

Before: Unorganized Chaos.
The closet is crammed with
clothes, shoes, and more.



Closets in Crisis

Organizers Janis Kowalski and Darlene McDermott turn two messy closets into sleek storage spaces. You can, too.

By Karen Croke

With a sweeping staircase and polished wood floors, this Orangeburg home is elegant and contemporary.

The decor looks clean, crisp, and serene, with just one nagging drawback: a bedroom closet that literally overflows with shirts, tops, jeans, shoes, purses, and long-forgotten sweaters that have fallen off their hangers and made a new home on the floor. Organizers To The Rescue's Janis Kowalski and Darlene McDermott spent a day here untangling the wardrobe web, neatly arranging shoes, belts, bags, and more in a "cosmetically pleasing way," Kowalski says. How did they do it—and more importantly, how can you? Here, the five-step plan:

STEP ONE See everything. The key to a well-organized closet is pretty simple: You have to be able to see—and recognize—everything in the closet. "How many times have you pulled out a brown skirt and realized you have two more just like it?" asks McDermott. So to start, Kowalski and McDermott removed everything from the closet and had the owner take a good look at what was actually in there.

STEP TWO Get rid of things you don't need, don't wear, and don't fit into. Need help? Hire pros like these, who have no emotional connection to your clothes. With the owner's permission, they donated three bags full of clothes to the local Goodwill.

STEP THREE Separate and organize your clothes—by season, color, or use—and hang like-things together. Here, belts are hung with belts, pants with pants, blazers with blazers. Another idea: Create outfits and hang them together, say, a skirt with a blouse and a matching blazer.

STEP FOUR Keep your storage simple. Kowalski and McDermott have seen closets so full of fancy organizing systems that it makes accessing your stuff nearly impossible. You don't need to go out and buy a lot of new stuff. Instead, "shop at home," says McDermott. "We usually find everything we need is already in a customer's home." Clear-plastic bins are perfect for folded sweaters, and wire cubes can keep shoes from spilling all over the floor. Lastly, use a large tote and stow smaller bags and purses inside.

STEP FIVE Once the closet has become a paradigm of neatly hung jeans and perfectly placed pumps, create incentives to keep it that way. "The biggest incentive is that you will save time and money," says Kowalski. "You won't have to go out and buy another brown skirt, once you realize you already have two hanging neatly in your closet."

Think Like an Organizer

1. Less is more. Keep as few things as possible in your closet. Store out-of-season clothes in the attic, a second closet, or in storage boxes under the bed.
2. No bags on the floor. This includes laundry bags, gym bags, and work totes. "Bags on the closet floor just attract lots of clutter," says Kowalski.
3. Never use wire hangers. They are bad for your clothes.
4. Hang your clothes from the left to the right, facing you. Visually, it makes it easier for you to see what's in there.
5. Keep items you use frequently at eye level or below, and items you rarely use, higher up.

Janis Kowalski & Darlene McDermott; Organizers To The Rescue; 753-8080; organizerstotherescue.com



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