

Are You Using Stuff..Or Just Storing It? By Amy Simone, A Space in Time

Recently, I read an article with advice about how to better utilize the vertical spaces in your home. This is a great idea, by the way, but what struck me was a comment from the family featured in the article, "We wanted to feel like we were living here, not just storing things." ("Put Your Walls to Work", Real Simple, October 2016). The family had taken the time to pare back their belongings to only those items that they used. This is no doubt a worthwhile and freeing goal!

How can you find ways to live with less items in your home? A great place to start is to study your spaces to determine if the excess is located in one or two main areas of your home or if it is simply everywhere. Do you have a collection of board games three deep but you only play the same four games over and over? When you make dinner, do you have to dig through the cupboard every night to find the pot you need because it is buried amongst specialty cookware that you rarely use? Or do you have excess in every area of your house? Don't judge, just assess.

Once you decide to remedy your situation, start with the most obvious and easiest excess area. For example, I know someone who has moved two times and never unpacked a group of boxes. The items in those boxes would be classic "I'm just storing these" goods. If you have similar boxes, bring them directly to your favorite charity.

Next, move on to the area that makes you cringe every day. Do you know what's actually in your closet, for example, or do you just grab what's closest to the front? A suggestion for paring back clothes is to open the closet on laundry day. While all of your favorite clothes are in the wash, start pulling out items from the far reaches of the closet. Don't let anything back in that doesn't fit, you don't like, or that you haven't worn in the past two years (with the exception of formal wear; use your judgment here). Even once this exercise is done, you can pare back further by turning the hangers backward. Once you've worn the item, turn the hanger back the proper way. Those articles of clothing with backwards hangers six months later should be removed from your closet.

The goal, as you move from space to space, is to keep only what you truly use and need. Only you can answer those questions about your own goods. Of course, there is a collection of goods that don't qualify for "use" or "need". Memorabilia type items, such as a painting you did in 2nd grade, should either be displayed or stored. Limit the capacity of the storage and once that is reached, remove items before adding others. The displayed memorabilia can be rotated as well, in order to freshen it up.

Your efforts to pare back possessions should result in a liberating feeling as you convert your home from a storage space to a living space. However, like any new habit, you'll need to work on it to avoid slipping back to excess. Be a very careful shopper. Before buying something, consider its place in your home and whether there truly is a need for it. With practice, leaner living will eventually become the new norm for you.

Enjoy the side effects of lean living as you spend less time picking up clutter and more time playing your favorite board games. Which are, of course, the only ones in your collection because you've stopped "storing" the games with which you never played!