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THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

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Newton Living

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN

MEET THE WONDER WOMEN WHO CHANGE THE WORLD AND CALL NEWTON HOME

Paula Apsell
Barbara Grossman
Simone Winston
Sara Whitman
Julie Kahn
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Lights Out

Finding order in holiday abundance requires more than a trip to the Container Store. **BY MARNI ELYSE KATZ**

Life is chaotic. And then the holidays arrive. While some scrape by grabbing dusty bottles of wine as hostess gifts, paying tweens to use less-than-perfect penmanship addressing envelopes, and marveling that the lights adorning every overgrown bush haven't blown the neighborhood power grid, others revel in the season. To say the least.

Ali Brown, junior interior designer at Jill Litner Kaplan Interiors, is one

such gal. She adores every aspect of the holidays, especially the accoutrements: "I love Christmas and the day after, when you can buy all the decorations at 50 percent off." Brown, who claims she acquired her mother's predilections, owns three sets of Christmas dishes, red seeded glasses, a cupboard of Christmas mugs, a Christmas apron ("not tacky, from Williams-Sonoma"), vintage ornaments rescued from her grand-

parents' attic, and more than enough of her own to decorate two full-size trees, plus the mini one in the bedroom. When she and her husband have children, she says the collection will expand along with her family. The explanation is simple: "Christmas totally makes me happy."

Designer and *Space to Grace* blogger Elizabeth Benedict gets it. With four young children, a dog, and a husband, Christmastime is a whirlwind. But rather than succumb to the swirl, Benedict decorates. In her Chestnut Hill home one will find fingertip towels with holiday motifs, Christmas-themed needlepoint pillows, Byers'

Choice Carolers, garlands of fresh greens, and a global ornament collection that includes Chinese deities dressed up as Santa. That's just for Christmas. Benedict has decorations for half a dozen other holidays. When she starts talking holiday clothing (beautiful smocked dresses for the girls), we can't help but inquire about the iconic ugly Christmas sweater. "We're not holiday-sweater people. But my father had a tie for every holiday. I think it was the only fun he ever had with clothing."

So, the apple, er, ornament, doesn't fall far from the tree. Thankfully, when it comes time to sweep up, parents provide more than just baggage. Brown learned from her mother to pack and unpack by room. She says, "I undid everything at once the first year. It was a disaster." The key is to only bring out boxes for one room at a time and to get everything in place before venturing back for more.

Auburndale's MJ Rosenthal of An Organized Life recommends setting up storage space as though it's a kindergarten classroom. For instance, store Hanukkah paraphernalia in blue bins, and use clear packing tape to affix an image of a menorah, along with the name of the holiday printed in a large, easy-to-read font. Benedict follows this edict, storing her cache in pretty, holiday-themed paper-covered boxes from the Container Store. Christmas boxes have pictures of Santa, Halloween ones have pumpkins, and so on.

To reign in consumption, Newton interior designer Elissa Fenster advises picking a single item to collect. Her client Maura Horton does just this, collecting only Steinbach nutcrackers, though at this point she has over one hundred. Horton might consider following Watertown-based designer Urit Chaimovitz's ruthless advice: "When you reach capacity, something must go before anything else comes in; no exceptions."

TRADING SPACES, NEW LIGHTING FIXTURES, WINDOW TREATMENTS, AND STORAGE MAKE OLDER SPACES MORE LIVABLE.



THIS OLD HOUSE

DEALING WITH FIVE COMMON DESIGN CHALLENGES IN OLDER HOMES.

Most households in Newton are in buildings more than 50 years old—76% of housing units, says census data—meaning many of us live in spaces designed for lifestyles of a different era. Two local designers, Jill Litner Kaplan of Jill Litner Kaplan Interiors and Vicki Baker of Su Casa Designs, offer some simple solutions to make older living spaces fit today's needs. BY TIFFANY SMITH

1. Lack of storage. Seek creative storage options with small footprints, or find unused square footage. Add shelves to knee walls in upper floors or attics, hide storage in window seats, or tuck cabinets in unused corners.

2. Drafty air. New energy-efficient windows too expensive? Work with what you have. Use blinds or shades with a thick lining, or bring in floor-length curtains with

an insulated interlining layer to help block out drafts.

3. Low lights. Many people inherit old light fixtures that are original to a house. They may be charming, but they often offer little light. Replace them with larger, higher-wattage fixtures to add drama and personality.

4. Out-of-place fireplace. Older homes frequently have fireplaces in odd corners or at unusual angles. To maximize

the room's usable space, either ignore the fireplace or make two seating areas, one in front of the hearth with smaller chairs or a bench.

5. Barren bookcases. With the advent of digital books, some homeowners are paring down or even tossing book collections. Fill those empty shelves with accessories that tell a story, such as a child's artwork or colorful corals from a vacation.

Karen Kramer of Newton professional-organizer firm Space to Breathe reminds us to bring our own bags to the mall, cancel catalogs at CatalogChoice.org, and consider presents that don't make waste, like sports tickets, museum memberships, and iTunes gift cards.

As for the stack of holiday cards waiting to be addressed, Sharon Gavani Reilly offers an alternative

that saves time and resources. Her company Cool Dog Productions produces video "cards" that families can share via email, or on Facebook or YouTube. She came up with the idea after sending out traditional birth announcements for her first child, realizing they would just be thrown away. For her second and third she sent a video announcement. No paper, no ink, no gas; nothing but a click.