

welcome

Lighten Up

There's something about summer that means it is time to lighten up. I suppose that is literally true; the light here in the Northeast, light that we have been craving for months, gets beautifully strong and clear and we feel compelled to be outside, enjoying it, as we know it won't last long. That has an effect on my interior life, and it has an effect on the life of my interiors. By the time spring is in full force (white azaleas bursting forth, dogwood glowing in the twilight) I am getting rid of things in my house. It is as though I want more room in the house to let the light linger and play.

I am a big believer in seasonal decorating, and if I had more help, I would take it all the way. Up would go the wool carpets, down would go the dhurries and rush matting (yes, the old-fashioned kind that you have to spritz with water to keep it from drying out), on with the cotton slipcovers, off with the heavy curtains and up with the linen sheers. As it is, I have to stick to the small stuff, but still, it is satisfying to bundle away winter's heavy woolen throws and duvet covers and velvety cushions. Now that sisal is readily available, it is simple and inexpensive to replace the sodden winter mats with new rugs for the porches. I have a china fetish, and love a summer table of porcelain instead of the heavier crockery of winter. Metro shelving in the basement makes a handy butler's pantry. I can see, however, that I have strayed from my subject, which was getting rid of things. That is why I will never be a minimalist.

But there are so many things that accumulate over the course of a year (years, to be truthful). My house isn't messy, nor am I a pack rat. My rooms are orderly, as I am the sort of person who cannot think straight if things are awry. (In fact, before sitting down to write this, I had to straighten up my desk, line up my pencils, and make sure the floor was vacuumed.) But how many of us have closets that we have stopped opening? One of my sons is finishing his second year of college; I have stopped visiting his room. Then one day I couldn't find my gardening khakis, so I went into his bureau, to borrow the clothing he had outgrown. I took my pick of what was left behind, made a futile offer to my younger son (who wouldn't dream of wearing the same clothes as his brother, much less me), and took the rest to the local clothing drop. That got me started.



Next was the attic; what about those sweaters that I hadn't worn all winter, or for the previous five winters? Out they went, along with lots of other things. I had not realized how much I had squirreled away over the years. And no, I will never wear that size again, no matter how much I wish I could. Harder to get rid of are the things that are in perfectly good condition, still reasonably attractive, but I'm simply tired of them—this goes for sheets and towels as well. I've finally given myself permission to move them on down the Chain of Belonging. Someone else will take more pleasure from them. Closets are one thing. Rooms, and files, and cupboards, and bookcases, and tabletops, quite another.

Bookcases. I will never understand how it is possible to ship off eleven boxes of books to a book dealer and still the shelves in the library are crammed. But at least the piles are off the floor, there are no more books railroaded across the tops of other books, and at least I have distinguished between things that I will never reread, things that I want my friends to read, and things that I am saving for my old age. While I was in the middle of sorting through my library, a girlfriend with a new house and new bookcases showed up and took home another five bags full. Someone, somewhere, always has empty shelves.

Stuff on the tables and mantels is easy to use, or put away, according to season, and it makes a big difference. During the winter when I am housebound, I like to let my gaze rest on a beautiful arrangement of things—an antique candlestick, a crystal decanter, a small painting. It is bleak out of doors; there isn't much to stimulate the eye. The dazzling color and sweet vanilla scent of a potted orchid means a great deal. It is a different matter in summer. Outside my window is a riot of blooms and every shade

and texture of green thing imaginable. Inside I prefer less stimulation; quieter, cleaner surfaces are soothing, serene. The objects that I love, that I cannot bear to give away, I wrap up and store in a plastic bin. It is surprising, though, how many things I don't want to see anymore. They go back to the great Chain of Belonging, too.

Lighten up. It is only a matter of time before winter comes to anchor us again.

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