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Redecorating is like a dance, says home organizer

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Jane Pollak practically shudders when she remembers the way her bedroom used to look. The closet doors that always popped open unexpectedly. The TV shoved haphazardly in a corner. The general sense of chaos and disorganization. It was completely unmanageable, said Pollak, 58, of Norwalk. But professional organizer Betsy Krobot changed all that. Krobot, 48, of Bridgeport, owns Betsy K Home Choreography and specializes in making unlivable spaces manageable and attractive. Not only does she organize and declutter these rooms; she often rearranges and redecorates them to make them more functional. Pollak hired Krobot, whom she's known for more than 10 year, after a visit to Krobot's bedroom. "I told her 'I want my bedroom to look like your bedroom,' " Pollak said. So Krobot got to work. The cumbersome closet doors were replaced with pale green curtains. The unsightly television got moved into a closet right next to Pollak's bed, so she could watch, then conceal the appliance with the closet "door" when she was done. Krobot moved Pollak's bed, turned an armoire into a shoe closet for her husband and made a bunch of other changes that turned the once-overwhelming room into a lovely, romantic hideaway. "It just suits us so well," Pollak said.

Krobot started her organizing business in 2003, and began operating under the name Betsy K Home Choreography last year. She chose the phrase "choreography" because she often has to balance the appearance of the rooms she redoes with the personality of the person living there. She also balances a number of techniques, including organization, decorating and design in her work. "It's like a dance," Krobot said.

Many of Krobot's clients hire her because they want to get organized, but don't know where to start. She helps them identify what they love about their homes, and what they want to change. The bedroom is just one of the rooms Krobot has redone in Pollak's home. She created both a meditation room and a dressing room for Pollak, and redid her home office (Pollak is an author, speaker and business coach).

A few weeks ago, she was at the home again, organizing Pollak's laundry room. Krobot expected the job to take about a month, and require extensive remodeling. She'll likely replace the washer and drier, take out some of the cubby-like shelves, and put in new, larger ones better suited to holding clothing and other laundry room items. But she started simply, by going through the wads of papers stuck in the laundry room's existing shelves, and putting them into cardboard boxes. Many homeowners have tons of excess paper hanging around, Krobot explained, and one of the things she does is help clients figure out which papers should be boxed up and put away, and which should go in the trash. "I never throw anything away without the client's permission," Krobot said.

The good thing about her job, she said, is that clients see results quickly. Indeed, after just a few minutes of Krobot sweeping papers off the shelves, the laundry room looked

notably neater.

Krobot is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, an Illinois-based group with 4,000 members. She went into the design and organizing business after 25 years in the corporate world, mostly setting up trade shows and events. Because of her lifelong love of organizing and design, she enrolled at the New York School of Design, but decided that field was a little too elitist and "upper crusty" for her tastes.

She decided to use her interest in design to create a service that was more down to earth. Organizing was something she had enjoyed for years, often using friends and loved ones as guinea pigs. "I did it to every guy I ever went out with," she said, laughing.

Her business also incorporates elements of feng shui, the Chinese practice of positioning objects in a room, home or other space to create spiritual harmony.

Jobs can take anywhere from a few hours to several weeks, Krobot said. She charges by the hour, and rates vary depending on the complexity of the job. Generally, she said, the range is \$50 to \$200 an hour, which is typical for a home organizer.

Usually, clients are happy to shell out for the extra help. Cynthia Steckel, of Westport, hired Krobot for several jobs, including organizing Steckel's closet. "That was always my fantasy, to have someone organize my closet," said Steckel.

Krobot also redid Steckel's basement and home office. Steckel is a writer, and, like almost everyone else Krobot works with, was drowning in paper. She and Krobot went through it all and, though Steckel found the process exhausting, it did much to streamline her life.

"There's a place for everything now," she said.

Krobot isn't the only one in the region who specializes in reinventing rooms. Ann Anderson, owner of Rooms Reborn in Monroe also examines problem spots in homes, redesigning them to be more attractive and organized.

Anderson is technically a redesigner, not an organizer like Krobot, but she often hires organizers to help her with her work, a big portion of which is "editing." Often people need someone to come in and help them decide what should stay and what should go, she said. "The most important thing I do is give people permission to get rid of things," Anderson said.

She redid Stratford resident Jocelyn Murray's living room, and Murray said she was impressed how just a few simple tricks - such as rearranging Murray's couches to frame her rug in a pleasing way - made her room look completely different.

"The professionals have tips and tricks to accessorize and arrange things," Murray said. "I had tried a lot of things with this room, and I just couldn't get it to work."

Krobot said getting a room to "work" doesn't just change the way that space looks. It changes the way the homeowners feel when they're in that room. "If you walk into a room and you love it, you're going to be more productive there," she said.

Krobot will speak 2 p.m. March 18 at the Fairfield Public Library, 1080 Post Road. For more details on the event or on Betsy K Home Choreography, call 273-7751 or on Betsy K Home Choreography, visit www.betsyk.com. For more on Rooms Reborn, visit www.roomsreborn.com or call 459-8901.

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