



Elizabeth needs new space for her creations—like the sweater she's wearing.

## The challenge

Crammed with tubs of yarn, two sewing machines, a dressmaker's dummy, and boxes of sewing supplies, Elizabeth Vindedahl's craft room is a treasure trove of possibility—and a major source of I-can't-find-anything stress. Elizabeth, 51, who majored in clothing, textiles, and design in college, now works full-time as a retirement-plan consultant. She has always spent her free evenings and weekends pursuing her craft projects. But when her sons, Benjamin, 21, and Craig, 19, headed off to school, Elizabeth revisited her love of design with a newfound vigor. She's currently pursuing her Master Knitter certification through the American Knitting Guild and has sold a pattern she created to a yarn company—yet she's finding that her clutter all too often interferes with her creativity. I'm confident that by making a clear plan of action, Elizabeth will create a space that's as inspiring as the projects she dreams up.

## The vision

To begin, I want Elizabeth to forget about the current state of the room. Instead, I ask her to imagine working in her space in five years. What will she be doing? Immediately, she envisions herself designing, creating patterns for magazines, teaching classes, and occasionally dabbling in hobbies like scrapbooking and stamping. This image makes it clear that Elizabeth is dedicated to making what used to be a hobby into a part-time career.

Because of this change, I encourage Elizabeth to stop thinking of the space as her craft room and rename it her "textile studio." In order to create a space you love, you have to imagine it first, and the name change will be an important step toward viewing the room as more than a storage area. Now that Elizabeth knows what she's working toward, she's almost ready to create the room of her dreams. But before she can, I ask her a few questions that will help us determine how to proceed.

## The key questions

### 1. What will getting organized do for you?

The clearer your intention, the more likely you are to succeed. Getting organized will enable Elizabeth to find things quickly if, for example, a magazine or company calls and asks for a pattern submission. It will also give her the peace and calm to dream up ideas, designs, and lesson plans for future crafting classes.

# Give your passion room to grow

Crafts could become Elizabeth's next career—if only she could straighten up her space. Organizing guru Julie Morgenstern helps a Minnesota mom streamline her supplies.



**Sew frustrating!** Having to search for supplies made it hard for Elizabeth to focus on her crafts.



## 2. What has prevented you from tackling the area until now?

Were you overwhelmed by the scale of the task? Was there just never enough time in the day? Or were you stressed out by the idea of getting rid of things you might later need? Knowing what's stopped you in the past will help you be aware of any roadblocks you might have to break through in order to begin the project. Until recently, Elizabeth was so focused on her family and busy with her full-time job that she wasn't able to use the room as anything other than a part-time hobby den and storage space. Now she's excited about taking her sewing and knitting to the next level and ready to use the space more often and with a more specific focus.

## 3. What belongs—and what doesn't—in the room right now?

Elizabeth loves the large window and her long table where she can spread out her work, but she's not crazy about how cramped the area currently feels. She wants fewer boxes and supplies and more space to lay out her projects. Right now, the things that do belong—her sewing machine, tubs of yarn, and knitting needles—are nearly impossible to unearth among the dozens of back issues of knitting magazines, the cast-aside half-finished projects, and the hundreds of patterns printed from the Internet (which she saves even though, she admits, she never refers to them).

Elizabeth realizes she's held on to a lot of excess crafting supplies, but none of them are "just" junk. I want her to acknowledge the purpose that the stored objects have served in the past; the clutter will be less likely to creep up on her in the future if she understands why she's held on to it for so long. For example, when Elizabeth's sons were growing

**"To create a space you love, you need to imagine it first."**



## Espresso & The Sunday Paper

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up, she simply didn't have the time or focus to dedicate to her projects that she does now. I have a hunch that printing patterns and saving them, or collecting craft magazines, were habits that Elizabeth developed as an efficient way to inspire and maintain her creativity. But now that she has the time to devote her full energy to her projects, she simply doesn't need these things anymore.

### The action plan

I suggest that Elizabeth think of the space as a kindergarten classroom, divided into different activity zones. We can divide her room into four sections: one for knitting; one for sewing; a catch-all area for projects Elizabeth enjoys dabbling in, like stamping, scrapbooking, and needlepoint; and a corner for prepping lesson plans if she eventually begins offering knitting lessons. Each zone can then be divided into three distinct spaces: a workspace (for the knitting zone, this would be the room's long table), supplies (knitting needles, current patterns), and storage (leftover yarn, future patterns, and completed projects).

I also urge Elizabeth to draw a layout or blueprint of where things will go in the room, then rearrange the furniture to best fit the role of each area. This might mean shifting a file cabinet to the scrapbooking area or moving the sewing machine to the newly created sewing area. This is not the time to buy new containers or furniture, though—it's best to do that at the very end of the process, once you know exactly what needs to be stored.



Once the furniture is in place, Elizabeth can sort through all her belongings and place them in the correct zone. At this point, she shouldn't worry about keeping or tossing anything—whatever doesn't fit into one of the four zones can go into a separate pile to be vetted later. Next, Elizabeth should go through each category, tossing anything that's no longer useful. After her materials are pared down, she can determine whether she needs any additional containers (if, for example, she finds that her sewing items primarily consist of thread, needles, shears, and pins, she may want to find a four-drawer storage unit), or she may discover she already has all the storage space she needs. Once her space is defined and cleared and her supplies are at her fingertips, she'll truly be able to focus on achieving her five-year vision.



Julie Morgenstern is an organization and time-management expert, business productivity consultant, and *New York Times* best-selling author of five books, including *Shed Your Stuff, Change Your Life*.

## Drive forward with your dream!

No matter how limited your time (or how small your space), you can always make room for the things you love.

**1. Schedule it.** To achieve your big dream of, say, writing a novel or knitting a sweater, give yourself a smaller, specific task (outline the first chapter, research a pattern). Then choose a

block of time and stick to it. Your appointments with your dream are as important as any others on your calendar!

**2. Ditch the piles.** A large bulletin board where you can place any directions, recipes, or magazine clippings is one way to keep important thoughts at the front and center of your workspace, and

allows you to easily get rid of ideas that have become obsolete.

**3. Label and manage those computer files.** Virtual clutter is easy to conquer—and cleaning it up will save you plenty of real-life time. Instead of having documents, pictures, and PDFs haphazardly scattered all over your computer desktop, make a system

of folders that are labeled by date, type of file, or specific occasion, like "Jill's wedding" or "Volunteer work 2010." Either save as you go or set aside 30 minutes a week for sorting. And consider saving files to an online home like Google Docs, which allows you to retrieve your documents from anywhere.

COURTESY OF SUEBET (7)



**Haunted by clutter:** Whenever Elizabeth opened her closet door, she was greeted by the ghosts of projects past.

**Elizabeth's reaction:**

I've been wanting to reorganize this room for ages, but people always told me that I needed to start by pulling everything out of the room, and I was afraid if I emptied it, I would be more lost than I already was. The consultation with Julie was the motivation I needed, because she suggested a realistic plan that can

happen in stages and isn't overwhelming—or expensive. I now realize that my tendency to hold on to printouts, magazines, and other supplies doesn't mean I'm disorganized; I just saved these items to nurture that part of myself while my husband and I were raising our kids, which makes it easier to part with them, as Julie predicted.

In fact, I was so excited after the consultation that I made the blueprint and started moving furniture that very night! I started sorting through all my knitting things—I never realized I had so much fabric and yarn. As I sorted, I wondered why I'd saved so many things, but I was ready to let them go, because now that I have more time for my projects, I don't need all those reference materials to jump-start my creativity. I filled three garbage bags, emptied boxes, and have a full bag of yarn to go to charity, as well as a large pile of things to sell through Ravelry.com, a knit and crochet community. Ultimately, the project took me about 14 hours to finish, but the results were worth it. This reorganized room is just what I needed; I can't wait to get to work in my brand-new studio!

Want Julie to help you organize your home, office, time, or priorities? Email [redbook@hearst.com](mailto:redbook@hearst.com) (subject: Organizing) to be considered for an organizational makeover.



**"I realize I don't need so much stuff to spark my creativity!"**



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