

# Behind Closed Doors

If you're gripped with fear every time you open the door to your linen closet, don't throw in the towel. The key to a great space is organization. Here, the pros tell you how. *By Abbey Gold*

There's something incredibly gratifying about a closet filled with neat stacks of folded towels and crisp sheets. Go that extra mile and label your sheets by size (twin, full, queen, or king) and group according to room (master, children's, or guest), and you may find yourself downright giddy.

After all, linen closets have become the final frontier of organization. In Westchester, they're keeping pace with our growing homes, going grander, both larger in size and custom-fitted with special shelves, drawers, and hanging bars. With more bedrooms come more sheets to store and, with more bathrooms, more color-coordinated towels to stow. In some new construction, builders include more than one such space in the plans.

Still, the sign of a linen closet that's a cut above isn't simply square footage (though that helps). "A great linen closet is more about effective use of space than size," says Janet Valenza, sales and design manager for the Westchester/Manhattan office of Closets by Design. In fact, in one home, her team tucked a linen closet in a 12-inch space between a shower and a wall. Functionality is the name of the game.

The bottom line? Many of us are no longer satisfied with digging for matching hand towels, which has led to an explosion of closet organizing companies ready to create areas for toiletries, towels, linens, and hampers within closets.

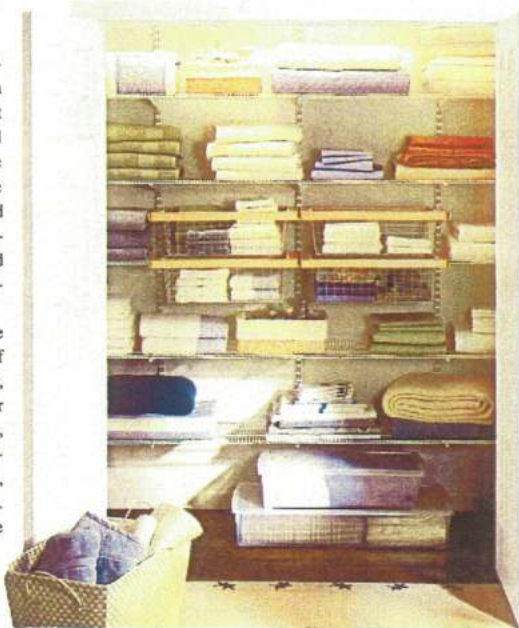
Photo Courtesy of The Container Store

sure everyone in the house knows where items belong.

"Computer labels on the sides of shelves have made my life easier," she says. "I don't have to constantly reorganize our linens anymore, and my family and my housekeeper seem to keep the closet better organized with the constant written reminders." In the Finkelstein household, making beds also is now a breeze with separate shelves labeled "Master-king," "Caroline-queen," "David-full," and "Kevin-twin." ("It's great for household relationships," Finkelstein quips.)

Ideally, you want to have two sets of sheets and one mattress pad for every bed in the house. Bonni Stanley, a Bedford-based style consultant and owner of the wardrobe consultancy Get It Together, also recommends having one dust ruffle, one duvet cover, and one sham per pillow.

Place things you don't use on a regular basis on the top shelf and items you often reach for on the middle shelves. Stanley generally puts everyday sheets and towels where they are most acces-



Jill Weisfeld of Scarsdale is one such customer. She admits it was the constant search for items that were "all over the place" that led her to hire Debbie Harwin of Larchmont-based I Need My Space, an organizational service that deals with both commercial and residential properties, as a way of clearing her clutter and systematizing her family's two linen closets. After all, what woman wants to be the only one in the house who knows where everything is?

"I never paid a lot of attention to my closets and would just throw stuff in. Eventually, it became harder and harder to find what I needed," Weisfeld says. "I now have one closet that houses all of my white linens and another that's just for the kids."

Intrigued? Here, the pros offer some foolproof ways to segregate your space so you (and your kids!) can find what you need, when you need it.

First, says organization guru Harwin (who recently taped a segment on *The View* after helping Meredith Vieira take charge of her Irvington house) take stock of what you have. "Pull everything out and take inventory. Then start editing it down." Don't be afraid to purge: get rid of old towels and items you haven't used in years. Then sort sheets into sets. Place whatever doesn't have a match in another pile to sort later (or toss).

Don't worry about what Harwin calls "mistake purchases"—items you bought but never used. "There's no need to crowd your space with overflow; all it does is take away from the closet functioning as a source of storage," she says. "Don't feel guilty; just get rid of those old sheets and towels."

Second, wipe shelves with a cleanser and line them with shelf paper. Harwin uses Bounce Fabric Softener sheets in between layers of towels and sheets as a way of giving the space a fresh scent.

Match sheets by rooms or by color. You might want to group together items for the kids' rooms, the master bedroom, and so on. Some homeowners, like Eva Finkelstein of Scarsdale, label their closet shelves for a no-excuse way of making

Home & Garden • Fall 2006 • 49

## Sources

Folding, sorting, and arranging are just a phone call away.

### Closets

ALTERNATIVE CLOSET COMPANY, INC.  
657 E. Main St., Mount Kisco  
(914) 666-5665, [www.alternativecloset.com](http://www.alternativecloset.com)

BILOTTA  
564 Mamaroneck Ave., Mamaroneck  
(914) 381-7734

175 E. Main St., Mount Kisco  
(914) 242-1022

525 N. State Rd., Briarcliff Manor  
(914) 762-3432  
[www.bilotta.com](http://www.bilotta.com)

CALIFORNIA CLOSETS  
16 Saw Mill River Rd., Hawthorne  
(800) 339-2567, [www.calclosets.com](http://www.calclosets.com)

CLOSETS BY DESIGN  
606 Franklin Ave., Mount Vernon  
(914) 665-6800, [www.closetsbydesign.com](http://www.closetsbydesign.com)

TRANSFORM  
(800) 450-1455, [www.gotransform.com](http://www.gotransform.com)

### Organizers

I NEED MY SPACE, INC., Larchmont  
Debbie Harwin  
(914) 833-2626, [www.ineedmyspace.com](http://www.ineedmyspace.com)

GET IT TOGETHER, Bedford  
Bonni Stanley  
(914) 234-4406, [Bonnistanley@aol.com](mailto:Bonnistanley@aol.com)

sible; extra blankets and pillows go on higher shelves.

"It's crucial that you check your arrangements by visibility and accessibility," stresses Harwin, "because if you can't see it, you won't use it." This means rotating certain items such as beach towels, which in winter you use only on vacation but regularly pull out during the summer.

Finally, stock bulkier supplies, such as toilet paper rolls, extra toothpaste, soap, and cold medicines, in clear bins or baskets (and by category) on the lower shelves. Of course, this depends on how much room you have, but Harwin says there is often "dead space" in a closet that can be better utilized. Built-in or wire shelf dividers from stores such as The Container Store or professional closet-organizing companies work well because of their built-in dividers. **PHG**

*Abbey Gold writes for a variety of national magazines. Tired of digging for her favorite blankets, she is hoping a space organizer will have mercy on her and stop by her Westchester house.*