

SILICON VALLEY

FALL 2018

DESIGN

THE MAGAZINE OF ASID CALIFORNIA PENINSULA | SILICON VALLEY CHAPTER OF ASID



AMERICAN
SOCIETY OF
INTERIOR
DESIGNERS
CALIFORNIA PENINSULA



Making Space for What Matters



By Melinda Mandell, ASID

Pushing back the clutter is a daily battle in my house. I often wish I had an empty drawer to whisk that ugly pile into as friends dropped by on a Sunday afternoon. Here are four things to think about when searching for meaning in your clutter-filled home.

Functional furniture

Use furniture that works for your needs rather than what you think should be in that space. Don't be afraid to break the rules. Need drawers instead of doors? Go for it!

In order to provide more storage for one family of passionate readers and writers, I placed an enclosed minimal bookcase in the dining room. It's stunning, and for all anyone would know, it contains serving dishes!

I'm a fan of packing as much storage into interiors as possible. But I also appreciate flexibility and an open, lightweight look. So often, instead of big, built-in solutions, I assemble collections of furniture that meet storage needs without feeling bulky. Think free-standing cabinets with tall legs flanking the living room fireplace to house a collection of cherished family photo albums.

I also want to take a moment to rant about console tables. There have so many beautiful designs, but with nearly all of them, I want to scream, "Put a drawer on it!" As far as I can see, there

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is no good reason not to have a drawer and a shelf on a console table — someplace to stash a bag, a pair of shoes, the spare keys or the doggie bags.

Work with what you have

Don’t be afraid of working with what you have. If you have extra space in your laundry room and not enough in your pantry, use that space for pantry items. However, this is not permission to be haphazard in your storage habits. Keep like things with like things.

Though we are moving toward being a paperless society, we are not quite there yet. One good tip I heard from an organization-fairy-godmother and love to practice is to sort the mail as it comes into the house. Unnecessary items are tossed into the recycle bin, and the mail is placed in a tray to take further action with later. It helps so much to prevent clutter by deciding right at the door what you will allow into your home.

Starting fresh

When designing a remodel or new build, we as designers are positioned perfectly to help our clients (or ourselves) optimize daily flow, both customizing spaces and maximizing organization.

When designing kitchens, I take inventory of what types of tools, appliances and supplies my clients have, and then design their kitchen to have high-frequency-use items close at hand and low-frequency-use items further away from the main work area. Knife collection? Have a drawer for that! Paper towels in bulk? Have a cabinet for that! Sparkling water obsession? Have a shelf for that!

One client wanted a dedicated space for their sacred morning coffee ritual. The solution took advantage of an enclosed stairwell



protruding inconveniently into the kitchen. The depth of the stairwell is now hidden by the kitchen’s new “coffee center” and pull-out pantry nestled perfectly behind. The client gained a hallowed space for coffee in the morning, extra accessible storage and maximum square feet in their new kitchen.

Call in a professional

As professionals, we know and preach the value of bringing in experts. We know when we need to bring in an architect, a surveyor or a Title 24 consultant. Personally and professionally, I have benefitted from professional organization services. We want our community to value us as experts, so let’s practice what we preach. Let’s call in the dedicated closet designers, the qualified garage outfitters and the professional organizers.

What I strive for in my interior design practice, and in my own home, is to create spaces that support a meaningful life. Each space must be thoughtfully considered, planned and optimized with beautiful silhouettes, useful storage, organizational tools and negative (empty) space.

Designing our homes well gives us space in our lives to do more of the things that are meaningful to us. ■

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