

H O M E

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Design

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The paper chase

Organizing your clutter could be an ideal arrangement...

BY SHELLEY SHEPHERD
KLANER

When I bought a San Francisco 49ers bucket filled with beer glasses I was eventually left with a metal bucket with no real purpose. Not one to hold on to things without any use, the bucket put me in a quandary because it was just too cool to throw out. I set it on the windowsill by the back door. It was probably a couple of days later when I was on my way out to the recycling container to dump a soda can that I realized it was raining and didn't want to carry the can to the side of the driveway where the recycling container sits. I threw the can into the bucket. Later some junk mail was tossed in as well. Two years later that bucket is still there acting as in interim recycling stop.

According to local organizing specialist Cheryl Spater, it's important to create systems that lead to habits in order to keep on top of the piles of paper, periodicals and clutter that enter a typical home.

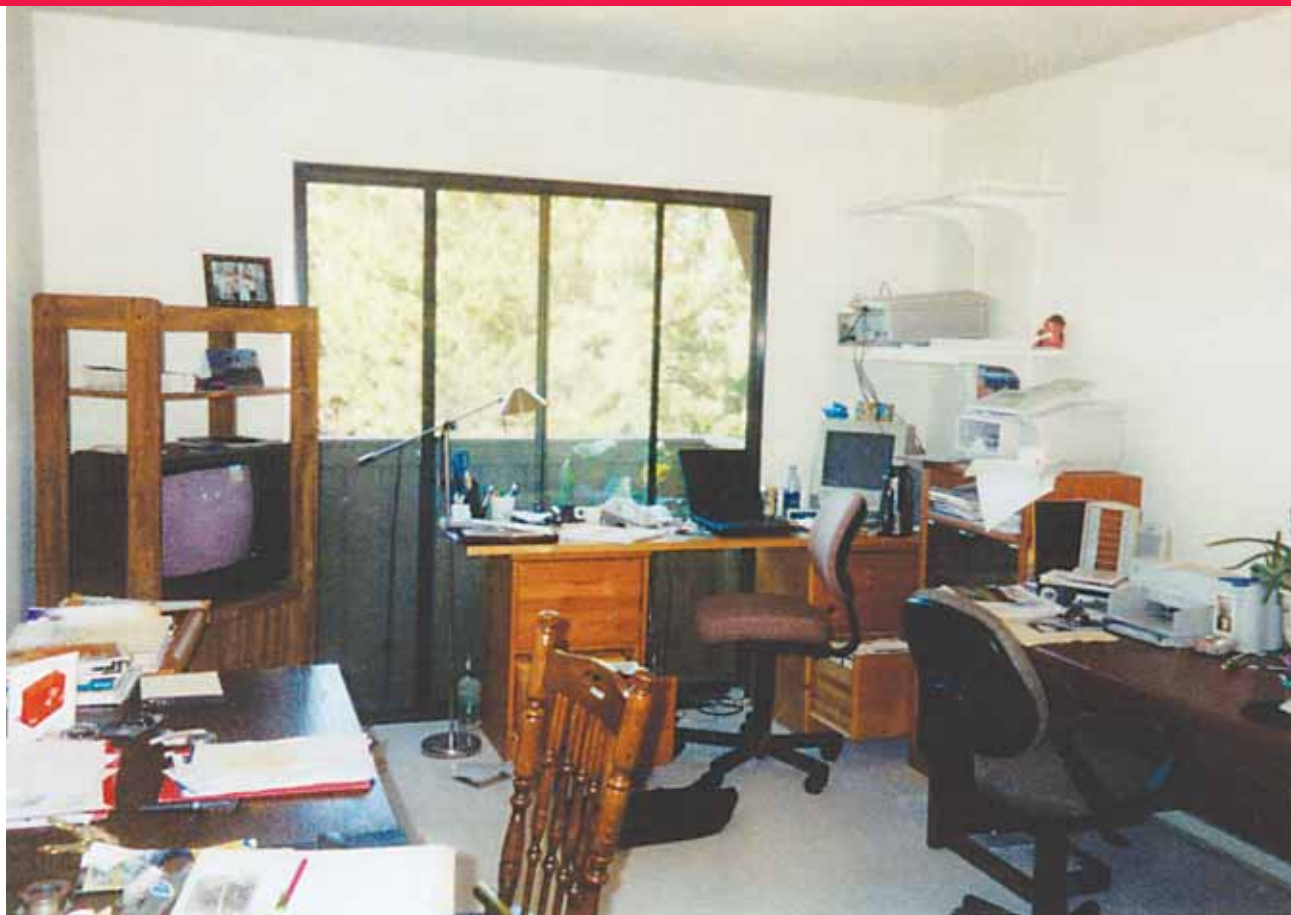
"January is the perfect month to get organized and start your new year off right," says Standolyn Robertson, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO). "Getting organized is one of the top five New Year's resolutions people make."

It sits up there with the big ones such as quitting smoking, losing weight, getting out of debt and going to the gym, Spater says. "It is because most people are overwhelmed because life is so chaotic."

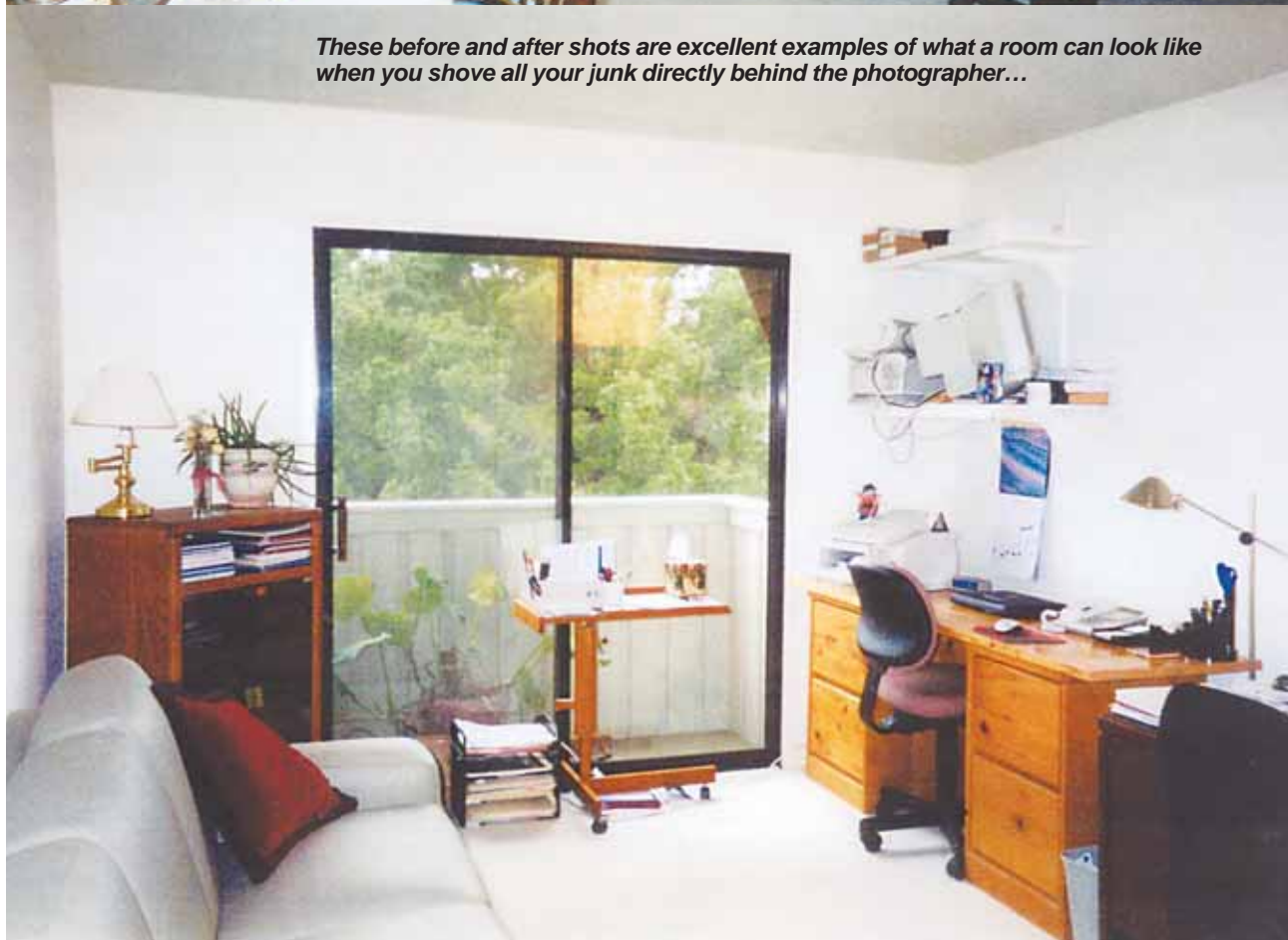
NAPO insists being organized at home can achieve several things:

- Brings order, calm and control to home and family life
- Saves money by organizing bills, shopping and clothing
- Helps you get more done in less time
- Assists you in finding what you need and needing what you find

Spater, owner of Simply Organized out of Forest Knolls, has assisted people in their quest for control of their piles of stuff for the past eight years. During a time of transition in her life, Spater was looking for a new career. She took a class from a career counselor, found that organization was her niche and she put out her shingle. Her father was



These before and after shots are excellent examples of what a room can look like when you shove all your junk directly behind the photographer...



well organized, but she calls her mother the “queen of clutter” and figures she took after her dad.

Not everyone needs to hire a professional organizer to get control over his or her home or business. Those who do usually have gone through a trauma, such as losing a spouse or divorce, and are in immediate need of sorting through possessions—determining what is garbage, what can be donated to charity and what to keep. Others just don’t know where to start or don’t have the time to get organized.

About 80 percent of the clutter in a home is a result of disorganization. According to the National Soap and Detergent Association, getting rid of excess clutter would eliminate 40 percent of the housework in an average home.

Spater completes a needs-assessment when beginning a new project. She walks through a home or office and determines a plan of action by asking several questions. She looks at areas in terms of zones, with multiple zones capable of falling into one room, such as a kitchen or home office. She finds the hot spots or areas that are causing the most trouble by asking, “Why did you call me?”

She usually hears that the kids can’t find their backpacks or keys are missing. She then determines whether to start in the kitchen or a bedroom or another spot. She recommends that anyone tackling his or her own organizational mission for 2008 do the same. Start in an area that is really in trouble and work from right to left.

For many people that space is the garage. The U.S. Department of Energy reports 25 percent of people with two-car garages don’t park any cars in it and 32 percent parked only one.

NAPO reports that 50 percent of homeowners rate the garage as the most disorganized place in the house. To make the garage work better, determine how to use the space. Is it a workshop or a storage center? Is it both? Stick with the floor plan. Get rid of things that don’t work and then sort through what is left, throwing away things that aren’t necessary. Consider floor-to-ceiling possibilities for shelving, racks, stackable drawers, hooks and pegboards. Purchase the proper storage containers and clearly label the tops and sides of the containers.

Don’t spend a day at the container store until you finish organizing. This is a common mistake people make—buying nonfunctional sizes or storage items without knowing what is needed first. Clear, non-wooden containers are the most affordable and the best—go for ones that can be labeled.

Spater lives in a small space and says it is harder to remain organized when closets and cupboards are at a premium. “If you get something new, something has to go,” she says. “Your clutter is someone else’s treasure.”

She uses the acronym SPACE: sort, purge, assign, contain and enjoy. It is commonplace for people to find they have three of the same item when sorting and they can toss two when they find the duplicates. She also gives permission to

re-gift things to others that may not fit your décor or taste. “There is no right or wrong way to get organized,” Spater says.

Most people wear 20 percent of the clothes they own 80 percent of the time, with the rest just hanging there, in case. When organizing a closet, pull out everything that hasn’t been worn in a year. Decide what needs to be readily available and what can be hidden in containers under the bed, on top shelves or in drawers. Similar items should be grouped together such as shirts, pants and dresses. Closets should be bright and inviting, NAPO suggests.

When getting a kitchen in order, things that work together should be stored together, such as baking pans, electrical appliances, plastic containers with lids, pots and pans and large platters and bowls. Drawer dividers are a good way to keep utensils in order. Rotate food staples in the pantry. Gauge the activity flow in the kitchen. Place glasses near the sink or refrigerator and put snacks in a convenient cupboard.

Paper management is one of the hardest tasks for most people. Spater uses the acronym FAT: file, action and toss. Get off junk mail lists. “We get more junk mail in a month than our grandparents did in a lifetime,” she points out.

In fact, there is so much paper in a house that 23 percent of adults say they pay bills late and incur fees because they lose them.

The Home & Garden Television network Web site advises to start by making a list of the types of paper handled every day such as mail, school or work papers, magazines, catalogs, coupons, receipts and newspapers. Ask whether there is too much paper or not enough storage. If there is too much paper, what can be eliminated altogether? Can newspaper or magazine subscriptions be eliminated and read online instead? What kind of storage is available?

Sort items into two categories: keep and recycle or shred. Gather loose papers, magazines and newspapers. Pick up each piece of paper and decide whether it goes or stays and start creating categories and grouping all papers together. Papers that are kept should fall into two categories: active or reference.

Active papers need to be front and center on a desk or counter for easy access. These could include bills to pay, cards to mail, invitations and papers to sign and return. Reference papers can be stored away in a banker’s box or a file cabinet. These might include tax papers, health history, insurance information and vehicle records.

A regular decluttering routine helps maintain new paper management. Sort the mail daily. Stand near a trashcan or recycling bin when sorting and toss immediately what isn’t being kept. Create a specific place for paying bills. Create a family communication area with a family calendar. Set time aside each week for filing.

Perfection is not the goal to organizational pursuits. “I’m not anal about it,” Spater says, when talking of her own home. “I am proud of my junk drawer, but I can also find what I need in one minute.” *



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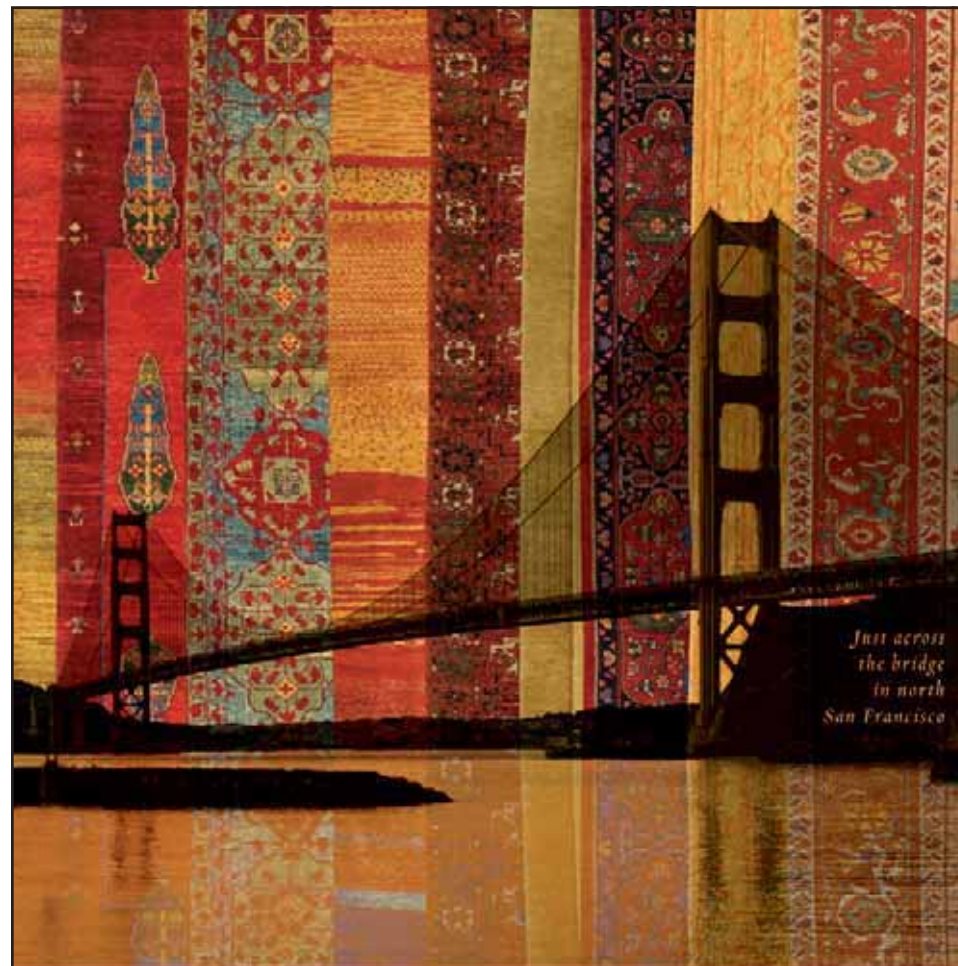
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