

INSIDE STORY

Clutter? You gotta bite the bullet

If your house is heaving with stuff, you probably need the help of junk-busting Romaine Lowry. Belfast-born Romaine is the brains behind London-based The Clutter Clinic which aims to overhaul your home, office, wardrobe... well, your life really.

Romaine was bitten by the de-cluttering bug after using her re-organising skills on friends' badly behaved homes.

Since then she's been spreading the gospel of de-junking to others ... and now she's bringing the message to her native Northern Ireland.

The former exhibition organiser, who has overseen some of the biggest trade shows at Earls Court, Olympia and NEC, says the high octane atmosphere and logistical nightmares were the perfect preparation for what she does now.

And as a result she combines the property-prepping ruthlessness of House Doctor Ann Maurice with the style savvy of Trinny and Susannah (but nicer). "At a show, 101 things can go wrong and I was dealing with thou-

sands of exhibitors and visitors," said Romaine.

And she says there is a link between disorganised homes and chaotic lives.

"Very often after I've sorted out people's homes it has motivated them to take on other things in their life, like losing weight" she says.

And there are practical reasons for our increasingly overcrowded existences.

"Because of rising property prices, houses are smaller and we need to be very clever with the space we have," says Romaine.

But it's not just about sprucing up a dishevelled home, Romaine 'attacks' every room in the house, spending up to seven hours compiling reports on how to maximise that oh-so-valuable space.

"I look under beds, behind wardrobes, go through letters and photographs, so it is important to establish a rapport with the person," she says.

Again experience from staging interior shows means Romaine is well placed for shifting furniture around to enhance space.

"I come to a house with a fresh



Junk-buster: Romaine Lowry can help you clear that clutter

eye. People are used to their homes and would probably never think of turning a messy box room into a study or spare bedroom," says the makeover guru.

But it seems we are all hoarders; Romaine says the classic mistake people make is not sticking to the 'less is more rule'.

"People have cluttered houses, but don't see it. They have inherited furniture and buy more, so the whole effect is thrown together," she says.

And out of control clutter affects people's lives.

"They don't invite friends round or have family over for Christmas as they are too embarrassed. They're unhappy with their home and the fact they ought to do something about it plays on their mind."

Romaine's no-nonsense approach means hopeless hoarders are relieved of some of the responsibility for disposing of Aunt Agatha's armchair or taking the strain off a wardrobe buckling under the weight of so many (usually unworn) bargain buys.

"I don't physically put anything in a bag, but I know by the look on someone's face if they're dithering," she says.

"I stand over them and ask if they really like it, pointing out that they've had it for years."

This done, all the energy-zapping junk is bagged up (she has a colour-coded system depending

on the items to be disposed of) and removed by Romaine in her four-wheel drive to various destinations, including charity shops or the dump. She even burns confidential items as some clients have bank statements gathering dust for years.

Binning bad habits along with old furniture and clothes is a real weight of people's minds.

"People do feel better when they get rid of the clutter; their homes are more liveable, they are happier and calm in it.

And for those who can't part with an heirloom or want to keep it for the children, short or long-term storage is the answer.

Romaine's mantra is the famous William Morris adage that 'there shouldn't be anything in your home that you don't believe to be beautiful or not useful'.

Clutter-busting tricks:

- ▼ have a place for everything;
- ▼ display favourite photographs and put the rest in an album;
- ▼ wardrobes should be used for clothes in season, with out-of-season clothes in bed stores;
- ▼ A large log basket is a great hiding place for kids' toys;
- ▼ use a blanket box for books and magazines and store it behind the sofa;

▼ make the most of small rooms with Perspex or glass furnishings to create the illusion of space.

Mail order shopping list:

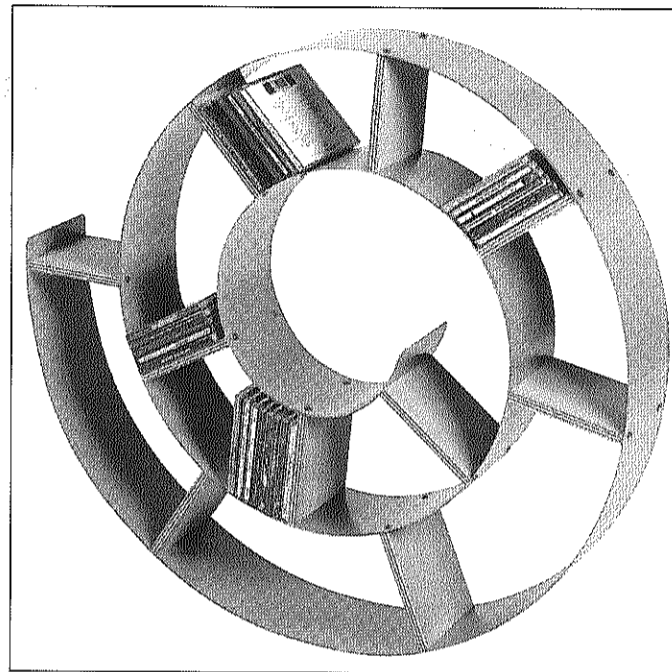
□ Cotswold Company, 0870 550 2233, www.CotswoldCo.com; Ocean, 0870 242 6283, www.ocean-furniture.co.uk; Habitat, 41 Arthur Street, Belfast, 9024 9522, info@habitatbelfast.co.uk and Dwell, 0870 241 8653, www.dwell.co.uk.

□ Clutter Clinic, 07834 338 568, enquiries@clutterclinic.co.uk or www.clutterclinic.co.uk

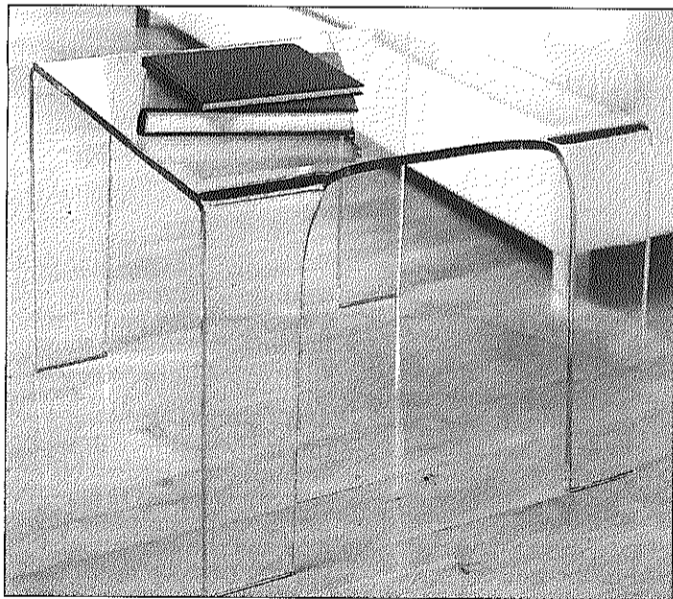
Fees:
 ▼ Initial consultation, £40 hour (half deducted from full clutter clearing session); clutter clearing, £45 hour; clutter blitz, £250 for seven-hour session; wardrobe MOT, £40 hour; photograph albums, £25 hour; property styling, £70 hour, £450 day; home move, £40 hour, £250 seven hours.

An untidy house really does mean an untidy mind.

Helen Carson reports



Clever container: spiral wall-mount shelf holds up to 100 CDs, £59, Dwell



Clearly better: glass or Perspex furniture creates the illusion of space. Side table made of toughened glass, £189, Dwell

A little place to call your own

HOME really is a haven for Northern Ireland folk who crave some 'me space', according to a new survey.

More people here are turning to their homes for peace and relaxation, says a report by Dulux Light and Space. Up to 88% of us now crave a space in the home which is a sanctuary.

Whether they are living with flat mates or a partner and children, time alone in a private space is essential; and a key demand for people in the province when they are looking for a new home.

And for most people the most private spaces are also the smallest. Sixty-eight per cent of us now shun open plan living in favour of smaller personalised rooms to cater for the demand for 'wet', laundry and pantry rooms.

And they are continually searching for innovative ways to tailor their spaces to their specific needs; not only that, but 87% in Northern Ireland now buy to live, not let — cultivating our space to reflect our personal needs.

"Small spaces have become a reality for many living in cities

and this is not a trend that can be turned back easily," said a Dulux spokesman.

"Once regarded as cramped and gloomy, these small spaces have taken on a new desirability with our need to compartmentalise our home to match our increasingly complex lives.

"We now dedicate a huge amount of our time and money to stamping our homes with our personalities. For example, a small home office is perfect for reflecting its workers with creative flair, while a well designed larder will express a food lover's

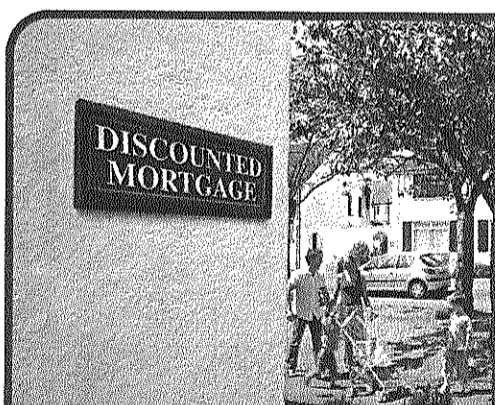
personality and tastes.

These spaces need to work hard for us, not just look good, which means great design. Carefully chosen colours can have a huge impact by helping to reflect light and create a haven of functionality and luxury."

In response, Dulux has developed its Light & Space range of paints which use LumiTec technology that reflects up to twice as much light around a room.

Available from the usual outlets in a range of colours and absolute white (emulsion and quick dry satinwood).

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