

You don't have to buy all your storage gear at the Container Store. Vintage items — like this relish tray (search for similar ones on eBay) — both corral stuff and add personality. Other ideas: Mount a garden rake head on the wall to hang necklaces; use old wooden crates to hold shoes.



A Dressing Room of Her Own

What's a fashionista to do in a house with no closets? Build one!

The average size of a closet in a modern U.S. home? Six feet by 8 feet, which might be enough space for my admittedly large collection of shoes (um, maybe 100 pairs), cocktail dresses and vintage coats, with at least a corner left over for my husband's stuff. But the builders of our 1921 rowhouse didn't have a time machine to see what future buyers might like — or any inkling of what clotheshorses Americans in general, and I specifically, would become. Which explains why, though the Mount Pleasant abode we bought last spring came with many charms (a breezy porch, crown moldings), it lacked any reasonable amount of closet space. Within 1,800 square feet, there were just two measly, 3-foot-wide closets — perhaps enough rack room for a tween boy who wears the same shirt every day.



Color Blockade: To keep clothes and shoes easy to find (and easy on the eyes), the author sorted them and displayed them by color.



Gem Locker: Velvet-lined, jewelry drawers help keep necklaces and bracelets at the ready — and untangled.

Collection Agent: Leave room for small, personal touches — in this case, antique ink wells and jars.



ROOMDETAIL PHOTOS BY ABBY GREENAWALT



A mid-century metal peacock decorates the author's dressing room door. Deco-era fashion illustrations snagged at a Paris flea market also bring a touch of glam to the walls.

Why did our new-old house have such puny closets, and why weren't there more of them? "People didn't have as many clothes," says Toronto fashion historian Jonathan Walford. "They stored things in trunks or armoires. Closets were just for coats."

Still, on moving day, I kept hunting for phantom storage. Surely we'd missed a closet. By my not-so-scientific measuring (a DVF scarf makes a great yardstick), I estimated we had room for an eighth of our stuff, which would mean dressing in nothing but black (me) or parting with a zillion baseball hats (my husband). Visions of sweaters heaped in the kitchen and boots piled in the den went through my head. Does "Hoarders" have a "Buried by Fashion" edition?

We went into "This Old House" land knowing storage might be a problem. "There are closet challenges with older homes. Spaces can be small! You have to think vertically," says Alabama pro organizer Amanda Le Blanc of Style Network's clutter-busting show, "The Amandas."

So I decided, since I didn't really have a closet, I'd build one. Like many older houses in D.C., our pad has what I call Uncle Fes-



Hanging Around: Unusual hooks, like these the author scored in an Austin, Texas, thrift store, make putting bags or scarves on the wall stylish.

ter's Room, a rather useless space fit only for a kid or weird relative. Ours, across from the master bedroom, measures 8 feet by 10 feet, enough for all my clothes.

"You want it to be like a little department store," advised my pal Anna Kahoe, co-owner of GoodWood (1428 U St. NW; 202-986-3640), who turned the basement of her last house into a glam space of clothing racks and mirrors. "It'll prolong the joy you get from shopping and help you see more of your clothes."

After debating ordering closet parts online and doing it all myself, I decided the oddness of the space (a radiator in one corner, a 1-foot-wide closet filled with HVAC pipes in another) meant I needed pros. I splurged on Arlington's Eco-nize (Eco-nize.com), which, for \$2,000, crafted me ashy-gray wooden shelving units with hanging bars, spots for shoes and bag cubbies.

Eco-nize measured the room, then came back a few weeks later to noisily install the "closet." The resulting dressing room's new shelves soared close to the 10-foot ceiling, giving me enough storage to finally start unpacking.

At Le Blanc's urging, I organized everything by color. "That

helps you know what you've got and can mean you'll purge more and shop less," she said.

Sure enough, I found I had 27 black blazers, enough to outfit the Rolling Stones for several reunion tours. A few got dropped off at Goodwill (sorry, Mick!).

Jewelry went into neat, velvet-lined drawers; my tights and flats got organized into hanging bags on the backs of the room's doors. And suddenly, there was bin-free, mess-free zen where there had been chaos, and storage where there had been none.

Adding personality to my chick cave — framed fashion illustrations on the walls, a sparkly Pottery Barn chandelier on the ceiling — made me almost as happy as getting organized. A vintage vanity table from Craigslist and a big Ikea mirror meant I could blow-dry my hair and put on my makeup in the room, pretending to be some movie star.

"It ends up being about relishing your feminine side," says Kahoe. "You'll buy fewer items of clothing but see them more and keep them in better shape."

And who knows? Having all my stuff on display might even inspire me to shop less. Which I'm sure will help my husband stop resenting his crummy, tiny closet.

JENNIFER BARGER



Smaller jewelry items get stored in a Little Black Dress Organizer hung on the back of the door (\$20, Containerstore.com).

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DECOR DATES

A Show of Color at A Spring Showhouse

When the grand, 1956 mansion at 4951 Rockwood Parkway goes on the market later this spring, it'll be listed in the millions. But just \$20 will get you inside the Spring Valley spread during the D.C. Design House April 14 through May 13, when 24 local interior talents will use it to showcase the latest nesting trends.

Among the talents reimagining the 10,000-square-foot space: Kelly Proxmire, who will tackle a mammoth ballroom, turning a zone where South American diplomats once mingled into a plush solarium. "I was inspired by the Orangerie at Versailles," says Prox-



Allie Mann will mix crackled tile and polished nickel fixtures in a child's bathroom at the D.C. Design House.

mire. "I'll do orange drapes, white walls and comfortable furniture. It's got three walls of windows, and I think people would rather sit in a sunroom than dance in a ballroom these days."

Upstairs, Case Design Inc.'s Allie Mann subtly riffs on Lilly Pulitzer's peppery pinks and greens in a child's bathroom. "I want it to feel soft, almost romantic," says Mann. She'll combine pastels with "blingy sconces, crackled tiles and polished nickel, which is fresh."

Other spaces also weave in colors both muted and bold, including Marika Meyer's cobalt-infused music room and Victoria Sanchez's rainbow-bright bedroom. Tue.-Fri. 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Sat.-Sun. noon-5 p.m. Dcdesignhouse.com. JENNIFER BARGER