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Messy house equals a messy life

Influential designer Clodagh offers tips to give you clarity.

By Claire Whitcomb

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When times are troubled, home should be a sanctuary, says Clodagh, the New York interior designer known for sensual, modern rooms crafted with natural wood, cement and tinted plaster.

She's also the genius behind the interiors of the new W Hotel on Fort Lauderdale beach, which incorporates the Chinese art of feng shui with the colors of sand and sea.

"A hotel room is an escape and should be designed as an escape," she said. "The rooms are designed with all the qualities of a spa."

To Clodagh, design and architecture are "healing arts that support the spirit as well as the body." She measures the success of her decorating projects by clients who say that their lives are richer, their families are able to connect in new ways, and they experience a sense of relaxation.

You would, too, if you lived in the homes photographed in Clodagh's newest book, *Your Home, Your Sanctuary* (Rizzoli, \$50).

As Clodagh makes clear, the path to serenity starts with a simple word: clarity.

"Clarity in the rooms of your home translates into clarity of mind," insists Irish-born Clodagh, who long ago dropped her last name. To put it another way, a messy house equals a messy life.

Possessions, she says, have sticky energy. They cling to you with memories and emotions, making them pleasurable to acquire and difficult to unload.

But if you treat your home the way Clodagh treats her closet — if an item hasn't been used for a year, it's in the give-away box — your living quarters can feel like a sanctuary.

You'll find physical and emotional space to do what you've always wanted to do — exercise, paint, write, sculpt, mediate or simply regroup.



If your home is small, don't be discouraged.

"A feeling of spaciousness is determined far more by clarity and energy flow, not by square feet," Clodagh says.

What makes such spaciousness possible is flexibility — seating areas defined by rugs and focal points (windows, fireplaces, kitchen islands) instead of walls, sofas that work for curling up and entertaining, and eating areas centered on "the largest dining table space will allow." The table should support homework on one end, e-mail on another and, when it's time to eat, friends all around.

Clodagh puts every light on a dimmer, allowing an easy transition from the bright lights necessary for reading, cleaning and cooking to the dim light that sets the mood for parties and bedrooms. In the latter she likes "a very dim 'love light' to make you look fantastic."

The one thing that a bedroom should never have is disorder, which Clodagh terms "a source of mental static that is not conducive to either rest or sex."

Cover bedroom bookcases with doors or shades. Make sure your closets won't embarrass you if a stranger opens them. Clear your desk of bills and paperwork if it's visible from your bed, and store linens, spare pillows and blankets under the bed.

When you wake up, you'll want something beautiful to look at. It may be a picture, but what it shouldn't be is a mishmash of pictures. Instead of scattering family photos in various rooms, Clodagh advises assembling your photographs on a single "memory wall." She also believes in rotating art.

"Even a masterpiece can become wallpaper if the eye becomes too accustomed to it," she says.

Creating a sanctuary takes work. But when you connect deeply with your home, you'll experience the well-being that Clodagh's rooms are about.

"In the same way that regular exercise is essential to physical health," she says, "the more thought you invest in your home, the more it will support you."

Creating a sanctuary is both a choice and a discipline. What better place to do it than at home?

Home Editor Charlyne Schaub contributed to this report.

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