

Hang in there!

Tanya Linton, National Post · Saturday, Jun. 5, 2010

Must Have Closets. If your bedroom could write a personal ad, that's what it would say. And that's what most women look for in the fine details of real estate listings. The problem is that finding a proper master with enough storage for his stuff and her clothes, purses, shoes, coats, hats and jewellery is almost as hard as scoring a house with herringbone hardwood flooring.

Still, the magical combination of sleeping and storing is the number one want on every homebuyer and home renovator's wish list. And their desires are not just about having a big walk-in. No way. Buyers today want killer closets outfitted with head-to-toe mirrors, vertical shoe shelving, necklace holders, shelves for out-of-season stuff and some space for your better half's jeans. Think custom closets designed specifically to house your purse collection.

But you don't have to hire a team of contractors to blow out all four walls and reconfigure your already-tiny bedroom to get the closet of your dreams, nor do you have to kick your teen into the basement so you can knock through the adjoining wall into his bedroom to solve your wardrobe woes. You just need to think creatively and customize pre-made organization inserts from a big box store like Ikea. "The trick is buying pieces and having your contractor cut them down to fit your room exactly," says Tamara Robbins Griffith, an Ikea staff designer and public relations specialist. "You can make a bedroom look like the closets and shelves were built specifically for the room, but in fact, they are all components of our Pax system."

For a downtown Toronto homeowner and her husband, storage in the bedroom was not just a want -- it was a must. Let's paint the picture: There was a previous closet big enough for two days' worth of clothes, just enough space for a double bed with two end tables. The room was 12x16 feet, and the couple needed to house her wardrobe, accessories and shoes; his clothes; the linens and towels; out of season clothes -- as well as all the other stuff there was no storage for, such as throw blankets, guest bedding, paperwork and such.

"Because we had no storage anywhere else in the house, we decided to build a wall-to-wall wardrobe unit along one wall," says the homeowner. "The room had enough width to do that, but because the ceiling is fairly high, I thought it might be possible to use the space all the way to the top. So we had our contractor customize Ikea's off-the-shelf closet system. Then we also had him enlarge the already existing closet to create a linen closet. It's amazing how, after just a few days of work, all our stuff fits in this room."

Sounds like a lot of hefty renovating, but in fact the biggest stress has more to do with editing your things and pre-determining where everything will go. "The Pax closet system is quite easy to modify, providing you have a contractor," adds Ms. Robbins Griffith. "In the case of this homeowner, we stacked two units on top of each other and her contractor cut all of the top doors for a customized fit along the angled ceiling. The result is a spectacular wall-to-wall unit that looks completely built-in. Then we outfitted it with a combination of hanging wardrobes, shelves, a customized cubby for vertical shoe shelving, pullout trays with velvet lining, hanging racks for belts and necklaces. There's an insert for practically everything."

In the case of the other storage demands like linens and things, the goal was to make sure that the bedroom wasn't overpowered by closets. "Once the wall-to-wall unit was put in, we started working on widening the existing closet," says Ms. Robbins Griffith. "Then we recessed some Pax units into it to create more storage--a section for linens and another for the hamper, ironing board and even a ladder so the upper level of cabinets could be easily accessible. And to make both walls of the closets different, we mirrored the second closet's doors to offer a spot to glance at your outfit on your way out in the morning and also to give the illusion of a bigger room."

But in order for this mega closet makeover to be successful, a few things needed to be done before they even got started. "A wardrobe inventory is the first thing to do," says Estelle Gee, a professional organizer in Toronto. "Women wear only 20% of their clothes 80% of the time. The rest stay in the closet with excuses attached. Distill your wardrobe down to that 20% before you get serious about closet design. If you haven't worn it in a year--out it goes."

Ms. Gee also suggests making your bedroom clutter-free by only keeping things in there that are calming to look at -- think books, beautiful bedding and pretty light fixtures. And choose bedside tables with storage underneath so if you are living in a teensy space, you have a spots to store a few extra items. Not too many, mind you.

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