

The Organized Closet

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The trend today is to simplify our lives and reduce or eliminate clutter that weighs us down in our lives. Counseling clients on how to streamline their closet is one way to accomplish this. However it can become very complicated as decisions are made emotionally. Assuring clients that adding new clothing should replace the old is not an easy task. In addition, there is the indecisiveness of releasing favorite items that they are sure they will fit into again! A positive twist is that they may find some wearable clothing that has been forgotten in the squeeze.

The first step is to evaluate the existing closet space and determine if additional space could be developed. There are four basic types of closets.

1. The wardrobe or armoire is a piece of furniture that serves as a clothing storage area.
2. The reach-in closet is where doors conceal the pole and shelf space. The inside clearance depth should be 2 feet.
3. A walk-in closet is a room that one walks into to access two, three or four walls of space organized with hanging poles and storage shelving which may or may not have individual doors. A minimum width of 6-1/2 feet is recommended.
4. A dressing room is a larger version of a walk-in closet with a furniture island and/or seating area in the center of the space. It normally includes a built-in dresser cabinetry to store all clothing so the sleeping area in the master suite has no clothing storage responsibilities. Amenities include glass closet doors and detailed architectural accoutrements such as crown molding, baseboard and columns.

The ultimate goal, no matter what type of closet, is to obtain enough room to properly store clothing and other items in the closet. A serious inventory and elimination of items not used and then relocating the poles and shelves for maximizing storage in the existing space can achieve this.

So your job is to motivate the clients to remove all of their clothes from the closet and take a serious inventory. Here is a very simple process. Place clothing in three piles on the bed.

1. Work and casual clothing that they currently wear.
2. Dressy / Formal wear and Special Occasion Clothing
3. Clothing that they have not worn in a year or that does not fit them

Then sorting starts with the pile of the clothes they currently wear by separating the items into the following groups:

- Pants / Shorts
- Skirts
- Tops and blouses
- Sweaters
- Dresses
- Suits
- Jackets

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- Exercise clothes

Sort the pants and arrange by color from dark to light.

- Jeans - folded over a hanger
- Casual - folded over a hanger
- Work / Dressy - folded over a hanger

Sort the skirts and arrange by color from dark to light or pattern and solid color.

- Casual
- Work / Dressy

Sort the blouses/ tops and arrange by color from dark to light or solid color or pattern or by type.

- Casual - some folded or hung depending on fabric
- Work / Dressy

Do the same with the dresses, suits and jackets organizing them in piles to be put back in the closet when the next steps are completed. Now they have inventoried exactly what needs to be stored in the closet. They have also had the opportunity to recycle unwanted clothing to those in need.

The next answers vary with the specific size of the person using the closet.

- How many items could be hung with double poles, one above the other? The typical is 75% of the closet needs double poles and 25% needs a single pole and shelf.
- How much space between the rods is needed for the length of the clothing? The typical height is 38" above the floor for the bottom pole hanging folded pants with the top pole about 74" to 76" above the floor depending upon the length of the clothing to be hung, usually for hanging blouses and tops.
- Here is a formula for grouping clothing in the closet:
 - Group casual pants / skirts below and blouses /tops above in an easily accessible area.
 - Next group work / dressy pants and skirts below with the blouses and jackets above.
 - Exercise and sports clothing can be hung on an upper or lower pole in it own grouping.
- How many long items need to be hung on single rods? The typical pole height is 78" above the floor. A single or double shelf can be mounted above the pole for storage of handbags, hats or shoes.
 - More formal dresses can be hung towards the back of the closet as they need the least amount of accessibility. Covering with plastic bags (like those used in dry cleaning) over the top of infrequently-worn formal clothing helps to keep the wrinkles to a minimum.

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Below is a table of **Recommended Clothing Storage Allowances** to use as a guideline in determining the hanging length and shelf widths needed

RECOMMENDED CLOTHING STORAGE ALLOWANCES		
Women's Clothing	Hanging Length	Pole Space
Blouses	27" - 45"	1" - 2"
Skirts	24" - 46"	1" - 2"
Day Dresses/Robes	42" - 60"	2" - 3"
Evening Dresses	60" - 72"	2" - 6"
Slacks (1/2 folded)	21" - 30"	1" - 2"
Slacks (full length)	48" - 54"	1" - 2"
Jackets/Coats	27" - 60"	2" - 4"
Men's Clothing	Hanging Length	Pole Space
Slacks (1/2 folded)	36" - 46"	2"
Slacks (full length)	54" - 60"	2"
Suits with Slacks (1/2 folded)	36" - 45"	4"
Jackets/Coats	36" - 60"	3" - 4"
Shelf Space	Shelf Width	
Folded Sweaters	12" - 15"	
Folded Shirts	9" - 12"	
Men's shoes	9" - 12" per pair	
Women's shoes	6" - 9" per pair	
Folded Socks/Nylons	4" x 10"	
Rolled Socks/Nylons	4" x 5"	
NOTE: Dimensions may vary according to the height and reach of the clients.		



Courtesy of This Old House

After the inventory is complete and the needs are established, check out ways to accommodate the required storage. Melamine and wood veneer wall-mounted systems that are usually hung on a rail that is screwed securely into the studs in the wall may be a good option. Shelves and poles are adjustable because of the incorporated boring system. Partitions allow the panel system to be flexible. Furniture-like systems may feature deeper shelving and a wider variety of storage components (i.e. 32 mm).

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Design in visibility. Take advantage of the many accessories available, such as see-through wire bins, acrylic- or glass-fronted drawers, drawers with dividers, and belt and tie racks, to keep items organized. Wire products allow air circulation and are inexpensive and readily available. However they may leave a waffle pattern on the back of garments and may not be stable enough for heavy items.



Courtesy of California Closets



Courtesy of California Closets



Courtesy of California Closets

Remember that folded items can either be stored in drawers or on shelves in the closet. Seasonal clothing can be stored in boxes designed to slide under the bed and rotate into the closet as the weather changes. Bins on high shelves, roll-out boxes that sit on the floor (available from many catalogues), even a third closet pole if the ceiling is over 9 feet high, are ideal for storing items that are not used all the time.

If you are dealing with the larger dressing room, you must determine other activities that will take place. Here are some questions to ask:

- Does the client want a place to sit?
- Does the client want a UV protected window, skylight or solar tube in the space with sun-blocking/privacy shades? Note: window sills should be no higher than 42 to 44" above finished floor for client to see out when seated.
- Does the client want a full length mirror? Note that there should be at least 36" to 48" of clear floor space in front of the mirror for easy viewing.
- Does the client want to watch television while getting dressed? Note that retractable hardware can conceal a flat-screen television behind a cabinet (Hafele America Company) and special televisions can be concealed behind a mirror in the wall stud area and transmitted through the mirror.
- Does the client need laundry and dry cleaning hamper space in the closet?

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- Does the client want a safe in the space? If so, what size? Avoid heavy safes on upper floors.
- Does the client want specialized storage for ties, belts, jewelry, etc.?
- Does the client want a jewelry safe?



Courtesy of Closet Factory

Consider furniture in the dressing room. A center island can vary in height from 30", 36", 39" or 42" high depending on the client's height and can be used for packing a suitcase. It can include roll-out drawers or shelves and the top provides packing assistance. A pull-out staging rod for packing should be close by. Other inclusions may be hampers for dry cleaning and/or laundry (or a laundry chute), a washer and dryer, fold-out drawer ironing board (check standing clearance and electrical), clothing steamer unit, a gentleman's valet or pant press attachment, a divided drawer for mending items / sewing machine, a drawer with all shoe polishing items, a drawer for small travel sizes of grooming items and equipment and a mini-port device for recharging electronic equipment (i.e. Hafele America Company and/or Doug Mockett & Company).



Courtesy of Closet Design Ideas

If insects are an issue in damaging clothing, then including some form of cedar in the closet may be necessary. Cedar also does a good job of absorbing moisture and odors.

Cedar can be incorporated in the walls of the closet or it may simply be added by using cedar hangers or rings. When the cedar smell diminishes, just lightly sandpaper the cedar to expose new wood and the fresh cedar smell will come right back again.

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Correct lighting for large closets is very important. The 2007 California Building Codes are specific to the placement of luminaires or lighting fixtures in clothes closets that are over 70 sq. ft. These types shall be permitted by code to be installed in a closet:

- A surface-mounted or recessed incandescent luminaire with a completely enclosed lamp as up to 90% of the electricity consumed becomes heat
- Or a surface-mounted or recessed fluorescent luminaire

The location of the fixtures are also specified by 2007 California Building Codes:

- Surface-mounted incandescent luminaires installed on the wall above the door or on the ceiling shall have a minimum clearance of 12" between the luminaire and the nearest point of the storage space
- Surface-mounted fluorescent luminaires installed on the wall above the door or on the ceiling shall have a minimum clearance of 6" between the luminaire and the nearest point of storage space

Another consideration is the Kelvin temperature of the lamp itself. This is the color of the light emitted from the lamp. A Kelvin temperature of 2600° to 3000° replicates artificial lighting in the majority of homes. Outside Kelvin temperatures can be as high at 5000°K. This explains why color changes from assessing coordinates inside the home and then seeing them in a different light outside.

For large dressing areas use three-tier lighting. Directional surface-mounted lighting at the ceiling between the client and the racking system illuminates hanging and shelved clothing. For dressing tables in closets, surface-mounted lighting system illuminates the general area in front of the mirror. Also include a ventilating system on a timer for regular interval operation in large walk-in closets and dressing areas to control mold, mildew and other still-air breeders. The door should be sized so that make-up air can enter under the door.

Recommended lighting controls for closets include an occupancy sensor or vacancy sensor. An occupancy sensor automatically turns the lighting on with someone enters a room. A vacancy sensor is a switch manually operated to turn on the lights and then the sensor automatically turns off the lights based upon their detection of no motion in a specific area.



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Reorganizing closet space can vary in cost starting with a fresh coat of paint to repositioning placement and adding poles to a major investment in professionally furnishing the closet. There are many firms that specialize in closet remodeling.



Courtesy of Closet Factory

Organizing the closet will greatly simplify your client's life. Finding the right group of clothing makes selecting what to wear easy and efficient thereby saving time. It becomes a pleasure rather than drudgery to get ready. Simple maintenance is a part of keeping things working and requires putting clothing away in the right compartments and areas within the closet and an on-going purging of items no longer worn. Whether it is a simple reach-in closet or a complex dressing room, the experience of more organized, efficient storage is a pleasant way to start a day.

Sources:

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2007 California Building Codes