

# EXTREME MAKEOVER: HOME OFFICE EDITION

Can a personal organizer reform a lifelong domestic travesty? Sarah Buckwalter and Kate Altieri of Organizing Boston take on our writer's cluttered space. **BY CARMEN D. NOBEL**



My desk is buried and my living room looks like a mailroom. I need help!



STEP 1: CONSOLIDATE

We separate things into piles. Apparently shoving bills in between my couch cushions doesn't count as filing.



STEP 2: SORT AND PURGE

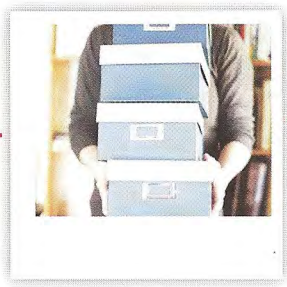
At Buckwalter's prodding, I proudly purge tattered grocery lists, outdated prescriptions, and (sigh...) crumpled love letters; old feelings are harder to purge.



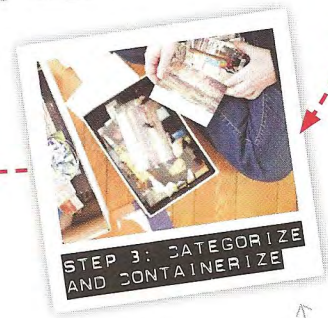
Tagging every folder, box, and drawer sounds like a drag. But I discover that as a grownup, it's fun to put stickers on stuff.



STEP 4: LABEL



Buckwalter and Altieri divide medical bills from sheet music, readying the paperwork for my very first filing cabinet!



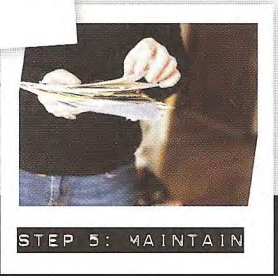
STEP 3: CATEGORIZE AND CONTAINERIZE

Going through old photos proves difficult. Is that scruffy guy a third cousin once removed, or someone I once removed from my freshman dorm?

Labeled files will help me remember that I'm organized now.



I used to procrastinate by looking for stuff. Now I procrastinate by filing.



STEP 5: MAINTAIN



So this is how a desktop should look—lean, clean, and serene!





"A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING, AND everything in its place." It's an adage I used to interpret very loosely. But when a scavenger hunt for a stapler successfully ended at the toilet tank, I realized I needed some help. Not a moment too soon, I called professional organizers Sarah Buckwalter and Kate Altieri of Organizing Boston. They rescued my cluttered home office with their signature five-step process: consolidate; sort and purge; categorize and "containerize," label; and maintain.

Buckwalter gave my space a quick once-over. "You kind of have mail everywhere," she diagnosed, and added a mantra of sorts: "Clutter is postponed decisions." And the organizing commenced... First we consolidated all my paperwork, loose photos, and gadgets onto my home office floor. Buckwalter asked me what I'd been using for a filing system. Apparently showing bills between my couch cushions didn't really count. The pile was daunting. "It gets worse before it gets better," Altieri said.

Next, Buckwalter provided separate cardboard boxes for office supplies, photos, and memorabilia. What was left went into separate boxes for recycling, trash, and donations—"People are always trying to give me stuff," Buckwalter commiserated.

I'm sentimental, so purging wasn't easy, but I realized that if a friend's kid just celebrated his bar mitzvah, it was probably okay to toss the driving directions to his bris.

Onward to the categorizing! Buckwalter plucked a talking George Bush doll from my desk. "Is he an office supply?" she asked with a raised eyebrow. Point taken. Everything in the office should have a logical home, she explained, stressing the importance of a good filing cabinet and some drawer organizers. Altieri then labeled every file, container, and desk drawer. Sure, I was the only one using the space, but labels would help train me to think like an organized person. Two afternoons later, my office space looked like it belonged to an organized person. Altieri sensed my culture shock. "It's okay to have white space," she said, gently.

After a few weeks, Buckwalter called to check up on me. And doggone

it, I was—and am—maintaining a clean desk and a logical filing system. So would I recommend an organizing service to my messy brethren? Absolutely! Without professional help, my stapler would still be living on my toilet. *\$60 to \$80 per hour for decluttering services, depending on the size of the project. Organizing Boston, 617-699-1263, organizingboston.com.* ■

## CALM AND COLLECTED

SIX PLACES TO BUY COOL ORGANIZING SUPPLIES.

### BOB SLATE STATIONER

If you're of the mind that not all desk calendars are created equal, head to Bob Slate, which carries a bevy of options, including the much-lauded Quo Vadis line. *63 Church St., Cambridge (and two other Cambridge locations at 1288 and 1975 Mass. Ave.), 617-547-7181, bobslate.com.*

### LEKKER UNIQUE HOME FURNISHINGS

The vast stainless steel magazine rack collection at Lekker rivals the beauty of most magazine covers. *1317 Washington St., Boston, 617-542-6464, lekkerhome.com.*

### THE MUSEUM OF USEFUL THINGS

The MUT's Red Vinyl 1½ Bushel Hamper holds (and hides) one-and-a-half bushels of memorabilia. *49B Brattle St., Cambridge, 617-576-3322, themut.com.*

### NEO INTERIORS

If you think "pretty file cabinet" is an oxymoron, you haven't seen the collection at Neo Interiors. *279 Worcester Rd. (Rte. 9), Framingham, 508-271-9900, neointeriors.com.*

### UNIVERSITY STATIONERY

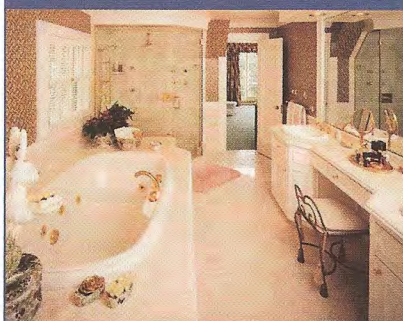
This (ironically) cluttered family-run business offers reams of practical filing supplies, along with funky gems such as a fish-shaped stapler, a tissue dispenser shaped like Shakespeare's head, and a very liberal student discount policy. *311 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, 617-547-6650.*

### VELLUM

The myriad cloth-covered albums at Vellum may inspire you, finally, to take your photos out of that shoebox and display them properly. *55 Dartmouth St., Boston, 617-247-2323, vellumstore.com. C.N.*



O'Sullivan Architects



O'Sullivan Architects, Inc.  
201 Edgewater Drive Suite 215  
Wakefield, MA 01880

Phone: (781)-246-1667  
Fax: (781)-246-1683

[www.osullivanarchitects.com](http://www.osullivanarchitects.com)