

Start Out Right

With a good organizational plan, you can be sure to unclutter any area of your home. And if you maintain the neat, orderly space you're created, you'll always know what you've got—and exactly where to find it.

—MERVYN KAUFMAN

I love the look of a clean home—and you probably do too. But wanting an orderly home and actually bringing it about are two different things. If you sometimes struggle to maintain your space, you're not alone. Most of us eventually have to admit, “I just have too much *stuff!*”

I, too, didn't realize the clutter I had collected until I opened my linen closet years ago and found *twenty-six* tablecloths. That's enough for a new one every two weeks, and I didn't even use tablecloths! That was the day I discovered what too much felt like. So I started to sort, and then I created simple solutions to control the clutter.

As we all know, cluttered closets (like my overstuffed linen closet), paper pileups, and overflowing countertops gradually fill our homes for a variety of reasons, ranging from a busy schedule to other people to pick up after. Then, adding to our piles of stuff, we receive gifts, find great bargains, and purchase new things to enjoy without getting rid of the old. Before long, the clutter grows in every room and we feel out of control!

If we don't simplify the things we own, our homes become full of gathered belongings and we become “museum” keepers. And the more things we acquire, the more

time we have to spend taking care of them. Without an effective system to organize our belongings, we spend many frustrating hours searching for important things that are lost or misplaced.

Put quite simply, too much stuff complicates our lives.

Get Things Back Under Control

Perhaps things have gotten a bit cluttered in your life. If so, let me assure you that having too much stuff is not a character flaw! It can be the sign of a busy life, a sentimental attachment to things, indecisiveness, or reluctance to let things go. Whatever the reason, in this book you will learn practical tips to help you overcome your past and make a fresh start.

There are simple solutions to getting things back under control. You don't have to live in a complicated home. You can make changes . . . at your own pace. The dream of a simplified space can become your reality.

The good news is that when you simplify your belongings, you will find not only clear space but also more time. You won't be taking care of so many things, and that will free you to focus on what really matters. Now is the time to let things go, for your benefit and for others.

Motivated to Change

We all have personal reasons for wanting to simplify our space. Mine was embarrassment.

My well-organized twin aunts were visiting from out of town for a week. I loved my aunts and knew they were neat as a pin at home and work. Thinking I could use a little encouragement from them on how to get organized, I casually asked as we were setting the table for dinner, "Aunt Helen, how can I get these papers on my kitchen counter in order?"

She folded her arms, took a step back, and surveyed the situation. I knew right then I was in trouble. Sure enough, Aunt Helen began to assess my situation aloud.

"First of all, you need to get rid of these piles on the countertop. Then the piles sitting on the floor underneath the counter need to go. And then . . ."

As she continued, I was mortified. I thought, *Can't she see I'm a busy person? I'm raising a family with three kids! What does she expect?*

I started to blame my family for my disorganized lifestyle, but it wasn't their fault. The fact remained: I had a cluttered kitchen, and I was responsible. What I had visually tuned out as a minor problem was a noticeable eyesore to everyone else. I decided to change.

Make a Plan and Take Some Action Every Day

You may not have an Aunt Helen in your life, but you may have heard comments from a spouse, neighbor, or friends (or feared getting some). This may be your moment to do some clearing out and cleaning up. If not for others, do it for yourself. The peace of mind is well worth it.

Here's what I learned as I pursued organizing my paper-filled countertop:

1. Keeping things out is the slowest way to find anything. It all runs together and is difficult to find anything, from the credit card bill to the coupon for a favorite store.
2. Getting organized is only half the battle. I had to go a step further and prioritize things to keep and things to let go.
3. Living an organized lifestyle is much easier than living in a disorganized one. No one told me it was way more fun and took much less time. Once I discovered this secret, I was hooked on keeping a simplified space, and you probably will be too.

Little did I know back then I would not only clean up my space, but I would encourage audiences and clients across the country with the hope that they too could make changes. Orderliness is not a gene you are born with; anyone can learn to sort, organize, and simplify successfully—starting today!

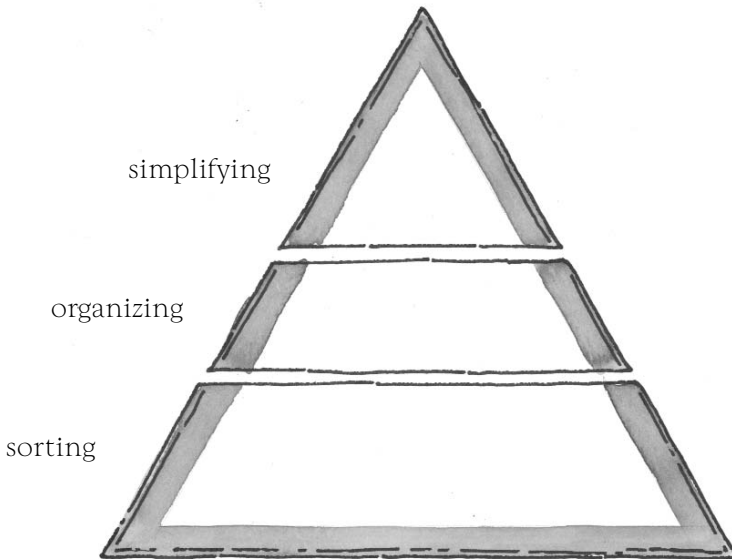
How Do You Simplify Your Space?

Simplifying your space is the process of organizing your belongings and letting go of the excess until your surroundings are orderly and peaceful. We're going to do it room by room so you can see your progress.

As you simplify your space, you might be doing one of several things. For instance,

you might be clearing up a cluttered coffee table by separating paper from other items. Or you might be going through a closet and donating a good portion of the contents to charity. Or you might be making room in the garage by organizing sections and getting rid of excess clutter.

Think of the process like a pyramid. *Sorting* is the base, *organizing* is the next block, and *simplifying* your space is the attractive pyramid point that shows you have completed the space.



SPACE-SAVING TIP #1

To simplify your space, you *sort* things to give away, *organize* the remaining items, and then *simplify* by keeping and neatly arranging your favorites.

How Are We Going to Do This?

Simplify Your Space takes you through your home in a way that will give you the biggest results in the least amount of time. The book's easy-to-follow sequence covers your entire home from the most visible and used spaces to the larger and less used storage areas.

Simplify Your Visible Space

Kitchen—Family Room—Daily Paperwork

Simplify Your Personal Space

Bedroom—Bedroom Closet—Bathroom

Simplify Your Active Space

Laundry Room—Child's Room—Office

Simplify Your Formal Space

Dining Room—Living Room—Guest Room

Simplify Your Storage Space

Garage—Basement—Your Next Move

Simply Maintain and Multiply Your Success

The sections of this book, as well as the three chapters in each section, progress from easier to more challenging rooms. You don't want to get lost organizing a back closet when your family room media center is screaming for attention. Simplify the things in your home that are the most visible first, and then organize the less used rooms last, which need your finely tuned skills to work up to them.

I drop organizing hints in each chapter (fifty-two throughout the book), so you can follow the chapter sequence or you go to the room chapter of your choice. Passion to start and finish a job creates momentum, and that's what we're looking for!

By following the step-by-step directions in each chapter, you will be equipped to succeed. Living in a clean, organized home creates a sense of serenity and order. You'll feel good about yourself and your space.

Ready, Set, Go!

Read each chapter, follow the strategies and tips that work for you, and then stand at the door of the room with that chapter's checklist in hand. Success means many "yeses"

on the checklist at the end of each chapter or when you clean up what you started for the day.

Too often, inexperienced people start to organize without a specific plan and end up making a bigger mess than when they started. No more! To ensure you won't end up creating more piles in a helter-skelter sorting frenzy, in each room we will follow my CALM approach, an easy acronym to remember that will keep you focused.

CREATE A PLAN
APPROACH IT BY SECTIONS
LIGHTEN UP AND LET GO
MANAGE IT SIMPLY

Think of me as your personal organizer, coaching you through each room of your house. You will be able to see *and* feel the organized approach to each room. I think you can do this yourself, but if you have trouble making decisions you may want to invite a friend to join you.

This process may take one day or one week per room, depending on the amount accumulated and how determined you are to create a simplified space. The problems multiply the more they sit there. But the more you overcome them, the more skilled you will become.

By the end of the book, you will be problem solving like an organizing pro as you personalize these systems. One drawer, one cabinet, and one countertop at a time, you can simplify your space.

You Can Do This!

There is a Finnish proverb that says, "Happiness is a place between too little and too much." We are going to find that place—the place where you are content with what you have and not overwhelmed by having too much.

Then the fun begins when you can decorate and put your personal touches in each room. To help you do that, I've invited restaging and interior design expert Susan Wells to provide decorating tips in each chapter.

Think of the benefits of a simplified home: No more endless searching for items you