

Another fine mess?

Spring is the season to clear out the clutter – but where do you start if you're drowning in it? TV expert Vicky Silverthorn shares her top tidying tips Interview by Ruby Millington

Right now is traditionally the time for a clear-out. But when your home looks like a cross between Steptoe's yard and a charity shop, even finding a place to begin can feel impossible. Enter 32-year-old Vicky Silverthorn, professional organiser and declutterer.

Vicky counts celebrities such as Lily Cooper (née Allen), Sadie Frost and Ed Sheeran among her clients, but insists that you don't have to be famous – or one of Britain's estimated three million obsessive hoarders – to benefit from professional help. "Most of my clients are just people who are struggling with everyday things and need help to get life running more smoothly," explains Vicky, whose five-part guide to permanent decluttering starts on *This Morning* this Wednesday. "People often feel a lot of shame about the extent of their clutter and it can really help to have some outside support. I tell every client not to worry because, no matter what we come across, I won't remember – and I will always have seen worse!"

Learn to let go

According to Vicky, our tendency to hang on to objects that have outlived their usefulness is often down to a sense of guilt. "We've spent so much money on acquiring this stuff that getting rid of it feels like an extravagance," she says.

The answer is to set aside one day only for regretting the money you've "wasted". Then wake up the next

morning determined to do things differently. And far from wasting money, decluttering helps you make it. By reducing stress and anxiety, it frees you to think clearly about what you really want and need, so you save unnecessary expense in the future.

The decline of dining

Modern family life – and the death of the formal dinner party – mean that dining rooms are less and less likely to be used for their true purpose, says Vicky. "Often they become dumping grounds for all the things we keep but don't actually need (ten per cent of the average person's clutter is unwanted gifts, still in boxes). When stuff builds up like that, you forget what's at the bottom of the pile, so you've effectively lost it."

We all like to keep things 'just in case' but if something has been sitting at the bottom of a heap unused for years, you have to wonder if its time will ever come. "If you haven't used it for three years," says Vicky, "You have to ask how important it is in your life."

Rethinking how we store stuff that only gets occasional use is the quickest way to declutter, she adds. "If you have a secure shed or garage, I recommend boxing things up, labelling them and storing them neatly. You wouldn't store seasonal items like Christmas decorations in your lounge, so extend that philosophy to stuff like barbecue equipment or children's party items."

With space at a premium for so

many of us, Vicky also recommends thinking realistically about the function of each area of your home. "Don't let your dining room become a box room," she says. "If you hardly ever use it to eat in, perhaps it's time to get a folding table that you can store in the garage and get out for Christmas dinner. Then you can use the space for something else, whether it's a playroom, TV or reading room."

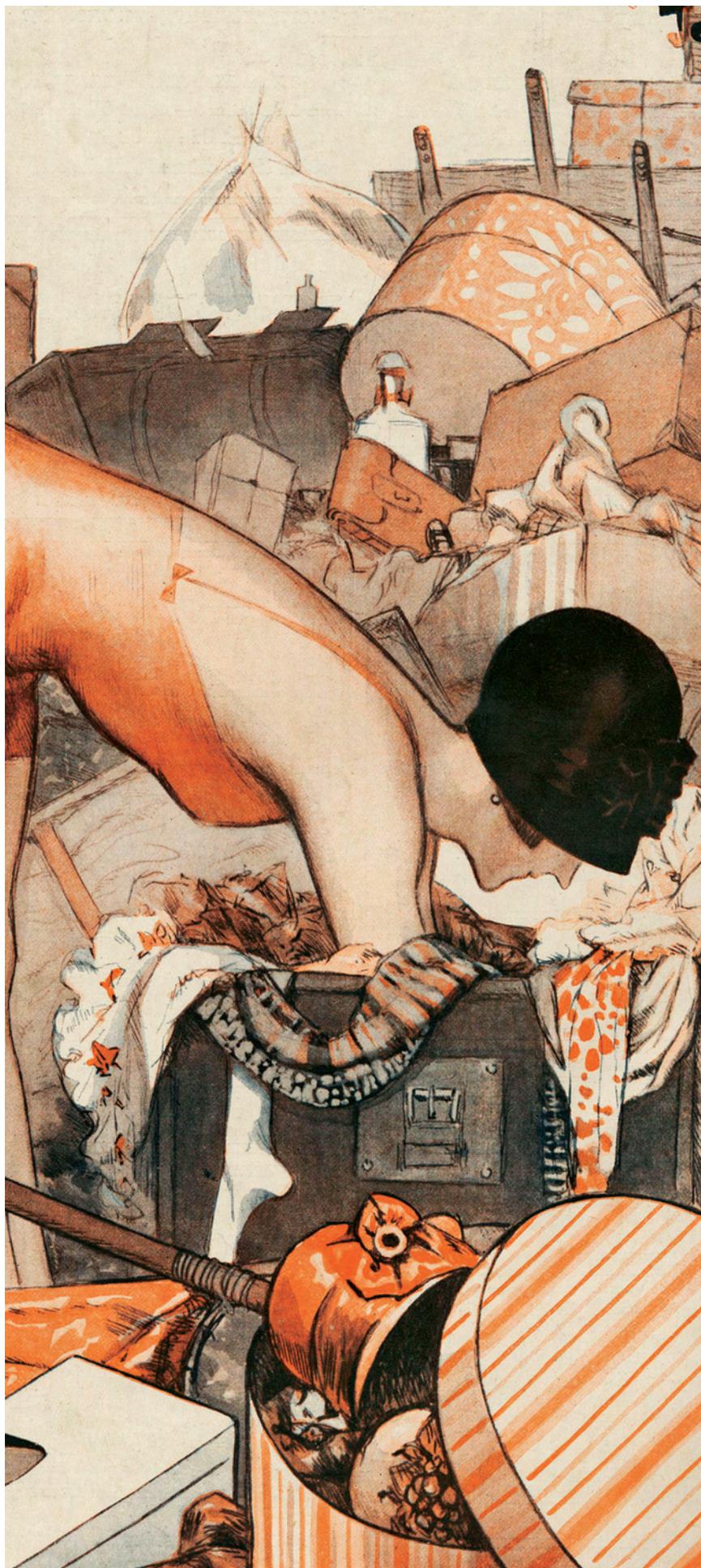
Flush out your bathroom

Your medicine cabinet can make you feel better – clearing it out is a simple, five-minute job that scores sky-high for satisfaction. As Vicky points out, "Items that are out of date can't be used, so there's no guilt in getting rid of them."

Toiletries should be rationalised too. "People waste so much money on these," she adds. "I often come across 10 different kinds of shampoo because we shop for the sake of it rather than using up a product and buying something when we need it."



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MODERN LIFE

Vicky also advises ditching any make-up mistakes. "It's very liberating to have one single bag for products you use regularly, and maybe a separate party make-up bag kept in a drawer. If you buy a lipstick and it doesn't work, give it to a friend. "You're not going to wear it, so take control," says Vicky. "The money's been spent so why not be generous?"

About the lounge

According to Vicky, ornaments and knick-knacks are a huge clutter culprit. "People often point out some ornament that has great sentimental value but you can't see it because it's on a shelf among 20 others," says Vicky. "My advice is to clear the shelf for just that one item. You'll appreciate it so much more and maintenance will be a lot easier. Cluttered surfaces put us off cleaning – when you miss one week of dusting it's even more daunting the next, until eventually it becomes an almighty job."

And if you have hundreds of dusty books, it could be time to cull your collection. "If you're not going to read them again," says Vicky, "share the pleasure these books have given you by passing them on to friends, charity shops or nursing homes."

Records and CDs can also take up valuable space. "It's amazing how people surround themselves with these huge collections, even though they use an iPod for their music and no longer own a CD or record player!"

Work in progress

Whether it's a separate room or just a corner dedicated to admin tasks, decluttering your desk and drawers can feel like an overwhelming job. But it doesn't have to be. "The main thing is not to view it as one enormous task – tackle it bit by bit," advises Vicky. "Spend 20 minutes sorting out one drawer of paperwork one evening, then do another drawer the following night. Focusing on one small area at a time is a great rule for any part of the house: you get a lot done and a real sense of accomplishment."

Vicky also recommends keeping on top of virtual storage space. "Having dozens of little icons dotted about your computer desktop can be very frustrating, but it's very easy to organise them into files – and it's the same with emails. A simple

system will save time and make messages more accessible."

Unwanted digital photos can clog up valuable memory, too, so edit pictures as you download them. "If you've got five photos of the same thing, choose the one that's best and delete the rest," says Vicky.

Out of the closet

When was the last time you had a good rummage through your wardrobe? "Whenever I help declutter clothes, I'll always hear, 'Oh, I forgot I had that!'" says Vicky. "Often people won't wear something for months – simply because their wardrobe is in such a mess, they can't see it."

She has one rule of thumb when it comes to sorting your clothes: be honest. "Put it on and ask yourself, 'Do I like it or do I like it on me?'" You'll find there's a big difference between the two," she promises. "You may love a blouse and imagine you'll find an occasion to wear it but, the truth is, if it doesn't suit you, you won't."

Presentation is key, too. "Matching hangers make clothes seem much more desirable. People giggle at that but, if you appreciate things, you wear them more and buy less."

The same applies to accessories. "The best way to store jewellery is laid flat in a drawer. That way you can see the things you enjoy wearing and discard those that you don't."

Kitchen confidential

"If you don't cook often, kitchen surfaces tend to get used for all sorts of other clutter," warns Vicky, while going through cupboards and binning date-expired products is another essential. Also, the average kitchen contains way too much equipment.

"Many of us end up with twice as many pans as we can fit on the hob, or several gadgets all dedicated to performing the same function," says Vicky. And it's not just juicers and blenders. "Wooden spoons are about the cheapest item to replace, but so many of us have a huge collection of old ones just harbouring germs."

Finally, you know that drawer full of bits and bobs? "Elastic bands, safety pins, corks and buttons all serve a purpose, but you don't need dozens of them – five will do".

Junk the Junk runs for five weeks on ITV's *This Morning* from Wednesday.