Donate it. Recycle it."

And if it's not something that can be given to the local Good Will, she works hard to find your stuff a home. She has lots of tricks up her sleeve to make sure your stuff is getting good use someplace else, like Habitat for Humanity.

It's a job that takes commitment, but Heist says by the time a client calls her, they're usually more than ready to take the plunge into purging. "I've never had a client not be committed. They are dedicated. One thing I really try is to listen to the client. Emotionally, what are they going through. If they don't want to get rid of things but organize, I'm there to do what the client needs to have done. I work with them on their goals and to help their goals come to fruition," she says.

So who calls Heist for help? She says they're all ages, all walks of life. Some are going through life changes and some just want to have a better grasp on what they own. They all share one thing, according to Heist: "The commitment to seeing change in their lives. They really want to see a change. They are tired of the way they are living, or they need to see a project done because they need the space."

A typical job could take three or four different sessions, which last about three hours each time. Her rate of \$50 an hour includes helping you re-design and redecorate.

For some, the change is a moving experience. "We think, 'I should be able to clean this up,' especially women. They think, 'I should be able to take care of this myself.' It can be a very emotional process," comments Heist. She's had some clients cry and others who tell her they smile every time they walk into their newly organized room. One client told her it was just like the credit card commercial; the end result was priceless. "It was such a freeing thing for her."

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Don't worry if you lose it over the teddy bear collection you've had since the first grade. She understands. Heist prides herself on making sure you know your secrets, and your stuff is safe with her. She understands how it can trigger feelings. "Everything we do is totally confidential," she says. "I want them to be comfortable with that, and they trust me."

One such client had Heist help her purge after a particularly bad time in her life. "Her clutter was a result of having a bad couple of years with her marriage. And there were all these bad memories caught up with this stuff. It was like shedding the baggage." Another client came across a box of her grandmother's hand-painted china when they cleaned out her attic. Heist encouraged the client to get it out of the box and into her life. "It was something so precious and beautiful to her, and I told her we really need to bring it downstairs." Heist helps encourage her clients to display and use those things in their homes. "I always say, 'If you have grandma's hand-painted china in the attic, and you have the latest overstock sale item on your wall from Ollie's, you need to prioritize what is important to you.'"

Heist feels the most important thing she can do for her clients is listen to them. Think

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Top 10 Tips to Avoid Clutter

Courtesy of our organization guru, Vali G. Heist, The Clutter Crew.

1. Mail! — The biggest culprit of clutter. The rules are:

- a.** touch everything once,
- b.** throw out all junk mail (rip up three times) and envelopes,
- c.** put bills in a place close to where you pay them,
- d.** place papers to be filed in one place and file once a month,
- e.** throw out old catalogs when new ones come; and
- f.** keep invitations, things to take care of, and calls to be made, etc. in one place.

2. Errands — Need to be taken out, just like dogs. Dry cleaning, items to return to stores/friends/relatives, banking, mail, etc. should be placed by the door to go out often.

3. Free? — Just because it's free doesn't mean you need it! Period. Learn to say "No Thank You!"

4. Holiday/Birthday gifts — Make memories instead of buying or getting stuff: dinner, a movie, a museum, or a Broadway show.

5. Donation Box — Keep a permanent donation box handy to put unwanted items into every day (that includes gifts you'll never use or don't want). When the box is full, take it to the nearest charity.

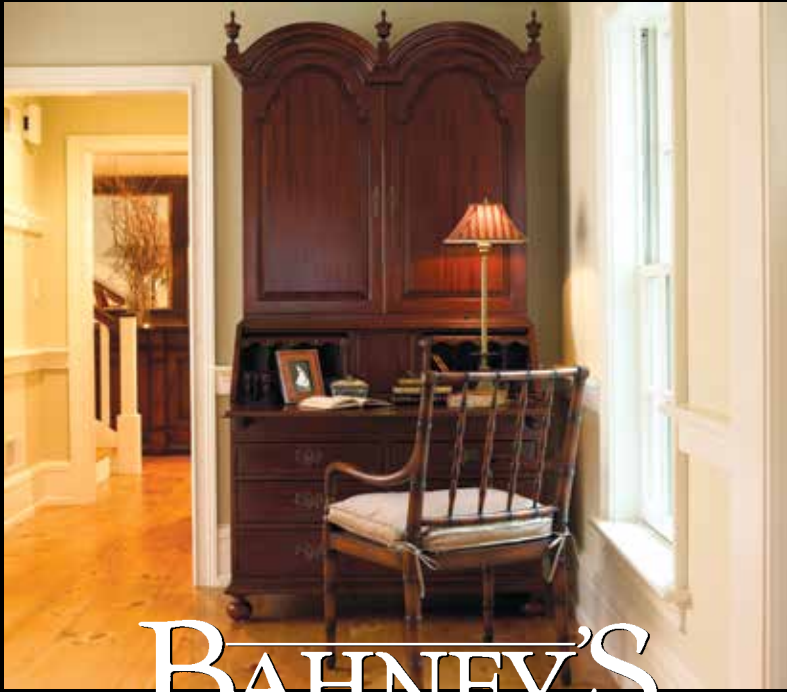
6. New in/Old out — When you buy something new, throw out or donate the old one. Do not put it in the attic or garage.

7. Clothing — Clean out the closet and don't buy any new hangers. When you buy something new, get rid of something you'll no longer choose to wear.

8. Keep a List — Take a list for all shopping including clothing, household items, food, etc. with details of the item on the list.

9. HSN, QVC and catalogs — Home invaders, they want to sell you something you don't need, don't have money for, or don't have the room for.

10. Maintenance! — Steps 1 through 9 aren't foolproof. You have to keep it up, but do it with music or the television on and drinking your favorite beverage!



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is it like therapy, but instead of just sitting on a couch talking about how you feel, you're classifying, cleansing and re-organizing your life.

Forget the diet. Clean out your

closet. Reorganize the garage. Give a new lease to your spare room. Now that's a way to a better you.

If you need to get rid of something, call or visit on the web 1-800-GOT-JUNK. Earl Schmidt at The Closet Works can be reached at 610-670-7617 or www.theclosetworks.net. For The Clutter Crew, reach Vali G. Heist at 610-777-9640 or www.thecluttercrew.com. ■BCL

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