

STORE IT

Tips and tricks to finding storage space

By Amy Souza
Examiner Correspondent

We Americans like our stuff, which probably explains why household storage is a universal dilemma — no one ever has enough. And those in condos, apartments and other smaller dwellings are especially hard-pressed for space.

Though a cluttered look can be cozy like grandmother's house, having everything in its place will likely make you happier. For those who live in small spaces, however, simply finding a place to put our things can be an unwelcome challenge.

Advice is often to "go vertical," meaning to take advantage of wall height with tall pieces. Surrounding yourself with armoires and tall shelves might solve the storage conundrum but leave you feeling cramped.

Anne Markstein, owner of Anne Markstein Interiors in Millers, Md., which offers complete residential and commercial design services for clients in Baltimore and the Washington metro area, said vertical storage can make sense, so long as you don't overdo it. She pointed out, though, that many other options exist. Consider some of Markstein's advice to make your space work:

» **Build a built-in:** "Built-in units are perhaps the most effective way to create storage space," Markstein said. "You don't want to feel like they're looming and you don't want it to feel too heavy, so you don't use a wood-grain finish. Instead, use a painted finish with either the room's trim color or a color complementary to the room's walls."

Markstein also recommended a mixture of open and closed storage within built-ins.

"Too much open can appear too busy if not organized properly, and too much closed can feel overwhelming to the room."

» **Make every piece of furniture count:** Coffee tables, nightstands and end tables are three pieces Markstein noted can serve double duty if you simply buy pieces that contain drawers. Ottomans with hidden storage nooks and window-seat benches are great choices, too.

» **Look up, look down:** Consider installing shelves above your living room furniture (except above your sofa, because Markstein said having something directly overhead can make you feel uncomfortable). In the kitchen, take advantage of space above cabinets, but forget the decorative baskets that stay empty for years; instead, go for whatever pieces you'll actually use.

The space under your bed is also begging to be filled. Markstein recommended drawers built for that specific purpose, but notes you can also buy inexpensive plastic bins. (You'll probably want a bedskirt to hide those).

» **Don't throw out your books, but keep an eye on design:** If you're a book person like Markstein, you'll never have enough shelving. "You can pile books on tables — decoratively of course — then something can go on top, such as a small lamp or art ob-

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ject. You can also stack books under tables, as tables, on top of cabinets, or in any nook."

» **Maximize clothes closet space:** Professional closet designers can organize space for you, but for do-it-yourselfers here's Markstein's quick tip: First, arrange all of your hanging clothes by length to create two groupings: long pieces and shorter pieces. Next, measure across to determine how many feet each group takes up.

"Most people only need one foot for long hanging," Markstein said.

You can maintain your closet's full-length space for long items and purchase supplies that allow you to double-hang clothes throughout the remainder of your closet. Add shelves above the hanging rod, over-the-door organizers, and shoe racks for the floor; then stand back and marvel at how much you can fit (and find when you need it).



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