



Ashley Hines of
Thee Tailored Life.
Photo by Amanda
Evans Photography.

Tidy Up

Tips and tricks to creating a more organized home in the new year.

BY JEN KENT

Just over one year ago, as a months-long kitchen renovation was nearing completion, I felt an immediate—and, admittedly, somewhat nutty—urge to organize.

My husband asked that I wait until the renovation was complete, but the inevitable chaos that is living through a major renovation had officially made its

mark on my sanity. I craved ONE area of order among the disorder, so I chose a project I knew would quickly satisfy my need: the new “junk” drawer.

Three trips to The Container Store and several hours later, we had a fully functional, and thoroughly organized, “junk” drawer. Each item had its own space, and I tossed numerous unneeded items in the process. Despite the fact that a few significant items still needed to be checked off the project task list, the joy I felt (and still feel!) when opening that drawer was enough to tide me over until the renovation was complete.

So, in the spirit of the new year, and during a time in which I imagine many of you are also feeling the need to organize and declutter, we asked three local experts to weigh in on how to create a tidier—and undoubtedly more joyful—home in 2024.

Go-To Tips

Establish a clear and personal purpose. “Defining your goals and motivations for your project is essential,” says Ashley Hines of Thee Tailored Life. “Clarify what you want your home to represent for you and your family. Whether it’s about leading a healthier lifestyle, saving time or reducing expenses, having a solid and personal ‘why’ empowers and helps you stay focused.”

Begin by decluttering. “Clearing your space down to items that you use, love and truly need will make a world of difference as you organize,” says Julia Hornung of Move Over Mess. “Letting go is powerful, and it translates to a new system that will last. You can’t organize clutter and expect it to stay organized.”

Do what works for you. And commit to it, says Raschel Biagioli of Customized

Clearing. “For example, if you’re always losing the lids to your Tupperware but have more than enough space in your cabinets, then commit to just putting the lid on your containers and storing them as a whole,” she says. “You have permission to customize your spaces and your systems to make your life easier, not because of what you saw on Pinterest or something you were taught by your mom.”

Start with what you see first. These areas will create momentum, Biagioli says. The garage is often the first thing you see when you arrive home, so organize and create ease for your transition, she explains. Whatever is across from your bed is the first thing you see when your eyes open, so declutter to create ease when you wake up.

Measure your space. “Before you go out and buy hundreds of dollars’ worth of pretty containers, please measure your space first!” says Hornung, noting that she encourages her clients to see the bigger picture and create a custom plan before purchasing products. “Sometimes we are able to use what my clients already own, but I’m a stickler for containers that maximize the function of a space. It’s not just about pretty clear bins.”

Categorize for efficiency. “Organize your belongings into categories that make sense for you,” recommends Hines. “Everything should have a designated place, and consider the flow and accessibility of items within your space.”

Abide by the One Spot Rule. “All the wrapping paper lives in one spot, and everyone in the house knows where that is,” Biagioli explains. “Set yourself up for success in that spot. Is this also where all of the tape lives? And maybe the pair of scissors that you’ve had for the last 30 years is just a bit dull for kitchen duty?”

Pick a number. How many is your call, says Biagioli, but once you pick that number, stick to it. “If you think 70 pairs of shoes is the perfect number for your lifestyle, then when you buy a new pair, commit to donating a pair. This could go for cook books, decorative boxes, sweaters, etc.”

Maintain the momentum. “Understand that decluttering and organizing are ongoing processes, not one-time events,” Hines notes. Develop a routine for maintaining your organized space, she continues, such as a weekly pantry reset to replenish food, discard expired items, and tidy up containers.”

Cleaning counters with Ashley Hines of Thee Tailored Life. Photo by Amanda Evans Photography.



Room-By-Room Tricks

Kitchen:

- Clear your countertops for a calming and less overwhelming feel, Hornung suggests. Use drawer dividers to house knives and cooking utensils.
- Prioritize clearing out expired and neglected food items, including spices, says Hines.
- Don’t underestimate vertical space, says Biagioli. Add more shelving, or utilize specialized wire cabinet shelving for more storage.
- Consider parting with small appliances and kitchen gadgets you no longer use, suggests Hines. It’s perfectly OK to declutter your kitchen of items that are not practical.
- “Just because someone gave you a coffee mug, water bottle, or plate doesn’t mean you have to keep it,” Biagioli says.

Bathroom:

- Use plastic containers for various purposes, suggests Biagioli. She recommends:
 - A tub with a full set of linens for your guest room
 - A “sick” container — your favorite sheets, medical supplies, and thermometer
 - An “ouch” container — all the bandages and anything for when someone is hurt
- Hornung suggests creating a “daily drawer” for everyday essentials like dental care and skin care.
- Discard any makeup and personal care items that have exceeded their expiration date, say Hines, noting that many come with a shelf life of 12 to 24 months.



Organizing drawers. Photo courtesy of Move Over Mess.



Organizing a basement. Photo courtesy of Move Over Mess.

Basement:

- Stick to matching totes to cut visual clutter, says Hornung, and remember to label what's inside. "Don't forget to go up," she adds. "Using vertical space will be your biggest help in clearing your basement floor."
- Protect your valuables from temperature fluctuations and pests by utilizing airtight bins, urges Hines.
- Scan your documents and photos, and shredding services will set you free, urges Biagioli. "Determine what you have to keep," she adds. "Your lawyer or accountant will be able to assist you in the details of what is necessary. Whatever is not necessary to keep, scan to a secure location."
- Add your keepsakes to your holiday decorations, Biagioli suggests. "Instead of letting your keepsakes sit in a box for the next 47 years, I love to add a Christmas bow to them and let them sit under my tree," she says. This way we can see them each year and talk about them."

Garage:

- Don't make this space seasonal, says Biagioli, and give everything a home. "Commit to a hanging or storage system that fits," she adds "and before you get a new tool, make sure it has a home."
- Use sturdy shelving or peg board to keep the floor as clear as possible, says Hornung, as the garage tends to collect clutter as quickly as the basement. Utilize the ceiling space for added storage, too.

Primary Bedroom Closet:

- The primary bedroom closet is a space that should assist in starting your day on a positive note — and leave you inspired to get dressed, Hornung says. She recommends the Elfa system from The Container Store, as it's both beautiful and functional.
- Have a donation bin right in that space, Biagioli says. "If you try that sweater on for the third time and you still don't love it, donate it," she urges.
- Use uniform hangers to maximize space, says Hines, and incorporate baskets and bins to help manage smaller items and accessories.
- If you're not ready to give away clothes that don't currently fit, pack them into Ziplock shrink bags and set a reminder in your calendar to revisit them in six months, suggests Biagioli. **MKE**

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— Julia Hornung, Move Over Mess



Getting a busy garage under control. Photo courtesy of Customized Clearing.



Maximizing closet space. Photo by Amanda Evans Photography.