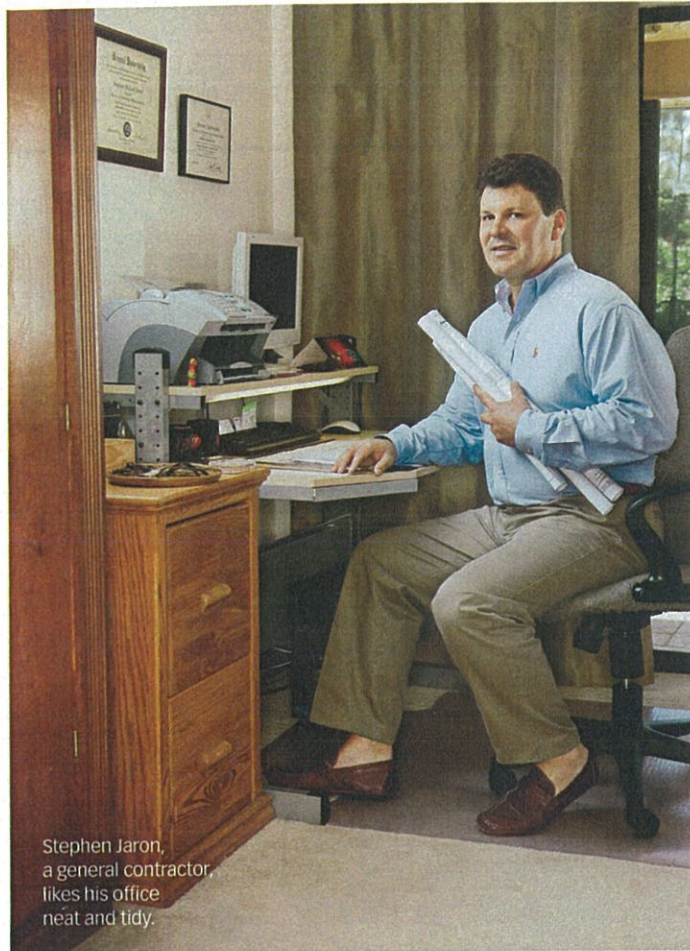


When a Neatnik Lives with a Slob



Stephen Jaron, a general contractor, likes his office neat and tidy.



Amanda Jaron, a jewelry designer, wants her stuff "out where I can see it."

TO CLEAN OR NOT TO CLEAN, THAT IS THE QUESTION

EVERY MORNING, JUST BEFORE he heads out for work, Richard Weiss hides the newspaper—and he is not going to reveal his stashing place. He'll tell you that he has no choice, that his stealth is rooted in self-defense. If he leaves the *Detroit Free Press* out in plain view—say, on the kitchen counter, the TV stand in the living room, or the dresser in the master bedroom of his Birmingham, Michigan, home—his neatnik

How do couples survive when he color-codes his sock drawer and she never met a magazine, shoe, or toothbrush she didn't want to keep forever? *By Joanne Kaufman*

wife, Donna, will act quickly to make sure the newspaper is history. "In her mind, if something is lying around or is sort of out

of order, it's fair game," says Richard, a psychiatric social worker. Donna is all for keeping current with current events. It's just that when her husband makes his way through the paper, "he clips coupons or stories he thinks are interesting, reviews of restaurants, or recipes he insists he's going to try, and then leaves the clippings all over the house," says Donna, 48, a property manager. And don't get her started on the cartoons from the funny pages that Richard, 50, hangs on the refrigerator door. "Clutter!" she says, exactly the way Scarlett O'Hara said, "Yankee!"

But that's all small potatoes for Richard. He has bank statements from 15 years ago ("You never know"), T-shirts from baseball teams he played on more than 30 years ago ("I might thin down and be able to wear them again"), the tie he wore to his Bar Mitzvah ("It may come back into style").

If you're a diehard Democrat and your mate is a Republican, it's possible to avoid political conversations. If you're pulling for the Yankees and your mate roots for the

The 10 Habits of Highly Organized People

You know those folks who seem to have it all together? They're not perfectionists (far from it). Instead, experts say, they follow a few simple rules.

Red Sox, well, baseball season doesn't last forever. But the neat/sloppy issue is pervasive, says Arlene Kagle, PhD, a psychologist in private practice in New York. "It's much more difficult to ignore."

Jonathan H. Parker, 47, a Miami Beach attorney, knows that all too well. He and his girlfriend, Melissa Marshall, a 38-year-old sales manager, took a five-year time-out after being together for six years, partly because of their differing views on the subject of tidiness. "I'm type A all the way, everything in its place. She's just the opposite," says Parker. "Her coat comes off and goes on the floor. Clothes come out of the dryer and stay in the basket. Her attitude is: Why fold them when I'm just going to wear them again? It's taken me some time to get used to our differences."

The neatnik in a relationship does tend to have more of a struggle, according to Kagle. "It's rare that a sloppy person is made uncomfortable by another person's neatness," she says. "Part of being a sloppy person is that you just don't notice."

Jewelry designer Amanda Jaron and general contractor Stephen Jaron of Naples, Florida, are still married "because he is willing to tidy up," says Amanda, 38. "We fight very little. When we do, it's because he wants to throw things out and I don't."

As she explains it, "I'm the kind of person who needs to have stuff out where I can see it. At any given time, I have thousands of beads everywhere. The time I'd spend cleaning would take away from being an artist." Amanda's husband is the kind of person who needs to have stuff put away.

The couple's story can be told by a quick look at their walk-in closets. Not that you can actually walk into Amanda's walk-in closet; there are too many clothes on the floor. Meanwhile, Stephen, 46, maintains his space as if preparing it for inspection by military top brass. The long-sleeved shirts all hang together; the short-sleeved shirts are similarly unified. The socks are stacked in perfect formation. In Stephen's home office, "his papers are stapled or paper-clipped together," says Amanda. "His world is alphabetized and in numerical order. I just don't know how to live that way."

Some would argue that disorder is in the eye of the beholder. Count Richard Weiss among them. "I don't think it's that I'm so messy," he says. "It's just that my wife is so neat. Why wash a cup that you can use again a couple of hours later? Why get rid of something that might be valuable?"

Kagle thinks the issue may be as much about timing as about the tidal wave of detritus. "It's not [CONTINUED ON PAGE 192]



1 WALK AWAY FROM BARGAINS

Just because you can buy a cashmere sweater for \$20 or three bottles of ketchup for the price of one doesn't mean you should. "Ask, 'Do I have something similar?' and 'Where am I going to store it?'" before making a purchase," advises New York City professional organizer Julie Morgenstern, author of *Shed Your Stuff, Change Your Life*.

3 NEVER LABEL ANYTHING "MISCELLANEOUS"

You put a bunch of things into a file or box and write this catchall across the front. "But within a week you've forgotten what's in there," says Morgenstern. Instead, sort items into specific groups—"electric bills," "lightbulbs," and so on.

5 STICK WITH WHAT WORKS

"I have clients who will try every line of makeup, every cell phone—it's exhausting," says Dorothy Breininger, president of the Delphi Center for Organization. Don't waste time (and money) obsessively seeking out the best thing.

6 CREATE A DUMP ZONE

Find a space to corral all the stuff that you don't have time to put away the moment you step in the door, says Breininger. Once you're ready to get organized, you won't have to hunt all over the house for the dry cleaning or your child's field trip permission slip.

9 FORESEE (AND AVOID) PROBLEMS

You wouldn't leave the house on a gray day without an umbrella, right? People who appear to sail through life unruffled apply this thinking to every scenario, says Breininger. Have a cabinet packed with leaning towers of Tupperware? Organized folks will take a few minutes to short-circuit an avalanche before it happens. (In other words, rearranging that cupboard now is easier than chasing after wayward lids as they scatter underneath the fridge.)



2 MAKE PEACE WITH IMPERFECTION

Efficient people give "A-level effort" to the most important projects (say, work assignments or a kitchen redesign), and for the rest they do just enough to get the job done, says Renae Reinardy, PsyD, a psychologist who specializes in hoarding disorders. Maybe you give yourself permission to bring store-bought cookies to a school bake sale or donate a bag of stuff—unsorted!—to Goodwill. "Trying to do every task perfectly is the easiest way to get bogged down," says Reinardy.



4 SCHEDULE REGULAR DECLUTTERING SESSIONS

Rather than wait until an industrious mood strikes (we all know where that leads), have a decluttering routine in place—whether it's spending 15 minutes sorting mail after work or tackling a new project every Sunday afternoon.

7 ASK FOR HELP

"The organized person is willing to expose herself to short-term embarrassment and call for backup," says Breininger. Which is to say, that elaborate four-course dinner you planned? Change it to a potluck.



8 SEPARATE EMOTIONS FROM POSSESSIONS

It's healthy to be attached to certain items—a vase you picked up in Paris, your grandmother's pearls. But holey concert tees or cheap, scuffed earrings your husband gave you years ago? Just let them go.

10 KNOW WHERE TO DONATE

It's easier to part with belongings if they're going to a good home. Identify a neighbor's son who fits into your child's outgrown clothes, or choose a favorite charity. "It will save you from searching for the perfect recipient every time you need to unload something," says Morgenstern. (For a list of worthy organizations that want your stuff, turn to page 159.) —Sarah Stebbins

Does Anyone Want My...?

They say one person's trash is another person's treasure. But it can be tough to figure out how, exactly, to get the belongings you can no longer use into the hands of someone who can. We've found places to send your stuff—from suits and sofas to yoga mats and cell phones—that will help those in need.

You want to get rid of...

CELL PHONES



Send your old Motorola or busted iPhone to Cell

Phones for Soldiers. The phones are sold to a company that recycles them, and Cell Phones for Soldiers uses the money to buy calling cards for troops stationed abroad so they can phone home for free. Go to cellphonesforsoldiers.com to print a free prepaid shipping label.

EYEGLASSES



OneSight accepts prescription glasses,

bifocals, and nonprescription sunglasses in marked bins at LensCrafters, Pearle Vision, Sunglass Hut, Target Optical, and Sears Optical stores nationwide. The organization provides the used specs—along with free eye exams—to those who can't afford them at 20 clinics around the world. (onesight.org)

COMPUTER EQUIPMENT



The National Cristina Foundation will match your

used tech equipment—a computer, printer, software, fax machine, monitor, mouse, or any other parts—with an organization near you that needs it. Many are nonprofits

that provide education or training to at-risk students or people with disabilities. (cristina.org)

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS



Former band geeks can donate instruments to

the Roots of Music, an after-school program in New Orleans that teaches children ages 9 to 14 how to read and play music. The nonprofit also provides students with academic tutoring and hot meals. Instruments must be in working order. (therootsofmusic.com)

FURNITURE



The National Furniture Bank Association (find a local

bank near you at nationalfurniturebank.org) will pick up and distribute your furnishings to families in need. Most accept beds, dressers, nightstands, tables, chairs, sofas, and lamps.

BATTERIES



Batteries contain heavy metals that can contaminate

landfills. Instead of tossing them in the garbage, order an iRecycle kit from Battery Solutions (\$35; batteryrecycling.com). Fill the kit, which holds 12 pounds, with any type of battery, including rechargeables found in cell phones and laptops. Drop the prepaid box at any U.S. post

office or FedEx location, and the company guarantees the batteries will be recycled according to EPA regulations.

BOOKS



Books for Africa accepts texts of all kinds—from picture

books to encyclopedias—to help fill libraries and classrooms throughout the continent. Except for dictionaries, reference books should have been published in the past ten years. (booksforafrica.org)

PAINT, TOOLS, AND OTHER BUILDING SUPPLIES



Drop them off at your local Habitat for Humanity

ReStore. ReStores sell donated goods at discounted prices; the money is used to fund the construction of Habitat homes. Each ReStore is different, so contact one in your area (find a listing at habitat.org/cd/env/restore.aspx) for information on what items they take.

SPORTS EQUIPMENT



Your gently used athletic equipment can help

underprivileged children enjoy the fun of sports. Send Frisbees, baseballs, cleats, and more to Sports Gift. They will refurbish the items and distribute them to needy children in the United States and abroad. (sportsgift.org)

YOGA MATS



Wipe it down, roll it up, and send it to

Recycle Your Mat, which recycles worn-out mats or donates those in good condition to local community programs. (recycleyourmat.com)

VIDEO GAMES



Donate Games accepts used games—including your

1990s Mario Kart—and then posts them for sale at a discounted price. Purchases fund medical research to help fight rare, life-threatening, or debilitating diseases. (donategames.org)

MEDICATIONS



Flushing or pouring meds down the sink sends them into

the water supply, harming fish and the environment. Instead, put meds in a plastic bag (crush pills and add water to dissolve them), and add kitty litter or coffee grounds to make them less appealing to animals. Seal the bag and place it in the trash. Another option: Many pharmacies offer a take-back program for unused meds.

WINTER COATS



Hold on to them until fall, then find a local coat drive through

onewarmcoat.org (most

drives begin in October). Coats must be clean, and all closures should work.

BUSINESS ATTIRE



The Women's Alliance provides a directory of

local organizations that accept interview-ready clothing for disadvantaged job-seeking women. Most accept jackets, skirts, pants, shirts, and accessories. Men's suits can go to Career Gear, which is based in New York City and has affiliates in five other cities. (thewomensalliance.org; careergear.org)

BRIDESMAID DRESSES



Search donatemydress.org to find a local "dress

drive." Donated frocks are given to disadvantaged teenage girls looking for their perfect prom attire.

COCKTAIL DRESSES



Send them to Housing Works, which sells high-end

secondhand apparel at thrift stores throughout New York City. Sales go toward providing housing, job training, medical treatment, and more to homeless and low-income people living with HIV and AIDS. (Housing Works Thrift Shop Warehouse, 48-49 35th St., Long Island City, NY 11101)

—Paige Greenfield