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HOMESCAPE

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By Lisa Scontras

Even though you've publicly sworn off New Year's resolutions, privately you've vowed to make 2008 the year when you finally get organized.

Not just get-all-the-shoes-to-fit-in-the-closet organized but structured, every closet and every drawer, everything-is-accessible-without-the-help-of-a-search-party organized. Not just everything looks clean, but everything really is clean.

According to professional organizer Donna McMillan of Island Organizers, there is no better time than the new year to tackle organization projects in your home.

"Getting organized is in the top five most common New Years Resolutions," says McMillan. "And January is Get Organized Month, celebrated by the National Association of Professional Organizers."



Before getting organized, you need to manage your time and that requires a good strategy. She recommends setting aside several dates and blocking out time periods on your calendar for "get organized" projects.

"Organizing is a process ... it's not a one-day project," says McMillan.

January

After the holidays is the best time to take on closet organization. In with the new, out with the old takes on a whole new meaning when you're trying to find a place for all your new toys.

"Gifts we received over the holidays need a place in the home, so naturally, people tend to move and shift or toss old things to make way for the new ones," says Karen Simon, McMillan's partner at Island Organizers and president of the Hawaii Association of Professional Organizers.

Go through closets and donate to charity anything that hasn't been worn within a year.

"If you can't find something in 30 seconds, it's in the wrong place and it needs a home," adds McMillan, who uses the Million Dollar Real Estate Rule when organizing closets. "The items that are used daily or weekly should be kept within an arm's reach. We refer to this space as 'Million Dollar Real Estate because it's so valuable. Whatever gets to live there should be your most frequently used items."



Before

Many charities require only a phone call to pick up usable items such as clothing, furniture, housewares and appliances. If you're a pack rat, consider filling a box to donate every month this year.

Tip: Donate clothing to Honolulu Habitat for Humanity, 538-7070 or Big Brothers Big Sisters of Honolulu, 521-3811, ext. 231. Don't forget to get a receipt — your donations are usually tax deductible.

Experts say organizing one area at a time makes the task less overwhelming and can motivate you to tackle other areas.

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February

Carpets are breeding grounds for allergy triggers and should be cleaned once a year. Take a look at the carpeting and check for darkened high-traffic areas like hallways and stairs. Clean carpets will really freshen up your entire home. Call a professional or, if you prefer, rent a carpet cleaner.

Tip: For spot cleaning, use a product called Spot Shot, which dissolves most stains on contact. For musty odors, sprinkle baking soda on carpeting and leave over night. Vacuum in the morning.



After

March

Cleaning out and organizing the kitchen cupboards is one of those jobs that rarely gets handled on a regular basis. It's best to do each cabinet one at a time and pull everything out. Toss out those Happy Meal toys for starters. Simon suggests keeping the different kitchen tasks in mind when deciding where to put things.

"If you can picture in your mind 'zones' in the kitchen, such as 'the cleaning/washing zone' — usually the sink area — then you would place cleaning supplies so that they are within reach when you are washing or cleaning," she says.

Consider donating canned goods to a local food bank.

Tip: The Hawaii Foodbank is open Monday through Friday and is located at 2611 Kilihau Street off Nimitz Highway. Also Ruby Tuesday is a year-round collection site for canned goods for the Hawaii Foodbank. A basket is set up at each hostess stand at all Oahu locations. Help fight hunger in Hawaii by donating canned goods.

April

A thorough annual cleaning includes dusting framed art and photographs on the wall. Take a soft dust cloth to the frame. Clean the glass with a lightly dampened clean cloth.

Tip: Don't spray Windex or water directly onto the glass. The liquid will seep behind the glass and damage the artwork. Spray the cleaning cloth instead.



May

Allergy sufferers pay particular attention to surfaces that attract dust — like drapery, curtains and blinds. Check the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning. If they are only moderately dirty, use the upholstery attachment on your vacuum to clean them. For wood blinds, use an old sock as a mitt to clean each slat. Stay motivated by pretending you're preparing for a white-glove inspection by your mother-in-law.

June

Vacuum and flip your mattress for a more even wear. Bedspreads, comforters, blankets and pillows are also dust collectors. Wash everything thoroughly. Then, clean out any clutter from under your bed.

"In most homes, storage space is at a premium so the space under beds is valuable," says McMillan. "Drawers can be built-in for easy access to frequently used possessions. Or products such as plastic boxes on wheels and strong vinyl bags with zippers are available for storing off-season clothing, blankets, shoes, etc."

Tip: Worried about bed bugs or dust mites? (Yuck, who isn't?) Melaleuca manufactures a product called Sol-U-Mel which kills dust mites. Spray the entire mattress with Sol-U-Mel regularly to eliminate these can't-see-'em type critters from your bedding.

July

Maintenance projects don't always need to be difficult. Check to see if your oven is self-cleaning — most are. If it is, read the instructions and set it to the cleaning mode. Remember to remove the racks first. The oven will heat up to super-high temperatures which will burn off any left over grease or food spills all by itself. It usually takes a couple of hours. Make sure you're home while the oven is on. Once it cools, just wipe the inside surfaces clean. If you're really motivated, clean the refrigerator while you wait. Or just pour yourself a glass of wine and curl up with a good book.



Donna McMillan

August

Gather all your photos and put them into photo albums. Whether it is years that you're behind on this project or decades, this can be a fun job. Try to dedicate a whole day (or



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a weekend) to giving the great memories a more permanent home. You can decide whether to sort them by date or by categories.

"Put the photos into categories or by events," says Simon. "Usually, people will look for a photo by the category, subject and/or event instead of by date. The date is usually the last thing that they remember about the photo."

Simon suggests putting together event albums featuring "Birthday Parties" or "Holidays" — and not worrying about the dates.

Make this a family project and do it together with your spouse, your mom or your sister. Looking at old photos can also be a good motivator for another one of your other resolutions — the one to lose weight.



Karen Simon

Tip: Acid-free photo boxes with dividers are best for sorting and storing prior to placing photos into albums and scrapbooks.

September

Keep your granite countertops looking beautiful by sealing them at least once a year. This really doesn't take as long as you may think. Make sure you read the instructions on the sealer carefully, wear gloves and work in a well ventilated room. Also, be sure you let the sealer dry for 24 hours before using your newly sealed countertops.

Tip: Local granite installers strongly recommend the 511 Impregnator by Miracle Sealants Company.

October

Polish the silver. Wouldn't it be nice if you could set the Thanksgiving table with the sterling silver flatware your grandmother handed down? The silver bowls, candlesticks, platters and flatware can be as clean and sparkly as when you got them. And you can do it in an hour or two. First remove candle wax by running the item under hot water. The softened wax should peel off with a finger. Then, wearing plastic gloves, use a soft cotton cloth or sponge to work the silver cleaner over each piece. Once you're done, why not clean your silver jewelry too.

Tip: The product Nevr-Dull is easy to use. As with any silver polish, make sure to wash each piece thoroughly afterwards to remove any chemicals.

November

Change the batteries in your smoke detectors. If you make a practice of doing tasks like this at the same time each year — right before the holidays when the largest percentage of home fires occur — you'll be certain that your family will be alerted if there is ever a fire.

December

A great end of the year project is re-organizing your garage or storage areas where holiday decorations are kept.

"Before putting the decorations away, take a look at the area where they are stored," says Simon. "If new Christmas lights were purchased for this year's season, were the old ones tossed? Can the cardboard boxes that were used to store the decorations be replaced with a new, clear-plastic storage bin?"

OK, Martha Stewart. Ready to get started?

Getting organized doesn't have to be painful. As you complete each chore, and watch your house transform, invite some friends over for dinner to show off your progress. See, isn't this way more fun than going to the gym or cutting out visits to Starbucks to save money?

There's no better time than the new year to start new beginnings in a home. Bring in the new year with a commitment to take special care of your most valuable asset.

For more information about Island Organizers, go to islandorganizers.com. **HS**

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