

DECLUTTER Your Life

Disorganisation is about so much more than just stuff. And expats face some unique challenges. Put an end to the chaos with these pro tricks. **By Nathalie Ricaud**



About the Organiser

With more than 20 years of experience in corporate logistics, French expat Nathalie moved to Singapore XX years ago. Here, she founded **Get Organised & Beyond** (www.getorganisedandbeyond.com) to assist expats and Singaporeans in restoring order in their homes (including *The Finder* editor's own!). "I feel a deep satisfaction when I help transform cluttered spaces into efficient ones, and bring harmony into chaotic lives," says Nathalie.

CLUTTER CHALLENGE #1

"We'd like to downsize, but we've accumulated a lot."

Whether it's because you're retiring or your kids are leaving home to study overseas, there are plenty of reasons to embrace living with less. But where do you begin? **Pro Tricks** It's best to start decluttering early so that you don't have to rush decisions that you may regret later. Keep only the things that you need, use and love. Let go of the rest. Anything that you can't find a place for in a cupboard, cabinet or drawer, and that ends up on the floor or piled on tables or countertops, is clutter.

Be selective with sentimental items, too. Save ones that really mean something to you and you have space to display. Avoid the temptation to stash a lot of keepsakes in boxes that will end up covered in dust. Making a choice about what to keep gives these items the importance they deserve.

CLUTTER CHALLENGE #2

"We'll probably move at some stage, and I might want these items then."

Most expats are sent to Singapore for a few years only. This temporary aspect can complicate decision-making: What to do with furniture and possessions that can't fit into a smaller Singapore home? How many winter clothes should you keep for travelling? Will you need warm bedlinens in the future? What about that office wear you don't need right now because you're full-time parenting?

Pro Tricks Instead of purging, more and more people are renting self-storage units to save the stuff that doesn't fit into their homes (see burst, at right). The Singapore self-storage industry alone has grown from one facility in 2003 to 47 in early 2015! Again, I recommend being selective – keep the quality furniture and much-loved artwork that can't be replaced, the winter and office clothes that won't run out of fashion, etc. But as for functional items, remember: You'll always be able to buy, rent or borrow an item you let go of now if and when you need it.



CLUTTER CHALLENGE #3

"I don't like these things, but I feel conflicted about getting rid of them."

People who have been through hard times, including older generations, tend to hang onto what they have, so as not to waste or, often in Asia, as a sign of wealth (e.g. over-stuffed shelves equals higher social status). Other people may keep items to pretend to be someone they aren't – a more educated, cultured or stylish version of themselves. Who isn't guilty of keeping those unread "must-read" books on their shelves? I've done it myself!

Pro Tricks Your home should be a sanctuary, where you can recharge. If it's filled with items you don't like, it affects you more than you think. It can become a real burden – almost as if the stuff is owning you. My advice: Be honest with yourself and stop pretending. Then, to quote *Frozen*, "Let it gooooo!" See page 64 for info on SG charities that accept all manner of donations.

CLUTTER CHALLENGE #4

"We have a domestic helper who tidys up – but the clutter keeps coming back."

People in Singapore tend to rely on domestic helpers to maintain order in their homes. However, the role of a helper is to clean the home. If there is clutter, she likely just goes around it.

Pro Tricks Organising is about setting systems built around each family's preferences (see sidebar, at right). Unless you approach it this way, you won't be able to keep your home organised – and you may add to your helper's workload. According to the National Soap and Detergent Association in the U.S., "Getting rid of excess clutter would eliminate 40 percent of the housework in the average home."

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Storage Made Simple

Have a beautiful oak wine rack that doesn't suit Singapore's steamy climate? Heirloom china that you don't have room to store? Flip to page 71 to read more about the versatile solutions at **StoreFriendly** (www.storefriendly.com.sg).

CLUTTER CHALLENGE #5

"I just went through a divorce, and it's difficult to let go."

In the context of a divorce, the death of a loved one or even getting fired or laid off, people may want to hold onto memories or hide behind things.

Pro Tricks The physical act of decluttering can be therapeutic, though it can also be overwhelming to do on your own. Having someone by your side, such as a professional organiser or trusted friend, who will gently guide and support you, can be a great help.

In the case of one of my recently divorced clients, our work together made her realise that a lot of her possessions were reminders of *not* so happy moments. When she let them go, she had a huge sense of relief.

CLUTTER CHALLENGE #6

"I hope to lose weight and fit into all of these clothes again."

Perhaps you're a new mum or chained to a desk at work, and your body isn't what it once was. No judgement! But if your day starts with a struggle to figure out what to wear, you may not be as "motivated" to lose weight as you think.

Pro Tricks I can't count the number of wardrobes I've seen, full of clothes that don't fit their owners. And I don't mean to be harsh, yet the reality is that there is no guarantee that the clothes that don't fit you today will fit you tomorrow. The first items to purge: ones you don't like, that never made you feel good or that are not in good condition. If you come across a few items that you particularly like but can't fit into, put them aside and set a deadline in your diary. If you haven't lost the weight within, say, nine months, let go of them then. A wardrobe full of clothes you *can* wear will make you feel empowered. **F**

Find out how feng shui can help you cut clutter.
www.thefinder.com.sg/feng-shui-for-beginners



How to Set up Organising Systems

...that will work for you.

Take Stock

I'm sure there are tasks that come more easily to you (e.g., finding a pen when you need one). Analysing your successes will help you identify practices to tap when organising the rest of your belongings. Examine your habits, too. For example, if you undress in the bedroom, there's no point in putting the laundry basket in the bathroom, otherwise clothes are likely to end up on the floor and stay there.

Build in Time

Let's face it, getting organised takes effort. After all, the clutter didn't happen overnight! Block the time you can realistically commit and don't compromise on it. If you haven't involved your family or helper in the organising process, invest time to teach them any new systems. Give them a chance to practise them for three to four weeks, which is the time it takes to build new habits.

Fine Tune

You may realise after you've organised your wardrobe that the home you allocated to your pants would be better suited for your T-shirts, or that the basket for your scarves is too small. Don't feel discouraged, there can be a lot of trial and error involved. Tweak the processes that aren't working until you're completely satisfied.