

## Get Organized to Enjoy the Holidays

By Nicole DeCosta ✉

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**Everything has its place – labeled, stacked straight and clearly visible.**



Danielle Liu, West Linn resident and owner of Totally Orderly, says she enjoys working with local homeowners and businesses to achieve organized spaces that function for them. Liu's kitchen is divided into zones. This zone is organized for baking items — utensils, ingredients and pans. This way, she says, she can bake faster because everything is within close proximity to one another.

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Color-coded boxes filled with holiday décor line garage shelves. Baking supplies neatly await transformation into something yummy. And a paper shredder channels unwanted mail quickly and mess-free.

West Linn resident Danielle Liu's house can be described in one word: orderly.

And Liu's company, Totally Orderly, works primarily with Lake Oswego and West Linn homeowners — as well as office tenants — to help clients use their time more effectively through organization.

With the holiday season around the corner, Liu says that organization will help her spend more time with friends and family.

"The holidays are meant to be enjoyed, not endured," says Liu, a professional organizer. "If you feel like you're enduring them, then you need to cross some things off your list."

For most projects, items can be organized using three methods: organizing stuff, paper and time.

"You usually don't organize one without the other," says Liu. "If your stuff is organized and your paper is organized, you save time. We spend way too much time looking for things, sorting things and reshuffling things. If your papers and your stuff have a home, then you know where they are and you don't spend time looking for them."

Liu has organized her own home into zones and uses processes to perform tasks to make life simpler.

### **Avoiding holiday havoc**

Liu used to sort like holiday decorations with each other — garland all in one box, candles in another, perhaps seasonal linens in another box. Then, she says, she developed a better system, which makes her holiday decorating much simpler: one storage box for each room that is decorated for the holidays.

"I have a box that says 'powder room.' And in that box will be the towels, the candles, garland, maybe a Santa. It's all there," says Liu. "So when I decorate now, I can get that box — one box — bring it in, put all the things out, and put the box away."

By using the one-box-per-room system, Liu says she avoids unnecessary clutter and disorganization.

“I’ll even put an extension cord in the box if I know a (holiday) decoration needs one,” says Liu. “That way, next year it’s already in there.”

By decorating this way, Liu says she can see progress quickly and the chore can be performed a little at a time – one room one day, another room the next day. This system also worked well when her children were toddlers, keeping them away from dangerous clutter that could be left out for days.

When putting her holiday decorations away, Liu stores them neatly in color-coded sturdy Rubbermaid containers in her garage. Boxes with lightweight contents – towels or ribbon – are stored on top of heavier items. This way, she says, she isn’t dependent on someone else getting the items down to start decorating.

Because all boxes are labeled, Liu says she can choose which box she wants to grab to decorate which room – in bite-sized tasks.

### **Keeping the kitchen functional**

Kitchen organization, Liu says, is a popular request from clients.

“We try to stuff everything into our kitchens,” says Liu. “The kitchen is what I would call prime real estate in your home and it should be reserved for those things that you use practically every single day.”

While pots and pans and other daily items work well in a kitchen, Liu says that seasonal or yearly items – such as a turkey roaster and fine China – can take up shelf space.

Liu says that if you serve items on a large Super Bowl football platter for the yearly event, chances are that for 364 days of the year it’s taking up valuable space in the kitchen.

“(The platter) could be in a well-labeled box in the garage that says ‘January’ because that’s when you’re going to use it,” Liu says. “That fees up space.”

Often homeowners may not even realize they have items hogging shelf-space in the kitchen, Liu says. On move-in day, she says, the mission is to get all kitchen items put away to get the boxes out of the way.

“But, things can get rearranged after you’re moved in,” she says.

On her move-in day, baking items were spread throughout Liu’s kitchen so baking a cake required a

lot of moving around. Common cooking items were scattered in different drawers and shelves.

Now, several shelves within two adjacent cabinets are dedicated to baking supplies, utensils, pans and condiments.

“When I’m baking I don’t have to move,” said Liu. “It literally cuts my baking time in half when it’s set up.”

She used the same system for her children by dedicating a low, pull-out drawer for their plastic plates and cups. This way, everything they need is together, functional and easy for them to reach.

When working with clients, Liu uses three methods to help tackle organization obstacles.

- n Consultations can be helpful to point homeowners in the right direction.

- n Sometimes, unpacking an entire room is helpful. Followed by putting items away in a manner that makes sense to the client. Clients can use their own organization containers – boxes, Tupperware, bins.

- n And for heavy-duty jobs, Liu reorganizes rooms using new storage devices the homeowner picks out and re-packs items away in a manner that makes sense for the client.

Liu is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) and vice president of the Oregon Chapter of NAPO. She is also a member of the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization and earned a certificate of study in chronic disorganization.

By taking the time to get organized now, Liu says clients save time in the end – time they would usually spend looking for things.

“I’m a big advocate of getting as much decorating done as possible before Thanksgiving. A lot of people say it’s too early. But I like to enjoy Christmas,” said Liu. “When December hits I want to be done (decorating). I want to enjoy the holidays. I’m ready for hot cocoa with the kids. I’m ready for looking at Christmas lights. It’s such a fun time of year.”

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