



NEAT FREAK NEWS: April 2008

Ahhhh, Spring time. Dogwoods and azaleas are a'bloomin' here in North Carolina, our dreadful drought seems to be subsiding, and everyone I know has a touch of the spring cleaning bug!

It's the ideal time to fling open the windows, shovel out from under the weight of winter "stuff" accumulation, and lighten your load. This month I'm continuing my year-long series on organizing your home, top to bottom. You can buy books that will tell you how to do this, but hey...why not read it here for free! Check out my newsletter every other month, follow my advice (as much as you can stand!), and by the end of 2008, I guarantee you'll be living with less and have more room to breathe. Enjoy.

THE KITCHEN

This ain't your grandma's kitchen! Once the spot for (mostly) mom to make and serve wholesome family meals, kitchens now multi-task as mail sorting stations, homework hubs, makeshift mudrooms, home office havens, and occasionally, as places for food preparation.

If you're ready to see your kitchen countertops again, I'll share with you a few organizing essentials so you can de-clutter, establish systems and get back to cooking...or at least enjoy take-out in peace.

Appliances Big & Small

Every kitchen includes the usual suspects—the fridge, the oven and stove, perhaps a dishwasher. Beyond that, the sky's the limit. You can now purchase your very own bread maker, a professional stand mixer, a coffee machine worthy of a trained Barista, even a panini press for those who have the time and inclination. (For a humorous look at these and other "unitaskers", check out www.unclutterer.com). These amazing kitchen gadgets are all well and good if you use them, but if you don't, they're nothing more than clutter.

First, assess the appliances you use weekly, and keep those within arms reach. Anything else should be stored away for special occasions. If you have space in your kitchen, consider a slide-out shelf that fits in a cabinet and will store several appliances, allowing you to easily remove them as needed. If, after a year, you haven't pressed any panini, it's time to say goodbye to that appliance and pass it on to someone else.

Your morning Cup o' Joe

Everyone in my home knows not to stand between me and my morning coffee! Gather together your coffee making goodies (filters, coffee bean grinder, measuring tools and mugs) and store them all together directly above or below your coffee maker. This will simplify your morning routine and get that first hot steaming sip in your mouth a little faster.

So many recipes, so little time

I enjoy cookbooks as much as the next gal, but if you haven't cooked out of a particular book in over a year, it's time to let it go. Test yourself by placing a sticky note in a book each time you use it. At the end of the year, if there are no sticky notes, you know what you've got to do!

And if you love to clip recipes from magazines but can never quite find that culinary masterpiece when you need it, it's time to sort what you have, purge what you'll never cook, and organize those that remain. An inexpensive photo album with those sticky, magnetic pages is a simple storage solution for clipped recipes. You can sort into appetizers, salads, pasta dishes, etc. and now you'll know where to go the next time you're ready to create the perfect feast.

Kids in the Kitchen

Your kitchen should be a safe and fun place for your crawler or toddler to play in while you cook meals. Dedicate one low drawer in your kitchen to your little one so he can stay entertained. Stock this drawer with pots, pans, wooden spoons, stacking cups, Playdoh, crayons and paper. Make sure to babyproof the rest of your kitchen (covering outlets, locking cabinets with potentially dangerous contents, placing a latch on your stove) so your child is always safe.

Once kids are older, allow them to have some independence in the kitchen by storing healthy snacks in a low cabinet they can access themselves. Store a few plastic cups down low, as well, and allow them to get their own water from the refrigerator as soon as they're able. You want to make the kitchen a fun place for them to be so they can learn to share in the fun of preparing and enjoying meals together.

If only the dishwasher could unload itself!

This dreaded chore can be simplified by storing frequently washed items (e.g. glasses and plates) in cabinets right next to the dishwasher. You'll also save yourself time if you load like items together in the dishwasher so they can be put away together more quickly when clean. And as soon as your kids are old enough, pass this chore on to them!

Food Storage

Start by pulling everything out of your pantry. Check expiration dates and get rid of anything expired (or unrecognizable!). Also assess whether you'll really use an item. Maybe that inspiration to start cooking traditional Ethiopian food was just a fantasy—

if you haven't made injera since the war with Eritrea, it may be time to clear up some valuable real estate in your kitchen.

For those items that remain, sort them into categories (all pastas and dried goods together, all canned fruits and veggies together, all snack items together...you get the picture). Then return items to the pantry with their pals so you can easily find them in the future. Consider using tools such as can stackers or lazy susans to provide easier access to the food you store. Group smaller items together in a basket or plastic bin so it doesn't get knocked over or lost in the pantry.

Repeat this same exercise in your refrigerator—assess expiration dates and usage and group like items together for easy access. This exercise will help you reduce the waste that occurs when you throw out un-eaten food or purchase duplicates of things you already have.

Make it work for you!

True confession, I live with a “WUK” (world’s ugliest kitchen)—we have no granite, no stainless steel, no fabulous built-in desk. And yes, I have Eames era stickers covering tacky 1980’s vegetable tiles on my back splash. However, my kitchen still functions! I use a rolling cart to provide additional counter space and I use vertical paper sorters on the wall to keep up with family information. I’m fairly ruthless about clearing the countertops and putting everything back in it’s rightful home. Even if your kitchen isn’t magazine-ready-beautiful, it can still work for you. Set aside time daily to clear the clutter and make space for the stuff you truly need, use, eat and love. Bon appetit!

PRODUCT SHOUT OUT!

Hey ladies, if you’re in the market for a new spring purse that is cute AND helps you to be quick on the draw with your cell phone, keys or credit card, you might want to take a look at The Moss Collection (www.themosscollection.com). Be sure to tell Sherry the Neat Freak sent you!