

Published January 14th, 2015

## Stylish Solutions

By Ann McDonald



This month, I have included photos from my own home so you can see where I walk the walk, not just talk the talk. This is one of my favorite angles to take photos of our kitchen. Why? Because it speaks truth about my dish cupboards. Seasonally I rotate collections but those can accumulate quickly. When I need an honest assessment of my mess, I snap this shot and take the truth pill. If it's bad, I dive in and reduce big time. Photo Peter Medilek

drapery and upholstery. There are so many services that specialize; find the ones with solid reviews that use eco-friendly products and invest. And look up. Don't neglect the oversized chandelier and ceilings. They need to be washed.

Many people hold off until the so-called spring months (March and April) to do what they call a "spring clean," but we have found getting a solid crew in for a deep clean in January not only clears the glitter off the hardwood floor (hello, holiday leftovers), it sets our clients in a refreshing place even while the weather can be gloomy.

Personally, we have stone floors and the glitter (which I love in December) gets a tad tiresome in late January. After a solid vacuum by me, it's time to call in the stone polishers and sealers. Expensive? Perhaps, but definitely worth it. Besides, a bit of maintenance along the way saves the investment down the road.

Second: Reduce, reduce, reduce. Did I say reduce? I meant, reduce! We tackle our waistlines and even our winter gardens in January but often forget to look hard inside our homes. Personally, I succumb to January sales just like the rest and, as a decorator, I am often purchasing for inventory later in the season, but some of those things work their way into my personal space. Not good, Ann.

How do I recommend tackling this reduction? Simple: make a chart and get aggressive. Take inventory and target to reduce by 25 percent. That means when you are cleaning out a kitchen storage area, if you have 10 measuring cups, lose two or three - more if you can. Ten pans? Lose two or three.

Many design clients have dreams of spring remodels, home updates and fresh flowers in completely redesigned guest suites and home offices, but the first thing we must address is the deep clean.

Think of it as an accounting of your home interior.

We have a saying in our office: "Blessing comes when it has a space to reside." The same is true of new furniture and interior decorating and design. We must create space for it within our homes before it can come live with us.

Without space for new things to inhabit, they get piled onto old proverbial wine skins and before you know it your gorgeous home is brimming with old and new items that don't quite work together. Let's take this January to really address simple tips and execute simple diligence so we can refresh our homes and refresh our families at the same time.

How do we do that? Here are my top three successful January cleanout tips for you, the stylish suburbanite:

First: Deep Clean. Even if you have never hired a cleaning service, there are times it's prudent to call in the professionals. At least three times a year, we recommend a deep clean for each of our clients. That includes things like: skylights, stone floors, heating vents, interior ceilings,

The truth is, when we really face our truth behind the storage doors in the kitchen and on the book shelves in the family room, there is always room for reduction. Donate, garage sale, recycle.

Even the pros know: it's nearly impossible for someone to get a clear vision for a space in their mind's eye without clearing the clutter first. It might be time to donate or toss that afghan with snags from your pet and one too many coffee stains (am I speaking to myself? perhaps), and purchase a new one that won't snag and will bleach in the wash.

It's funny, we do this with our wardrobes consistently, but we fail to remember it is just as critical with our homes, perhaps more so as our spaces nurture and create just by virtue of being space.

Third: Take Photos, Look Objectively, Document Progress for Encouragement. We tell our clients to take photos of each room in their home this time of year. Why? Because you'll see the space more clearly once you take a solid photo of a space, let it alone for a few days, clear your head, and by extension, your visual palate and come back to the photos a day or two later.

Set aside some time to address each photo and room. What are your goals for those spaces this year? Will 2015 be a year of guests? Then let's budget and plan for a refresh in that guest room. Will 2015 see an elderly parent or post-college child move home? Then let's budget and plan for that. What about the possible remodel or addition? Photos help tremendously. They simply don't lie.

When we sit down and work through what is really going on in a space, we can identify what needs to change.

Here's to a happy, healthy and tidy 2015 where our homes have space for blessings to reside. If you are interested in joining one of our upcoming design workshops, please email [ann@couturechateau.com](mailto:ann@couturechateau.com) or call (925) 386-0720.



We have two French Ranges that are not self-cleaning. As such, a professional deep clean is critical from a maintenance standpoint. Take a good look at your appliances, inside and out, front and back as well as ceilings, light fixtures and floors. Hire professionals when you can. Photos Eric Nelder



Close-up shots reveal how clean items really are.



Do your countertops need refinishing? I have brass straps on butcher block and call in marine-grade finishers to keep them in ship shape. Photo Peter Medilek



Ann McDonald, IIDA, NAPO, is the Founder/CEO of Couture Chateau, a luxury interior design firm in Orinda. For a complete blog post including other design ideas, visit [www.couturechateau.com/blog](http://www.couturechateau.com/blog)

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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