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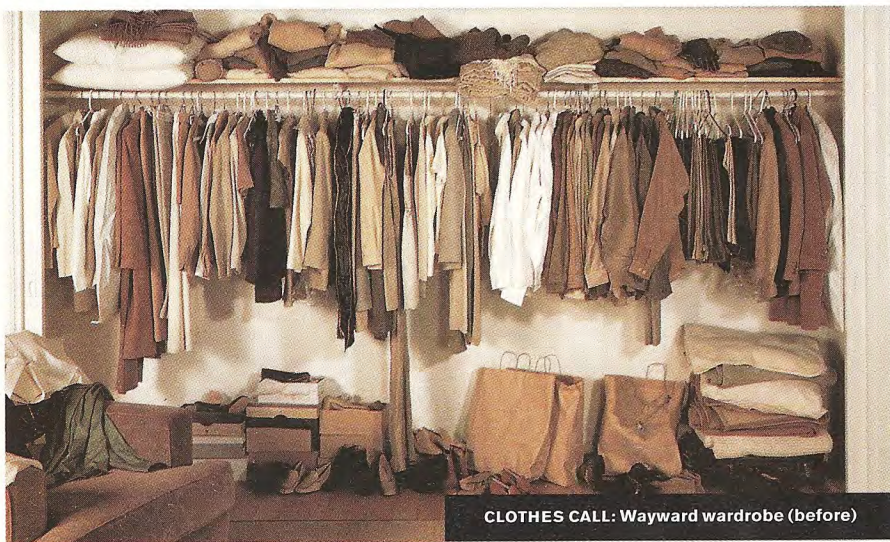
**Boston
Home**

Hide and Sleek

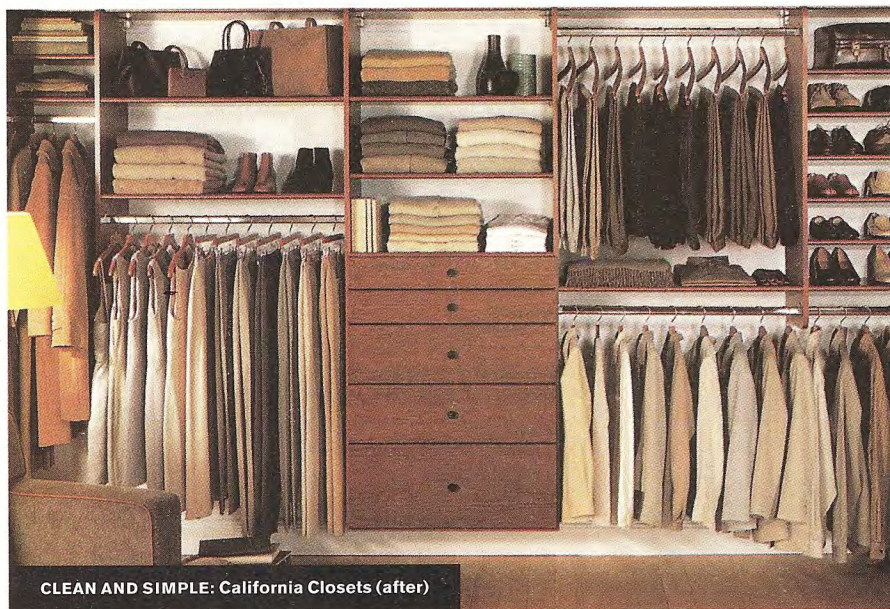
If your closets are out of control, or your house resembles a college dorm room, a clutter expert can sort out the mess.

By SARA BLISS

YOU ARRIVE HOME LATE TO A MESSY apartment. You are welcomed by stacks of unread magazines, bad milk in the 'fridge, and closets jammed with clothes, including some you haven't worn since the 1980s. Your schedule is crammed: work, time with friends, weekends at the Cape, an occasional Power Yoga class. When you are home, you just want to crash. And even if you were going to clean up, you wouldn't know where to start.



CLOTHES CALL: Wayward wardrobe (before)



CLEAN AND SIMPLE: California Closets (after)

Sound familiar? You're not alone, and now, in the tradition of self-help programs, there's relief. In the past 15 years, a cottage industry centered around organizing has sprung up. From closet designers to clutter-coping guides, stores such as Hold Everything, and even support groups have come on the scene to clean up the mess.

Professional organizers—the June Cleavers of the new millennium—do everything: sort through your junk drawers, put together photo albums, manage filing systems, pack for moves, and set up yard sales. Sarah Buckwalter, a Boston-based organizer, even goes grocery shopping and can rearrange your furniture according to the principles of Feng Shui. Eventually, you'll have to pitch in too, of course. After all, once you get organized, you need to learn to keep it that way.

When you set up your first appointment, be prepared to be examined. An organizer opens your drawers, peers through cabinets, and uncovers piles—all in all, a fairly invasive process. "It's hard for people to invite someone in to look through every aspect of their lives, so I don't look anywhere they don't want me to," Buckwalter says reassuringly. Most organizers use a hands-on and collaborative approach, all the while setting up efficient systems to keep their clients on track. Don't worry, though; they start slow. "On my first visit I tackle a small area so that we get something accomplished—and the client won't be so overwhelmed by their clutter," Buckwalter says.

FOR ANDREA LOEW, A BUSY PROFESSIONAL, hiring an organizer along with a closet designer was "money well-spent." After 10 years and too many days of the week taken up by business trips, her 850-square-foot Brookline apartment had become jam-packed, and she found it hard to keep up.

Loew admits she was reluctant at first to hire someone to de-clutter her place. "It [Continued on page 156]

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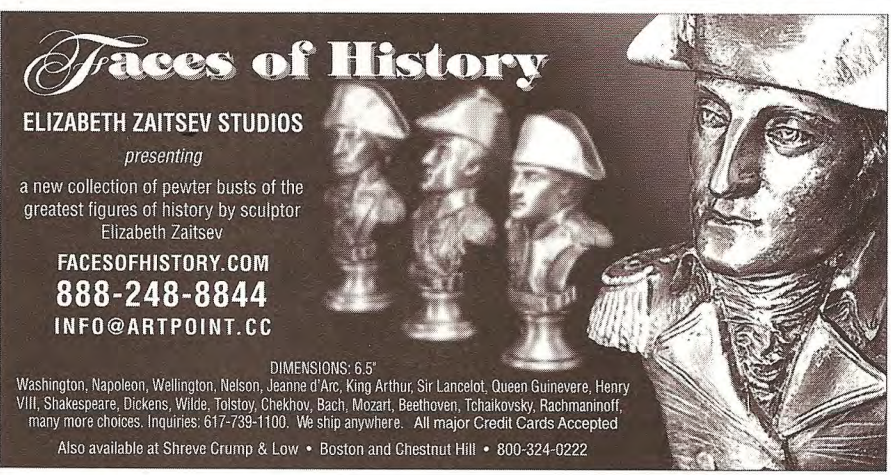
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was very bizarre to me to have this total stranger show up at my apartment, examine my possessions, and stare at my closet," she says. The anxiety turned out to be a small price to pay for the results.

The closet system Loew chose, from California Closets, maximized her space, and her organizer carted away and donated bags of clothing and other items that she never used. Now, with everything in its place, she doesn't waste time hunting for it.

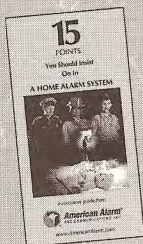
"Our company philosophy is, If you're organized, life is simple," says Chloe Durant, the California Closets designer who worked with Loew. Durant custom-designs laminate storage systems not only for closets, but for pantries, garages, home offices, and basements as well. In a one-hour consultation, she will measure your closet, decide if you need more drawers, shelves, or hanging space, and help you choose among the different hardware and variety of colors. A few weeks later, California Closets installs your new system in about four hours.

MORE THAN GIVING YOU extra space for your shoes, clutter counseling holds the promise of an easier and happier life. "When your home and office function efficiently, you have the freedom to pursue the things you really enjoy," says Boston professional organizer Lynne Silvers. She says one of her clients didn't just shed her possessions; "She felt so energized after we lightened the clutter in her house that she started a diet and lost 30 pounds," Silvers says.

For experts in the industry, this is no surprise. Michelle Passoff, professional organizer and author of *Lighten Up! Free Yourself From Clutter*, believes de-cluttering can be a life-changing experience. "I'm there for somebody's transformation, growth, and fulfillment," Passoff explains. "My particular vehicle for this transformation is clutter." Passoff's book is a combination of self-help inspiration and how-to instructions.

To Passoff, unloading is symbolic and, she writes, "allows space for

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magic and miracles to come into your life." Other experts may not take things quite that far. Most at least agree there's an emotional element to their jobs. They say getting rid of old boxes storing painful memories can be a healing process, for example. "It's a form of counseling, helping people sort through the items of their lives and figure out what is significant and useful," says Sarah Buckwalter. Silvers has even been recommended by psychologists to couples who need more than some emotional advice. "Disorganization can be a great source of marital problems," she says. The benefits she points out—freeing up your time so you can spend it with the ones you love, not being embar-

One way to keep the living room looking clean is to have furniture that does double duty—ottomans with lids for storage, and decorative baskets, for example.

rassed to have people over, and not always being late because you're always searching for your keys—are rewards beyond simple organization.

For the chronically disorganized, there are even national support groups: Clutterers Anonymous and Messies Anonymous. Clutterers Anonymous is a 12-step program modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous; a local chapter meets in Beverly. Most in the group admit that, for them, cluttering is an outward manifestation of an inner problem. Having a supportive, understanding, and encouraging support group with a sense of humor often helps them to reverse their habits.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS FROM THE pros on how to tackle the clutter hotspots in your home, room by room:

THE KITCHEN

The kitchen is often the busiest room in the house, so ideally it should function the most efficiently. One common mistake is saving plastic food containers, bottles, and grocery bags, which just add to the mess and rarely get reused. "If [Continued on page 158]

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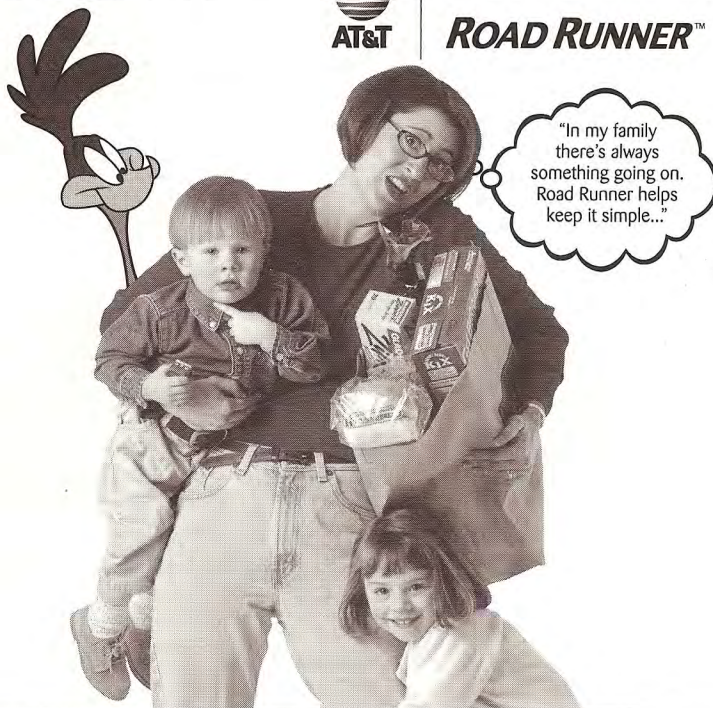
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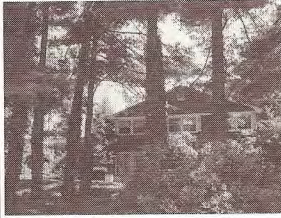
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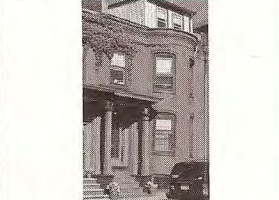
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Hide and Sleek [Continued from page 157]

you want to be an environmentalist," Michelle Passoff suggests, "instead just bring a cloth bag every time you go shopping." Another trouble area, she says, is underneath the sink. "We are all oversupplied with cleaning equipment, and it can get unwieldy," she says. Instead, follow Sarah Buckwalter's lead and place all your cleaning supplies in a large plastic bin with a handle under the sink so it can easily be pulled out. Another way to get things organized, says Buckwalter, is by putting food and like items together—all the pastas, for example, all the vegetables together, and all the drinking glasses together. That way you'll know where to find them when you need them. Lynne Silvers is partial to coffee makers, toasters, and other equipment you can hang from under cabinets, leaving counters free.

THE LIVING ROOM

"The living room should be about beauty and comfort, so you shouldn't have too much there," says Michelle Passoff. One way to keep it looking clean is to have furniture that does double duty—ottomans with lids for storage, and decorative baskets, for example. Keep tchotchkes off table surfaces. If you do have collections, Silvers recommends grouping them together in display cases, or on shelves.

THE BEDROOM

Passoff stresses that the bedroom should be used exclusively for rest and relaxation. Don't clutter this peaceful spot by using the area underneath the bed for storage or letting magazines, books, or cosmetics stack up on end tables, she advises. Buckwalter adds: "Don't let office work go into the bedroom. Instead, surround your bedroom with things that make you happy, like flowers and framed photos."

THE CLOSET

The closet, a huge trouble spot, can become a dumping ground for old clothes, broken furniture, and your collection of platform shoes from the '70s. Chloe Durant suggests taking everything out of your closet and going through it piece by piece. "If you

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haven't worn it in a year, donate it to charity," she says. A pair of jeans from high school, or a cap and gown from graduation, may have sentimental value, but they just take up space. In these cases, Silvers suggests, "Just take a picture, so you'll have the memory but not the stuff." Another pitfall is being indecisive about whether or not you'll wear something or hoping that you'll lose weight. "If you lose weight, you'll probably want to go shopping anyway," says Silvers.

THE BATHROOM

"It should be a luxurious space," Passoff says. "It should not be cluttered with too many kinds of shampoo, moisturizer, and samples." Instead, keep one of everything and be aware of expiration dates for old medications and old makeup. "When you buy make-up, mark the date of purchase with a permanent marker. This way you'll know to get rid of it after a year," Buckwalter recommends.

MAIL

"Don't let mail and catalogs sit on your entry table for weeks," Buckwalter warns. "Instead, take five minutes every day to handle every piece of mail once, pay the bill, read the catalog, or throw it out."

HOME OFFICE

Paper is a problem here too. Up to 50 percent of paper cluttering most homes can be thrown out, Passoff says. For the rest, she says that having a good filing system is the most important thing. **BH**

Here's where to turn for help with your mess:

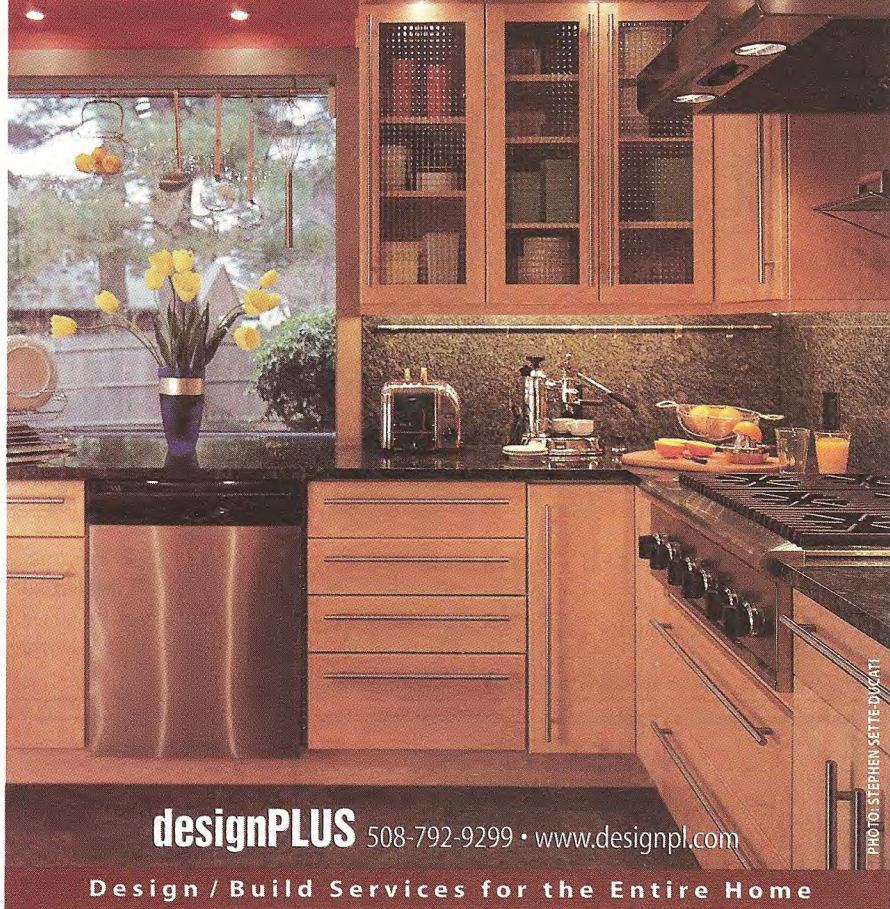
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