

## Feature

## Advertising

# Dressing up your closet

By Amy Acheson

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**Closets are small rooms with great expectations.** They need to be functional and organized at the very least, but with a little planning, they can unfold to a place of beauty and inspiration.

When it comes to women and clothing, what can we say? The two were meant for each other! We love to shop, whether it is online, downtown or at the big department stores. The only problem with our fancy for fashions is that we accumulate much more than we could ever possibly need — squeezing countless outfits into an ever-shrinking closet until we can't find a single thing to wear!

If we apply Pareto's Principle — the 80/20 Rule — we will start to understand our hang-up. The theory is we actually rely on just 20 percent of our clothes and rummage through the rest for no apparent reason. Wouldn't it be nice to skinny down to just the current clothes we love and have an organized closet in which to find them?

Sarah Suzanka, renowned architect and author of "The Not So Big House," did just that when she relocated to Raleigh, N.C., from St. Paul. She saw her narrow closet as the perfect renovation project. She began the process by letting go and donating clothes she no longer needed, and then by applying her architectural skills, was able to plan the best use of her space. She even found a way to personalize it by creating a centerpiece on the wall to showcase her necklace and scarf collections. Now she loves going into her closet; it's colorful and uplifting.

"It's making the closet itself beautiful," she explained.

Sometimes it's difficult to part with items we no longer need. "We have to create some processes for ourselves to make the letting go more of a celebration than a sadness," said Suzanka. It becomes easier when we know our clothes are going to someone who can really use them.



Photo by Randy O'Rourke

By taking a deeper look inside, people can assess true needs.

To help in this effort, Louise Kurzeka, a professional organizer who has serviced many in the Southern Minnesota area, tells clients, "You should only have what you can wear today in your closet. You can put those other clothes such as items that are out of season in another closet, but not this one."

Kurzeka started her career with a seminar titled, "June Cleaver Doesn't Live Here Anymore." It's about making life manageable by simplifying one's belongings to the essentials. It helps us keep up day to day because busy lifestyles demand efficient ways of living.

So sort through that tangled mess, no matter how large, and start to categorize: dress pants, dress shirts, skirts — you get the picture. If you haven't worn something in the past two years, put it in a "review pile." Garments that need dry cleaning or mending — another pile. If you decide they're worth fixing, take them in right away.

"Let's face it. We are not sewers like our grandmothers were," said Kurzeka. Finally, decide what you can give to a friend or family member, consign, or donate to a worthy cause.

The benefits are many when we share our used clothing with others. For instance, Workforce Development is a place that accepts professional clothes, like interview outfits, for people trying to become economically independent. Remember, you get a tax deduction per article when donated to places like the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, or the Epilepsy Foundation.

Consignment shops give up to 40 or 50 percent back on the marked price — better than a garage sale and easier. Also, take into account that by reselling and reusing our gently used clothes, we are helping to keep money in America at a time when the majority of apparel is made overseas.

Gaelyn Newbury, owner of Fashion Fair, a quality consignment boutique in Northfield, has taken a spin on "secondhand" and discovered a market in vintage clothing. (This is the perfect place to drop off those old party and prom dresses.) She notes there's a "new ethos" to consignment shops.

"It's become very chic to consign," she says. "People are getting rid of those things they can't use and looking for those they can."

Be selective in what you add back into your closet. Kristi Larson, owner of Kristi's in Owatonna, suggests buying clothes that can be mixed with different pieces you already own. When you buy, make sure you really love it and it fits well. A few quality pieces go a long way.

Once you clear out that clutter, create a space that's just your own. Dress it up with only your favorites and you'll find less really is more.