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No more old, boring closets

By Kay O'Donnell March 5, 2006 Publication: San Antonio Express-News (TX) Page: 06N Word Count: 788

Remember the days when closets meant clutter? When items were squeezed and stacked into every available corner with no particular order?

For many, those days are gone, discarded with the pale blue leisure suit. Homeowners answering the call to order have gotten serious about closets. "Sales of home organization products for use in closets are expected to post the strongest gains through 2009," said Jennifer Mapes, an industry analyst with the Freedonia Group, an Ohio-based market research firm. Mapes links this trend to the increasing amount of home space being devoted to closets, "particularly in the master suites of new and newly remodeled homes."

And we're not talking about your everyday, one-dimensional closets, here. More homeowners are opting for larger closets that resemble dressing rooms, with handpicked cabinetry and extras such as granite-topped islands and additional drawers and shelves for storage.

These larger closet areas "are kind of an extension of the whole bedroom," said Bobby O'Brien, a residential sales consultant for Hoss Construction Inc. Therefore, he said, clients are putting an emphasis on keeping the closet area more organized.

Closet sizes range from 6 feet by 8 feet to as large as 12 by 15 -- bigger than many bedrooms, he said.

Though some manufacturers, such as California Closets and ClosetMaid, have put together closet-organization collections, some homeowners are seeking out kitchen cabinet designers to customize a plan.

Laura Midgett, a kitchen and cabinet designer at Lowe's at 1470 Austin Hwy., has handled both sides of the design issue. "We're actually building things in" for some customers, she said. Others choose the versatility of off-the-shelf products and items specifically adapted for clothing, shoes and handbags.

"Budgets determine the quality of the cabinetry we recommend," Midgett said, adding that she has worked with homeowners to design closet space with budgets ranging from \$2,000 to as much as \$10,000.

"A lot of times, these closets are adjacent to the master bath or attached to it," she said. They might include coffee bars, mini refrigerators or even full-size washers and dryers.

Midgett has also seen a rise in the demand for dressing tables and customized lighting. How about cable lights attached low to the closet wall for the sole purpose of illuminating shoes?

O'Brien agrees that lighting systems are becoming more popular, particularly recessed lighting. "People are getting away from that one single light in the middle of the room," he said.

The floor space of today's master closets is not going unnoticed, either. Hardwood or bamboo flooring, throw rugs and interchangeable carpet tiles are being used to dress up the spaces, Midgett said.

For many of these closets with all the trimmings, the key word is customized. O'Brien said his company is increasingly being asked to accommodate certain needs when it comes to the master closet. Island areas, typically used to store valuables and accessories, are becoming more common as well, O'Brien said.

Steps to organization

Take time

Don't expect organization to happen overnight. Depending on the area, schedule a couple of hours each day to work on getting the area organized.

Clean house

Go through the contents. Donate or have a garage sale for anything you don't or can't wear or

use any more. Use the two-year rule of thumb: If you haven't worn it in two years, it's time to say goodbye to it.

Take inventory

After you've removed extraneous items, take a look at what remains. Does it make sense to keep it here? Is there another area where it would be more easily accessible for its purpose?

Look for wasted space

If you're in need of more storage space, think about additional areas that you can put to work. Examples include over doors and underneath beds.

Go up

If you don't have a lot of room to work with, then go 'up.' Instead of only having a couple of shelves to house your closet items, take them up to the ceiling.

Divide the space

By adding shelves to a single shelf, or by using containers that stack atop one another, you can divide the vertical space and make efficient use of the area you have to work with.

See it, reach it

The three rules to organization are visibility, accessibility and flexibility. Choose containers that are either transparent or that you can easily label to help immediately identify the contents and help save valuable time. Make sure that the items you need most often are the easiest to access. Select a storage system that can adapt to your changing needs. That way, you can reconfigure and reuse solutions to solve a variety of storage and organization problems.

Source: Courtney Shaver, Container Store

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