



## Sunset's Great Clutter Challenge

November 16, 2015 | By [Megan McCrea](#) | [Comments \(4\)](#)



*Thomas J. Story/Sunset Publishing*

No matter how you slice it, [moving](#) ain't easy. The last time I moved, I distinctly remember a moment—4 a.m. the day I was scheduled to move—when I sat down on my bedroom floor, surrounded by boxes, and wept.

I was certain that I would never *ever* finish packing in time to load the U-Haul and drive across the Bay. And I was one person, who'd lived in a studio for a year and a half.

Here at *Sunset*, we have had hundreds of employees and 64 years in Menlo Park to accumulate. And now, in 18 days, we too will be loading a truck and moving across the Bay. Adding to the challenge: We're moving from a spacious 65,000 square foot suburban campus to a sleek 20,000 square foot urban office.

Last month, when we realized how much paring down we had to do, we called in the experts, [Kyle Quilici and Cary Fortin](#), the founders of [New Minimalism](#).



*Kyle Quilici and Cary Fortin. (Photo courtesy of New Minimalism)*

These organization gurus, who have helped clients conquer clutter everywhere from their closets to their kitchens, operate on one simple principle: “Your external space affects your internal state of mind.”

Accordingly, Kyle and Cary—who hold degrees in interior design and psychology, respectively—work to help people create clean, tranquil spaces. On house calls, they assist clients in prioritizing their possessions, and letting go of the things that they don't really need so that they can appreciate the things they do.

We invited Kyle and Cary to come spend the morning with our staff here in Menlo Park, to share their guiding principles, give us hands-on help in the trenches (our offices!), and help us prepare our stuff and ourselves for [our move to Oakland](#).





*New Minimalism comes to Sunset. (Kimberley Navabpour/Sunset Publishing)*

Here, Kyle and Cary's big tips:

# 1) Drastically increase your standards

Sure, in a large office, you can keep everything. In a smaller space, you need to be choosy. Which of your objects deserve to occupy the prime real estate that is your desk? Perhaps in some cases (say, with framed photos), you can choose your favorite, and then let that one object stand for many.





*Food Editor Margo True weighs which books to keep. (Kimberley Navabpour/Sunset Publishing)*

## 2) Maintain the cycle of energy

Think about how much *stuff*—letters, packages, books—comes into your space each day. If items don't go out as frequently as they come in, you will accumulate more and more stuff around you. You can stay on top of this cycle by establishing habits—of donating, recycling, and periodically sorting through your “inbox.”



*The cycle of energy gone wrong. (Kimberley Navabpour/Sunset Publishing)*

## 3) Identify and eliminate to-do's in disguise

You know that letter you've held on to for months, meaning to respond to? Or that book that you've held on to for ages, meaning to read? Think of that object as a “to-do in disguise.” That is, until you complete the required action, that object will stay on your desk, gobbling up physical space and mental energy. Unless the to-do is essential, give yourself permission to let that item go.



*In search of “to-do’s” in disguise. (Kimberley Navabpour/Sunset Publishing)*

## **4) The Broken Windows Theory**

Our experts used an example that anyone with roommates (or family members) will identify with: Think about your kitchen sink. You know how when one dish doesn’t get washed, it’s soon joined by another, and another, and another, until you have a sink full of dirty dishes that never seem to get done? Clutter attracts clutter. Don’t give it the chance! Keep your space tidy, and it’s more likely that it will stay that way.



*The beginning of a virtuous (clutter-free) cycle. (Kimberley Navabpour/Sunset Publishing)*

## **5) The real cost of keeping something “just in case”**

Everyone has them, those things that they keep “just in case.” That menu that you just might refer to again, one day. That pretty scarf that you just might wear, some time. Yes, it can seem harmless to keep these “just in case” objects but, eventually, they accumulate and take up valuable space in which you could keep things that you actually use!

What’s more, when you keep them, you need to maintain them and remember where they are. Getting rid of the “just in case” things will allow you more space and mental energy.





*The*

*joy of tidying up. (Kimberley Navabpour/Sunset Publishing)*

This week, look for more posts about our experience with Kyle and Cary as we tackled our Great Clutter Challenge. We'll have tips on clutter control, ideas on overcoming emotional attachments to objects, and field notes from when Home Editor [Joanna Linberg](#) tried out Kyle and Cary's tips at home. In January, we'll bring you more organizational tips here on [Westphoria](#).