

# Combat Clutter

Don't let fear stop you from keeping your home organized

By SUE NOWICKI  
BEE STAFF WRITER

**W**hen June Saruwatari first meets with a client, either in her work as a professional organizer or on the set of the cable TV show "Home Made Simple," she starts by finding out how the person or family uses a cluttered space, then suggests ways to make it more organized.

Closets and garages often are the worst examples of chaos.

Saruwatari's method of organizing the clutter begins with a clean sweep. Yes, remove everything from a closet or garage. Then group similar things together. Decide what you really want to keep — what has value either practically or sentimentally — and get rid of the rest. Then design ways to store what's left.

"Start small," she recommends. "Start with your underwear drawer, your pantry or your knife drawer. Then if you're successful there in that one space, you'll feel inspired to move on to other spaces."

The hardest part, she said, is the amount of time and effort it takes to sort through things.



*'My mission is to make people realize they don't need all the stuff. They have everything they need within themselves. Don't let "stuff" make you feel complete and whole or define you.'*

— June Saruwatari,  
professional organizer

*Keeping kids' rooms clutter-free can be the biggest challenge in organizing a home. Here, organizers help complete the task — with room for toys, clothes and drawers to hide away socks, more toys, books and knickknacks.*

"Many times, it takes a lot more energy than you think," she said. "Even pens and knives have stories behind them. So it takes emotional energy to organize everything."

The important first step in Saruwatari's system is to move out everything from the place that needs organization.

"When you're moving a little at a time, you can't see clearly," she said. "The space isn't speaking to you. You can't see clearly what you want to keep. I'm a stickler for moving out completely."

"Put like items together. Then you can make a choice. 'Do I really need 10 pairs of scissors?' It's a process. It's a journey. That's when I tell people, 'Have fun with it.'"

"The bottom line: You'll always have to do laundry. The same thing with clutter. You will always have clutter

coming into your life, and you have to be vigilant to decide what you want in your life and what you can throw away."

Throwing away things can be the hardest thing to do.

"We don't need to consume more," Saruwatari said. "By going through the process, you begin to see, 'Oh, I forgot I had that.' And then you begin letting go of things when you use truth. Are you really going to fix that? Are you really going to give this to a friend?"

"For me, it's love and faith vs. fear. Don't hold onto something because you think you might lose the weight to wear it again or that you're afraid you may need it one day. That's fear. Keep it only if you love it."

So it's OK to keep things that are important to you, but those things need a home or they are homeless, she explained.

## ON TELEVISION

June Saruwatari is the co-host of "Home Made Simple," which airs Sundays at 1 p.m. on The Learning Channel. The show travels around the country to simplify, organize and improve the lives of deserving families who are overwhelmed by their circumstances and in need of more simplicity. For more information, visit [www.homemadesimple.com](http://www.homemadesimple.com).



*Socks, underwear and jewelry can be neatly stored out of sight in drawers.*

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Boxes on casters slide easily under bed for extra storage.

"Memorabilia, things that have meaning to you, you need to find a place for it. But you have to be truthful. What's the purpose you're holding onto it?"

With those concepts in mind, let's turn to closets. Why are they so messy?

"The problem that people have is they haven't decided exactly what the purpose is," Saruwatari said. "Once they define the purpose, then it's easy."

"I have a closet in my living-room/dining-room area. I used to have my bike in there. Then I went shopping in one of those warehouse stores. I stuffed

all the big packages of paper towels in there. I wouldn't even feel like biking because I had to wrestle my bike out of there.

"I was trying to save money by buying in bulk, but I couldn't do that. It wasn't saving me mentally, emotionally and spiritually. So I used the top shelf of another closet and I can store six rolls of paper towels there. No more. That was the answer for me."

Here are her tips for organizing bedroom closets — after first moving out everything, of course:

"Is there dead space that's not being used? Maybe it has just one top shelf. You might think about putting another shelf up there."

"The back of the door can be used to store things — caps, hats, shoes, purses. But if you do that, make sure it's organized."

"Evaluate everything based on truth, love, meaning, purpose. Create a home for everything you want to keep. In one home, we created a giveaway box. It was to signal that anytime something new comes in, you're going to give something else away."

"Everything in your closet needs to be ready to wear at a moment's notice. So anything that's wrinkled needs to go in the ironing pile. Everything that needs mending needs to go to the mending pile. Not in your closet."

"In the morning, you should be able to grab anything and know it will fit you and be right."

As for garages, Saruwatari loves professional storage units. But before you order, she said, first

clean out the entire garage and put the like items together — sports equipment, gardening items, Christmas holiday décor, tools, hardware, overflow pantry items, etc.

In one recent episode of "Home Made Simple," Saruwatari had the homeowner store things he wanted to keep in large, labeled Rubbermaid tubs. He gave away many things and the rest was grouped and stored in labeled cardboard boxes that he could sort through when he had time.

"You first must figure out the need and then buy the tools (such as shelves and other storage equipment) that you need," she said. "Rubbermaid bins are a quick, easy way to get things organized."

"I did one of those garage organizers where we did a whole gift wrap shipping center. High-end units, low-end units — there's so many you can buy. First, do the work to know what you need."

Whether a closet or garage or any other space (even drawers — "I don't believe in junk drawers," Saruwatari said), the end result should be peaceful.

"Once you start organizing your space, the things that don't belong start screaming out, 'I don't belong here,'" she said. "Start in one small space and see how it can bring you relief, peace and serenity. It's the simple solutions that make a difference. Then when you walk into the space, it's going to be totally you. You'll say, 'I love this frame. I got this from my grandmother. My husband gave me this.'"

"My mission is to make people realize they don't need all the stuff. They have everything they need within themselves. Don't let 'stuff' make you feel complete and whole or define you. Your life is a masterpiece. It's a piece of art. What kind of art are you creating?"

## QUICK TIPS

- **A little at a time:** Limit how long you spend in any single decluttering session, so you won't feel overwhelmed.
- **Make it fun:** Turn up the music, do something goofy, like weighing the stuff you get rid of.
- **Celebrate your progress,** no matter how small.
- **Buddy up:** Have a nonjudgmental friend (or a clutter buddy with a similar challenge) sit with you as you go through a stack of papers or belongings.
- **Something in, something out:** Before you bring something into your home, pick something to get rid of and do it.
- **Unload in stages:** Put some papers or old magazines in a bag and date it. After a few weeks, you might realize you can get rid of it.
- **Sort out the feelings** along with the piles: Write down some thoughts about the emotions that keep you from tossing useless items. It may help you to face — and maybe even overcome — them.
- **While you're at it,** toss the shame. If you're a clutterer, you're in good company.

THE SACRAMENTO BEE



# Storage is everywhere: Just think out of the box

By SUE NOWICKI  
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One thing that delights decorators and consumers alike is finding an item that fits the home's décor and does double duty as a storage unit.

An ottoman that opens to store a throw blanket, a window seat that houses books or art supplies, a daybed with a concealed space for blankets and pillows — all help fill the need for more places to put our stuff.

"I love organization to look like artwork. It's functional and practical, easy to reach, but it can also be beautiful," said June Saruwatari, a professional organizer from Los Angeles and co-host of cable TV's "Home Made Simple." On the show, Saruwatari works with families to bring order to their homes.

On a recent episode, Saruwatari and her team helped a family create shelves for lined turquoise baskets with pantry, snack and school items in a formerly chaotic kitchen. They also tackled a garage that was stuffed with stuff. And they turned a small room into a retreat spot for the busy mom. All was done on a small budget.

Saruwatari said our lack of organization and need for storage can be solved.

"I believe we just need a system in place," she said. "Then once we have a system in place, you need to dedicate the time to take care of the system. It's not going to magically happen. But it may take only 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the evening. It's definitely something that can be learned.

"When you have clutter, it can't serve you."

Saruwatari, dubbed "The Organizing Maven," said there are plenty of furnishings and other items that can do double duty inside the home and out.

"On one of the ('Home Made Simple') episodes, I put a credenza in the front foyer. This family was always losing their keys and cell phones. That was an issue. So I put four baskets inside the credenza's two drawers. I put a beautiful flower arrangement on top.

"No one would ever know that in the drawers were housed their cell phones, iPods, keys. Each member of the family got their own little basket with their own chargers. I drilled a hole in the back and hooked up the chargers. That's a great hidden way to charge up whatever you need for the next day."



Professional home organizer June Saruwatari makes storage fashionable.

She uses decorative baskets to store remotes for television sets, the DVD player and other electronic equipment.

An umbrella stand in her own home hides an electrical outlet and her small Swiffer vacuum.

"It's housing it beautifully," she said. "No one would guess it's in there."

Saruwatari said she worked with one family that opted for "benches all the way around their family room. It housed their photo albums, and they weren't just thrown in there. They could pull them out anytime."

Another client "didn't have a guest room," she said. "They had a living room with a pullout sofa. So we brought in these beautiful trunk boxes and we put guest linens in one, guest towels in another and guest toiletries in another one. They looked really decorative; you never would have guessed (what was in them.)"

One large family had children who always were playing in the living room. For various reasons, that was the best choice for their playroom. Saruwatari asked the family how often the china in the bottom section of the china cabinet was used. The answer was rarely. So her solution was to move the china to another storage area, and she put the children's toys in the cabinet, where they were easily retrieved and put away. And she stored their coloring books and crayons inside the coffee table.

She has a few ideas for the patio and outdoors area, too.

"I like armoires used on a patio," Saruwatari said. "Towels, sunscreen, pool toys are kept in them. They make weatherproof armoires now. They have plastic, steel, wood, everything. There are lovely pieces of outdoor furniture now."

She also has used "giant plastic benches in the patio area that double as a tool storage area. And I've used dresser drawers for gardening tools and seeds. You can do tole painting or anything to spice it up and match whatever you have going on outside."

She advises people to "look at stuff from a different perspective" to find other ways to incorporate storage and décor.

"You can use a bathroom to store candles. You can use your bedroom closet to store toiletries. I try to find ways to use things in new ways — figuring out the puzzle of your own life and making it work for you and your family."

June Saruwatari, right, during an episode in Cincinnati, proves your home can have plenty of storage and be beautiful, too. "I helped her organize her laundry and created a laundry system for her pastels, whites, darks, delicates, towels, etc. — all sorted by how she launders her clothes," Saruwatari said.

