

FUNCTIONAL & FASHIONABLE



More Than Just a Coat Closet

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When beginning work with a new client, I often suggest tackling the foyer coat closet first. This space is not usually at the top of the priority list, but it's a great way to practice organizational principles in a small, manageable space. When properly put to use, the coat closet can also be a very effective time saver.

So if you're looking for a quick solution to ease the process of getting out the door in the morning, try starting with yours.

Before you touch a thing, make a quick mental list of the functions you require from your coat closet. You might be storing light bulbs and wrapping paper in there, but these are not the best uses of this space. First and foremost, the coat closet is intended to store coats and accessories for guests visiting your home. So you know you'll need some extra hangers and empty shelf space to accommodate this purpose. The coat closet, however, can also function as a central incoming and outgoing spot for your family. So think about the things you and your family need to take with you when you depart the house – not just once in a while but on a very regular, if not daily, basis.

Almost everyone requires keys, handbags, wallets or backpacks. But you should also consider items such as coupons, reusable grocery bags, sunglasses and umbrellas for those rainy days. Especially in such a small area, it's important to have a very defined purpose for the space. So limit your list of uses for this, as with any space, to a maximum of three.

For example, determine that the coat closet will be used solely for guest coats and the items you take with you daily. If you have limited space in your bedroom closets and/or very few heavy coats, you might also store outerwear here. However, if you're able to house winter coats, accessories and rain gear in your bedroom, do so. It's usually easier to keep track of things when they're all together. This is why I store all of my clothing, shoes and accessories in my bedroom closet. It also frees up a little room in the hall closet. If you haven't yet met your maximum of three purposes for this space, you might consider storing a vacuum here. It's generally a convenient location for quick spill cleanup or a whirl around the living room in preparation for last-minute company.

Once you've outlined your closet's purposes, it's time to get your hands dirty. I always warn my clients that the

mess must get worse before it gets better. So get in there and pull out every last item from that coat closet. Dump everything on the floor.

Now that you're facing a mound of stuff and wondering how on earth you ever fit it in the closet in the first place, do a quick comb through for anything that can be thrown away, recycled or donated. Then start with category one of the maximum of three you decided upon. First, gather up the hangers and put about 10 of them in the closet. Try keeping only the nicer ones and take the yucky wire hangers to the cleaners for re-use.

Next, set up a station on a shelf or on the back of the closet door for your daily use items. Hooks are easy to install and work great for hanging keys, a handbag and your largest re-usable shopping bag with the smaller ones nested inside. Tape a calendar on the door with appointment reminders. A hanging mail sorter can be useful as long as there are only two or three slots. Outgoing mail can go in one, an envelope to store coupons in another.

Most closets will still allow you space at this point for a third purpose. If you have a stroller or grocery cart, the coat closet is a perfect home for it. If not, consider placing your vacuum here. If your standing one doesn't fit, perhaps a hand-held is all you need. Baskets, bins and other containers sort hats, scarves, gloves and sunglasses and maximize limited space.

Items that do not fall into the category of guest space, outerwear or daily use items do not belong in this closet. Cleaning supplies beyond a single vacuum, for example, should find another home, as should other household items such as light bulbs, paper products and water bottles. Office supplies, toys and books, clothing and decorative tchotchkes are all out of place in the coat closet. Separate these items into piles and deliver them to their proper places, remembering that a trash bag is always an available option!

Now you should have a perfectly organized coat closet ready to make daily life smooth and easy. Stop at this station in the morning and you'll never forget your umbrella. Check in at the end of the day to properly put away your things and you'll never lose your keys. Plus, your guests will feel welcome and assured that their coats and things are safe and clean when they visit.

As for the stuff you removed from this closet and

stashed in some other place in your house, don't be discouraged. Stay tuned here for more guidance on organizing other areas of the home.

Before I sign off, I'd like to share a quick word on spaces that are often used as coat closet alternatives. Mudrooms are the most common. If you are lucky enough to have one, I highly recommend putting it to use for the above-mentioned purposes, leaving the foyer closet empty for exclusive use by guests. Particularly if you enter and exit your home through the garage or back door, the mudroom is the preferred place to store daily use items.

But whether you have the luxury of a mudroom or are limited to a coat closet, it doesn't matter so much as long as you choose a single place to fulfill this purpose. Spreading outerwear and daily use items across various spaces is a recipe for disorder. For this reason, among others, I discourage the use of kitchen areas for keys, wallets and coupons and garage spaces for umbrellas, coats and accessories.

Allow your kitchens, garages and other areas to serve their own unique roles and dedicate a single, indoor space for managing the in-and-out of daily living.

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Marin Rose owns and operates *Functional, Fashionable*, a professional organizing, decorating and home staging company. For more information, visit functionalfashionable.com.