

**DOWNSIZE**

**To**

**FREEDOM**

**By**

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## PART 1

### LOOKING FOR THE FREEDOM

If you thought living in a Hamptons house, a Miami penthouse, plus a NYC duplex, all simultaneously, was heaven, in many ways it was.

I thanked God and why not? It was called gratitude.

But it wasn't until all that had gone, and I sat in my tiny new abode in London, was I surprised by a new sense of accomplishment;

*"How, did I actually fit in here?"* I asked myself daily, and with an increasing pitch to my voice. *"How the hell did I fit in here???"* It was followed by a bizarre, but overwhelming, sense of pride.

What I didn't know at the time was that I would be downsizing several more times, in different countries and for different reasons.

It was all the same principle in the end:

Downsizing is going small.

*"I bet none of my friends could do this...or in fact could many other people in the same situation".* I told everybody at every opportunity and they looked impressed for a millisecond, then probably shuddered at the thought one

day, it *could* be them.

In truth, it might be, because millions of us are 'Downsizing' in one way or another every year, but how?

It's almost unnatural, full of trepidation, nothing to boast about and could be sheer chaos, but it doesn't need to be and that's what this guide is for.

First, I will explain to you why downsizing may make sense and then I will discuss motives and a new mental attitude.

I will offer tips on how and where to look for your new place, to pack your old place and how to decorate, organize and live in your new home so it fits and delights you.

Downsizing is a consequence, a result of many actions, and decisions, which might go back years. Only you know which steps were taken and why, or *if* the steps were your own or someone else's?

We are subjected to so many different circumstances on a daily basis and it's a continual process. The process of downsizing is just another step in life.

It's not the destination, its just part of a journey. It's a cliché I know sorry, but it's true, so let's begin the journey.

## Invisible Wars

We are surrounded by 'invisible wars' being battled in loud but deafening silence e.g. the class war, race war, cultural war and the size war!

Big is beautiful, small is bijoux. It's all down to what you can afford and what suits your lifestyle best.

The demonstration of ones wealth, the size of your car, handbag, ring, garden, hair, watch etc. is seen to be irrevocably representative of what we have achieved in life.

We have gone into an era of uber kitchens, big bathrooms, large cars, oversized handbags, generous watches, huge diamonds, bigger boobs and momentous expectations.

No one boasts about the 'smallest' of any of these things, meanwhile the baby boomers are loosing their eyesight by the millions so they can't even see 'small'.

The younger generation is addicted to new technology and advertising which is so sophisticated we hardly even notice how brain- washed we have all become. It's difficult, but we have to stay objective, a bit removed, and on top of that- just plain grateful.

Folks these days, who are keeping big homes, are being sucked dry by large, unforgiving leveraged properties, whilst living on a diminishing income, eating discounted foods, and only going out when it's free.

They are drinking the supermarket wines, not servicing the car, cancelling insurance policies, living in the dark, wearing clothes for a younger thinner person and pretending they aren't using the bus.

The roof leaks, carpet is fraying, fridge handles are gone, taps drip, mold is growing, rust is spreading and the ants are now inside.

But they keep praying the house will increase in value, praying there will be something for the kids to inherit, praying they never have to take in lodgers and praying they can keep paying dues or the service charges.

Eventually the constant repairs are completely unaffordable, property taxes increase, they stop inviting guests over, the pool heater is off, and they look out at overgrown gardens while sitting in semi darkness still praying that they don't get some unexpected large bill.

This is all about cash flow and there is simply not enough of the cash flowing in.

It's a battle for survival and it's hitting the middle classes most. They don't know it, but they are bunkering down and their house is becoming a prison.

People need their house to increase in value annually, because that's what they are protecting and fighting for. But why?

So the kids can sell it, fight, squander, waste, brag, show off, and tell stories about a place they never paid for?

You won't win this 'invisible war' but you can get off the battlefield.

'Downsizing' is about being about becoming liquid, fluid, adapting, free, solvent, minimal, safer, invisible, humble, discreet, practical, unassuming, and even perhaps avoiding losing the lot in a foreclosure or a divorce.

It shouldn't be a battle and it might even be fun.

### How it used to be.

Many cultures all over the world are still traditionally living in smallish spaces with out collapsing into social chaos, popping Prozac, or shooting each other.

The need for a triple garage, 4 bedrooms en suite, TV den and BBQ pit is a relatively new phenomena imported from the USA that the middle classes worldwide now seem to expect.

Historically, in Europe, you had to be upper class, landed gentry or massively wealthy to even conceive of living in spacious accommodation and the luxury that offered.

Only they could afford to heat and maintain large rooms and multiple living quarters as without the servants, it meant no fires, no horses, no cleaners, gardeners, cooks or childcare.

Poor people can huddle around a fire, shared tasks, cooperate on the land and helped each other raise all the kids because it was pure survival tactics and made economic sense.

Since after the last Great War we have now learnt how to buy, borrow and leverage our own homes so we live in smaller independent, isolated from family groups.

We are building 'castles' to show off our success but meanwhile we have lost the 'servants'.

*We* are the 'new servants' and now try to do everything to sustain these 'castles'. It cannot be done on earned income alone; it's just not enough.

Being so tied into the concept of "your home is your castle" it now seems madness at best, or socially embarrassing at worse, to admit to a downsize move.

In the USA it's a reason for suicide, in France 'c'est pratique', in England you have now just gone deeper 'into the countryside.'

Conditions are now changing fast in this economy, so adapt voluntarily before you are made to by some exterior, overwhelming, or unstoppable force.

It's already happening as we live in 'bubbles' but the fear, remorse, and hesitation is mostly unfounded, so shake it off, otherwise it will continually haunt you.

If you wince, groan, whine and bitch every minute during this move, life will turn into hell, but there is an alternative.

You can downsize with some style, a healthy attitude, and a sense of fun, adventure, freedom, and appreciation.

It will take some organizing, mental strength, emotional maturity and physical effort, but it is possible.

First, we need to lighten your load;

### Be Honest with Yourself

Our daily lives are dictated by our monthly cash flow.

If the reason for moving is that cash flow is short and not supporting your current life style put this into the equation now or you will be downsizing again soon.

It's better to take 3 steps down in one go, rather than 3 separate steps downwards consecutively, as every move costs money.

Ask yourself "are living in your home or is your home living you?"

Who is working for whom?

Has your home become the reason to go to work, the reason to earn money,



to sacrifice, to stay married, maintain, plan, sue, or to have sex, etc.?

We have become slaves to our homes. The higher the cost of the home in relation to income, the higher the leverage then the longer the servitude and deeper the self sacrifice.

Talking about the 'increased equity value of your home' has become an addiction because a lot of property has increased much faster than our earning capacity.

This imbalance is cementing the relationship for longer loans and deeper debts.

One working lifetime, or one income, is not long enough to pay it all off.

Interest rates keep hitting all time lows and it's sucking us in further into more leverage but this is not a natural state of events and banks and governments are complicit.

The only true freedom is being free of debt and free of credit.

In order to be self-governing and self-determining, and take back the control of our lives we need to pay off all those outstanding debts.

We had a good run so let's pick up our 'cards off the table' and cash out while we can and before its too late.

When the worm turns, if interest rates rise and the banks decide to foreclose, no one will remember to turn off the Jacuzzi.

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I met a couple that had been made redundant in the USA, so they budgeted \$10,000 a year to live on a small boat for three years. They then built up an IT business and sold out for \$300m.

It's not typical of what happens to people, so don't count on that happening to you, but the point is they gave themselves time to restructure.

Downsizing is probably part of restructuring your life, rather than a sudden desire to be able to reach out and touch both the bedroom walls.

We live as well as we can afford to, and if we are flexible enough to 'upsize' with speed, we *should* be flexible enough to 'downsize' when needed.

You can't run, and you can't hide in this life, so better deal with the reality and have pride in that.

The human being is a very tenacious animal and we have lived in a variety of dwellings for centuries and if our basic needs are simple they can be pleasantly arranged and satisfied.

### The basic needs of housing.

Regarding the 'basic needs' I'm not talking about camping, sleeping bags, open fires, warm socks and a compass.

It is not about any of those things but more about the reality of what an average person needs;

Roof

Security

Warmth

Cooking facilities

Bed and covers

Toilet

Shower, bath, and sink

Lighting

Accessibility

Affordability

Peace

It's the extras we have now come to expect e.g. gym, lifts, views, porters, transport links, golf and tennis that are costing a fortune.

Homes now come with brochures, lovely wide angled photos of good-looking couples and a poetic description, which seduces us before even visiting.

Developers are selling 'lifestyles' not just some homely nest. They are selling dreams and stage sets that look like films we should to fall into.

We are now the actors who arrive stage left, wearing jogging pants, and exist 'stage right' in evening dress, whilst driving a red convertible.

We all smile showing straight white teeth, look like the guests, carry designer shopping bags and eat gourmet food.

We all drink Pinot Grigio, eat cashew nuts and keep every room spotless at all times. It's hotel style living.

Gone are the toothless old relatives, fat cousins, garlic peel, discarded laundry, dribbling toddlers and ash-flicking smokers.

Housing has gone from being a 'basic need' to an indulgent luxury.

Our basic housing needs was once met by a damp, hidden, insect infested cave or a couple of twisted branches, padded with rain soaked leaves and a bit of moss in the good times.

It was a place to hide from predators, avoid harsh life threatening climates, light a small fire, cook a few scraps, and *if* you had enough energy left, make some babies.

### How far we have come.

Now we hope the neighbors are totally invisible so we don't have to deal with our differences as the cities have been taken over by overseas buyers who have parked money in expensive homes left empty for months.

I loved the fact I never saw my neighbors, I never missed them one bit, longed for their return or any sign of them. Their two-week annual visit, from long distance lands, was about as much as we could all take with any genuine warmth.

They were happy to arrive, and they were happy to go, and were very happy they could afford to do both.

It would take years and perhaps a generation for a mixed diverse group to

grow bonds and affection for one another, which is the true foundation of a caring community. Moving in next door doesn't automatically give you that comfort.

Its love and empathy that makes a human go out of their way for another, but deep down we know being transient in a large city breaks those community ties.

Its a personal choice and depends on how much you are willing to give and put into creating bonds with your fellow neighbor, or if you even feel the need to bond?

I think some of us were born to leave the village and search for new horizons, while others were born to stay on and nurture the community.

We need both types of people.

It was the ancient 'wanderers' who first lead us out of the north facing damp cave, filled with snakes and a pile of bat droppings in the master bedroom and we should be grateful for their endeavors.

## Dollars and Sense

Downsizing has to work financially for you but you need to know the figures. Would you choose to go to a hotel for a month that you had no chance of being able to afford? Well, that's what a large house is.

Tens of thousands of us are living in 'mini hotels' called 'homes' that we cannot afford to keep.

The properties are crumbling, the weeds are sprouting, the furniture is rotting and the nasty reminder letters are arriving, every day.

Time to check out, say good-bye to the staff (that's you by the way) pack and carry your own bags before you get evicted.

We have been conditioned to expect our property investment to go up, and it did for years, big time, but this is different now and the world has changed, so waiting for this capital increase is getting risky.

That is the privilege of a few people living in properties in the top locations, owned and completely paid for.

It's not always a fact that your residence is directly related to your present income, (not capital) and there are many contributing factors.

It is said if a person divorces their lifestyle is cut by 47% on average but we do know divorce means *all* the bills arrive with only your name printed on them.

Incomes can fluctuate widely depending on number of earners per household, redundancy, death, divorce, relatives and kids born but you can't move house every time these factors change either.

In good times our desire to up grade, up size and up sticks was fuelled with an urge so great it's almost religious. Who could resist?

Coupled with our belief we only live once, we stretch our budgets to breaking point hence the huge debt households are now carrying.

Clear debts up, don't borrow any money and keep it simple.

We need to return to the basics and understand *"if it can't be paid for now, we can't have it now."*

The financial institutions and banks have sucked us all in and will spit us all out one day when the computers attempt to balance the books.

Reduce your family's expectations in life as the wrong people, media, advertising and role models feed us too many consumer messages.

The gulf dividing those with a 'good credit rating' or a 'bad credit rating' will become the new passport to functioning properly, legally or not in society.

A huge rise in personal defaults will black list hundreds of thousands of people in the future and impact on everything they attempt from then on.

Lets make a clean sweep of things now.

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In most currencies it's going to cost about 1,000 something a month to rent a half decent place with a double bed. 1,000 Euros, \$1,000 or £1,000 pm won't get you a great deal, but it is still possible.

"Oh," you might say, "Isn't the sub-continent very cheap?"

Not if you want to live with the posh folks with pools, air-con, parking and security. If you are willing to do corrugated shack on a back street you will pay less but try finding a realtor to take you to one. It all works out the same unless you get a break on the currency conversion.

The days when New Zealand or Australia was disconnected from the western worlds pricing structure are long gone, and they will probably never be 'cheap' again.

It's called 'globalization' which translates to us as 'no bargains over there'.

The word 'bubble' needs no translation and this time it's a world property bubble.

### Condos and apartments.

"Ok forget the big house I will buy myself a smaller flat" You might say thinking that's going to solve your problem but there is a problem out there with the residential property management companies, the rising costs, serious consequences of late payments and no one seems to talk about it.

The costs of actual maintenance, dues, services, and management charges delivered by the property management companies or syndicates are all going up fast and the costs are all passed onto the tenants.

Very slick professional property management firms who rebid for the contracts about every 3 years run the larger blocks. They then have to compete again with lower bids from other companies, which put them in competition to provide the best price for the Landlord or tenants. That all sounds good but it's more complicated than that.

Who ever bids low satisfies the Landlord / Head Lease Holder and who might endeavor to offer several blocks/buildings to one managing agent to save further on costs.

The MC in turn will then have to resubmit the bids after 3 years and so have forced their (real) fee down.

Because costs across the board have all risen, according to your lease the landlords (who are not prepared to pay them) will pass those costs onto the leaseholders/tenants.

So what do they all do? They submit service charge statements so complicated, compiled on a computer program, which tenants hardly understand or want to question too deeply.

The Residents Association/Home Owners Association will look into and examine all the charges *if* the building has one.

Foreclosure, due to unpaid service charges/dues, is becoming more common and it's a very dangerous position and one the middle classes are increasingly facing with silent terror.

As the building increases its value so the investment portfolio is worth more, so it's in the Landlord's interests to look for and fix any nice big jobs like boilers, roof, exterior wall/cladding cleaning, lifts, window replacements etc.



Local Councils can be even worse with the accounting, ruthless with payment demands and eventually evict tenants who have no hope of paying.

The only defense is a good strong organized Tenants Association but London is full of overseas folks who have no interest, won't rock the boat or linguistically can hardly read the small print.

Houses in Florida's gated golf communities are going cheap because the dues, Country Club membership and Property taxes now cost a fortune and the retired residents cannot budget for that with the low interest rates.

Dubai developers have never really factored in, or fully estimated the servicing cost of those gigantic modern blocks especially when half the tenants don't pay on time, the block is half empty, the elements and climate are extreme.

### Renting rooms.

All the thousands empty bedrooms now listed on AirBnB for weekly rental help supplement peoples income and pay their bills but the competition is getting hot. That's why the rooms or flats are so nice as again it's the middle classes who need the income.

Renting out your property peak season is an option but where will you live?

Have you seen the price of a caravan these days? Take a trip to St Tropez and see what they get for Kon Tikki Beach at low season.

Staying with relatives or friends during the season can be false economy and the relationship is thrown in with the costs.

Whether you are now renting or owning, enjoy it to the full, because the chances are the other option might be just around the corner, so be mentally prepared and stay light.

Remember a human is basically a nomadic animal and change is inevitable.

## THE MOVE

### Packing to Go

The first thing you need to know about packing is this:

No one will help you much, or often.

Regardless of the promises, bribes, intentions, kisses, and threats, your friends and loved ones will find a way to disappear quickly, without word as soon as you break open the cardboard boxes.

Never treat packing help unkindly as there are not there for long so have them do the heavy lifting quickly, before they disappear and you are left alone again.

Give anyone that helps you biscuits, tea, chocolate or rum so they stay longer and remain cheerful.

Moving men are always hungry and not known for superior dietary habits.

Play upbeat music for them, this is no time for Mahler's 2nd symphony, the news, talk shows, sit coms or a dull depressing silence. Do anything that gets those arms and legs moving.

Start early. Not only early that day, or that week, or that month but also early that year! You still won't have enough time.

Once you are sorting your possessions, photos, kids' stuff and mementos time will slip away into dreams, memories, regrets, tears, and laughter. It's an emotional roller coaster.

A single box could take a day, especially if it's sorting out children's items, clothes, photos, old wedding gifts, toys, books, antiques, glass, etc. Do you want your helpers coming over to watch you weep over pictures or accompany you down memory lane? No you don't.

You want them to help move things, heavy things, so be mentally and emotionally ready for them when they come.

Don't even touch the videos, holiday films, scrap books, school report cards, diplomas, divorce papers, tax returns, old bills, tooth x-rays or bank statements.

*Do not touch them!* Pack them up in a box and don't waste your life looking over every line. This is *not* a time for dwelling over details-they can wait for much later.

Pack and keep packing like a robot, as there is more junk stored in your life than you could ever imagine.

Mark the boxes. Yes, I know you know that, but trust me, we all forget, and we never mark the last ones. So buy plenty of felt pens and leave them all over the place, along with the scissors and duct tape all of which constantly disappear.

Don't over fill the box. I repeat, *do not over fill the box.*

Divide, divide, and divide. Don't put all your eggs, clocks, shoes, bags, plates, and glass into one box.

Use books sparingly at the bottom/ sides/ top of boxes for extra support. Not too many, as they are heavy, but they help protect the box sides against the pointed objects.

Use *all* the towels, sheets, clothes, pillows, heavy coats, socks, etc. as packing and padding material for glass, plates and all breakable objects. It's clean and saves you buying wrapping papers.

Don't use newspapers, as we all know it leaves terrible print stains and besides it's better used for fish and chips.

Buy new clean boxes if you cannot find free, clean, sturdy boxes locally. Buy the gaffer tape from The £1 Shop and buy more than you need and leave them all over the rooms.

Also buy a packet of 3 scissors, as they also get lost.

Stock up on the large, plastic striped, blue and red check two handled classic laundry bags for £1 each, as they are lightweight, slide across floors and are great for kids clothing. Do not over fill, as the zips are only plastic.

They seem less tacky and revolting when you have lots of them and yes, I have used them as emergency flight 'hand luggage' and no one gave me a second glance.

Strong thick garden bin bags in black or green really help out, but be sure to label, mark and count them otherwise they will be mistaken for rubbish bags.

Fill shoes with small things. Fill pillowcases with everything from underwear, soaps, cutlery, to hair bands. (A pillowcase is a bag)

Keep a 'charity pile' completely separate and fill it up! Let someone specific pack up those charity items and let keep them so they do an excellent job.

Give away all of your very tall glass vases as they are a nightmare to pack,

but make excellent gifts.

Do not take any perishable foods. Do not take breakable glass bottles but instead drink all the brandy, flambé the rum and give away the Tia Maria.

Dripping boxes of liquid are no fun and it *will* break or spill if it can.

Work logically around a room in ONE direction. Do not zigzag all over the place it wastes time, increases losses, uses up leg energy and annoys everyone else.

Progress quietly and forward rather than make a big show of effort and get nowhere.

Check your moving date is *not* during, before or after a bank holiday, Friday night traffic, school breaks, trains strikes or any state occasions.

Moving is very, very tiring mentally and emotionally and you will cry and laugh and shout and threaten even on a good day, so you don't need traffic or other unplanned hassles adding to the stress.

Finish all of your packing at least one day before moving out. Remember, when your moving men come, you want them to help you move, not stand around drinking coffee watching you pack, so be ready for them.

Don't solely rely on free help; hire professional people and use a professional packing company if you can afford it.

If you are divorcing get a quote ahead of time, put that in with your costs to the lawyer, so you leave with dignity.

Choose a company with good references and buy moving insurance. Shop around and ask a lot of questions.

Your life in those boxes and they need to reach their destination not

disappear up the M1.

Removal men have always been very kind, clean and sympathetic to me but perhaps I've been lucky.

Take a last photo on your phone of all of them with the boxes, and the registration number of the van should they drive away never to return.

Store your passport, jewels, papers, keys, phone charger and money hidden during the move and put them in a separate bag with your toothbrush, credit cards, birth certificate, the front door keys, airline tickets, hotel reference numbers and hairbrush. Don't lose the bag or give it to any one for safekeeping.

Keep all of these items with you for the night of your move, which should be spent in a hotel, not your new home. You will need to rest; sleep, and calm down not unpack.

Do not drink alcohol the night before moving. Save the celebration and drink afterwards.

Do not eat curry the night before, bad prawns, and mayonnaise or get pregnant.

Try not to lose the dog, baby, or pack the parrot along the way. Do not leave the bank account details under the floor boards, the designer shopping bags under the bed, the original French chateaux brass signs, hidden presents in the loft, or clothes in the washing machine- I have.

On moving day drink lots of water and wear comfortable shoes. Keep rubber gloves, hand cream and plenty of nail files handy. Keep your phone charged and your lawyer's number on redial, just in case.

Know how to make an insurance claim and download the forms from the company in advance in case of breakages.

Clean as you go, even if it's a paper towel or a quick mop over the floor. We all plan to clean the whole house at the end but then is the end?

At the end you can hardly speak or stand or have time to think straight so the big deep clean is last on your list unless someone helps you.

Take out the rubbish. It's not just polite but usually holds a lot of personal information, history, your businesses, finances and family.

Check into a hotel on moving day, eat early, and go to sleep.

Don't look back...

## Life Lessons

Packing, sorting and removing all of your possessions is a cathartic voyage into places your memory had either sealed, or entirely forgotten. It will induce a lot of mumbling, hours and weeks of mumbling.

"Where did I get that?"

"Why did I buy all that?"

"What idiot kept all those?"

"What was I thinking?"

"I always hated them"

"I always loved them"

"I must hand this down to a disinterested relative"

"Can I sell this?"

"Whose crap is this?"

A million questions asked, but hardly any of them will be answered properly. You get lost in boxes that open up worlds, both past and now present.

But what about the future?

What lessons can we learn from this?

It's shedding a lot of physical and emotional 'baggage' in so many forms.

Did all those possessions come to own you?

How much (after tax) of thousands of pounds was spent on this stuff you now can't even give away?

How much was actually useful?

How much actually made us happy?

*Why* did we buy all that? To impress others? To gratify relationships? To bolster a fragile ego?

I am beginning to understand why those tatty looking yogi men sit around in rags. It's not my style, but if you don't have anything, you might not ever want for anything?

And by sitting around all day meditating they are ensuring they never will have anything materially.



I had fallen into every consumer trap. I was convinced it was my idea not theirs. I swam in the consumer lake and drank the cool aid.

If you're shedding all these items you probably need to do some 'self shedding' because there is no point in getting rid of a pile of possessions but keeping all your bad habits!

Shed the drinking, smoking, negative friends, crap TV, poisoned foods and any thing else you don't need.

Loose the weight.

Shed the emotions, the greed, the guilt, and the desire to impress.

Shed the pain.... God knows we all have some pain.

Perhaps a bit of 'visualization' might help. What and who, do you now want to be? Look back at who you previously were and see if that matches what you have become?

Do you need to be noticed? Why? Being noticed doesn't lead to love but perhaps envy. Is that an emotion you want to evoke? Why?

It's almost worth going to an Ashram for a week to learn 'letting go' or waiting until after you have moved to help you realize why you have so much.

Either way the stuff is going.

Downsizing is a major live change so if you're going to put in the effort, go the whole way and re organize your mind.

### Location, Location, Location

Find a good location. This will take time and plenty of searching. Put in the

energy and don't moan.

Look over a couple of areas you *are* willing to live in whilst being very clear where you *won't* live.

Nothing depressing, dangerous, dirty or alien or that will cause stress and undermine the whole process. This is not a punishment. So let us assume that long car journeys to work, shops or schools are an unwelcome burden.

The question is can you actually live, breath, sleep, think, laugh, relax in the spaces you are viewing? Keep looking if the answer is "no" and don't settle for anything miserable, dirty, noisy or too isolated.

I think it well worth visiting a few expensive 'pied a terre' that you have no hope of affording to give inspiration. The Pan Peninsula apartment block London W14, near Canary Wharf, has the smartest studios about 28 sq.m. (300 sq. ft.). They are mostly black, very sexy, very stylish, very impressive, and expensive and are inspirational.

Most people have never seen the interior of a very chic, small, town center pad just as most people don't understand how to lay out a 26 sq. meter dwelling with a terrace. It's learning a curve; go learn, go look.

Don't forget your environment seeps into your residence so a good location around you lifts the spirit the minute you step out the door.

Don't stick yourself in no man's land as you will stay home more than normal and the space will start to implode. It's false economy to spend a fortune travelling back and forth and generally a waste of good time.

Get out and about, and get near something worth seeing, near cafes, cinemas, parks, gyms, tennis, markets and nature.

In Europe try to get near the main square, market place, Cathedral, beach or the Old Town. If in the USA start near the golf courses, shops, amenities, good road/rail access, safe areas or the better schools.

Start looking at homes closest to the town center, bus routes, hotels,

taxicabs and trains, then work outwards. Look at side streets near the best hotels, small blocks of flats 1950/60/70, or second or third row back from the beach. Unfortunately, most people do the opposite for the wrong reasons, and its false economy.

Choose somewhere arty, hip, gay, musical, ethnic with food and young people who bring in life and atmosphere.

Our dependence on local friends/ family is severely overrated and borders on the pathetic. Get a 'free calling plan' and call, if you must.

Visit all the new local shops say 'hello' and make conversation. Make a point of being known by all the small traders, market holders and local folks who very soon become a welcome source of human interaction and infinite source of local knowledge. How else will you find a good plumber?

It's called 'a community' so 'communicate.'

### Small doesn't mean miserable

Misery. Lets define it. It won't take many words.

Dirty, overcrowded, noisy, small, dark, damp, dysfunctional dwellings are the fears of 'downsizing'.

Multiple occupancy, dense housing, overcrowding, insufficient amenities, living close to squalor and living next to other squalid people are our greatest nightmares. These things will make you miserable, so don't go and look at them.

Choose a medium/small building that the landlord is maintaining

properly, preferable with owner residents not transient renters.

Silence is golden and we live in world polluted by noise, other people's noise.

Do not choose a flat along a busy corridor where everyone passes the door day and night.

Do the foot traffic count especially near lifts and stairs.

Don't live above pubs, takeaways, late night shops or traffic lights, as trains and traffic can positively 'hum' compared to voices. You need to have a lot of renewable gratitude and the ability to turn a 'negative' into a 'positive'.

Remember voices are hard to tune out, so avoid schools, cinemas, including play schools, hospitals and prisons, and takeaways. Living close to a lot of children is a 'no-no,' but you can't always spot them during the week.

Birds are good. Birds in trees, not cages, and waking up to the birds 'dawn chorus' every day is a delight. But dogs, machinery, fire stations, bus stops, pig farms, crack houses are not good.

Avoid dark interiors and if you can't put on lights, paint everything white, and add lots of mirrors. Make sure the place is not dirty and dark and if it is, move on.

Never live in damp place. There's a quicker way to die and it ruins good clothing.

I prefer facing west as evening sun is more important to me than the morning. That way, I can warm up all day long and then face the setting sun as I sip a cocktail. Remember, you are poor now so you need to find frugal entertainment.

You can't move the building but get the compass out and know which way you face during the viewing but try not to live facing north unless you

happen to be south of the equator.

Go back and visit the property after dark and take a walk around the streets. Speak to neighbors and local shopkeepers and ask about any planned changes. Pop into the local pub/bar and get the inside story it will be worth the price of the drink.

Avoid some of the hazards and you have a chance of finding peace, happiness, tranquility, and quality of life.

### Walking, Keep Walking

If you still have legs, use them. Walk.

Walking is not an outdated form of transport. It's not something our ancestors did before car keys and it's not an embarrassing shameful thing you grudgingly admit to doing. A person starts to die off the day they stop walking, mentally and physically.

Get the right footwear, bundle up, take the broly and hit those pavements and see the world at ground level.

Our relationship with cars has become unhealthy. It's a power thing. You grab the keys, jump in, start that engine, flick on the music and command a moving piece of machinery any way you want. What a thrill. It's your private, moving room full of familiarities, but it also alienates you from the elements and people. So try to leave the car at home sometimes and walk.

Walking clears the head, oxygenates the lungs and body, saves you money, and stimulates the eyes and the mind. Walking gives you perspective and diminishes depression. (Miserable people don't walk) Walking massages the internal organs, massages the feet, puts blood into the legs and

strengthens the back. What else can you do that's free for 30 minutes a day that is going to do all that?

Downsizing is a new start in life not just losing a few bedrooms, gardens, garages, driveways and a host of neighbors but it's about streamlining, trimming waste, and getting things done quicker, saving money and being efficient.

Walking is efficient.

## Moving into Your New Space

### The Arrival

Okay, so you have arrived and all the boxes are piled up to the ceiling, marked with numbers which now mean absolutely nothing to you, as the list is probably now lost.

Packing up the boxes previously helped you lose the will to live, but unpacking them is about as interesting as injecting yourself with poison.

Moving is like childbirth. There are no immediate returns.

"I can sleep on the couch, on a box, under towels or just go to another hotel," I said to an empty room where no one was listening to me. I was alone with a bunch of boxes and they weren't talking.

I awoke freezing, hungry and desperate for coffee so I went downstairs to the local cafe and introduced myself to the owners who couldn't care less if

I lived or died, alone, or not.

When you move in remember to eat, drink and warm up, then put on the radio and don't plan anything for a week at least.

Clean the place first. Clean out the other resident and their germs. Open the windows and change the air, pour over the bleach and change the smell and play your own music and change the vibes.

Disinfect and wash showers, all the walls, fix the grout and bleach everything including the door handles and light switches. Spray anti bacterial spray on everything- including the air, but mind the walls, it drips down paint.

Clear all drains with Super Drain Cleaner every month and rid yourself of smells, crud, and grease so you start afresh.

## Unpacking and where to Start?

### The Kitchen

Start in the kitchen, as food will be needed to keep you alive during this ordeal. No one needs books, clothes, shampoo or tennis rackets to survive, but you will need to eat and really soon.

### Storage

Put up lots of shelves, as shelves are the best invention since the wheel. Put up shelves beyond your reach and invest in the small folding two-step ladder from Argos it will save the day and doubles up as seat or extra table.

Use *all* the space above the kitchen cupboards, refrigerator and stove etc. all the way up to the ceiling for storage. Put everything in matching plain colored plastic boxes our Chinese cousins have made for us, and stack them up, up and up.

You can't have too many plastic boxes and bowls. They stack well so save space according to size, they are cheap and they are very cheerful so try to get them in two colors.

Lime green looks very clean, pale blue goes with white kitchens, red is modern and yellow goes with everything.

Use them for displaying fruit, salads, storing vegetables and spices.

The large oversized oval shaped bowls double up as serving trays, serving salads, or displaying candles or magazines.

Jam jars are great for storing salad seeds, nut, dried fruits, croutons, pasta, rice, knives and forks, pens and anything tall. Wrap larger bags of flour, coconut, sugar etc. in see through plastic bags and stack.

### Less is More

Keep all surfaces empty. No one wants to see all your crap, and they certainly don't want to see your laundry, in the kitchen. They also don't want to see dusty silly ornaments, dried old flowers, and signs on fridges



or hundreds of bad photos of children. If your house is cluttered with mementos it looks insecure and needy for all this crap around to make you feel safe or rich.

You are now neither so live in a tidy, clutter free, clean, empty space at eye level.

Use or throw away old mustards, old jams, old honeys and a pile of soft biscuits that are a health hazard. They are not signs of 'wealth'.

Have 3/4 good clean tea towels and throw away or use the old stained ones as rags, no matter how much you loved them. No one is that poor and it's another sign of mental sickness.

Keep only clean and new washing up sponges, brushes etc. It's a sink not a public toilet.

Do not buy large kitchen dustbins unless you are a family of 4 or above. Use smaller bags and throw away, as needed during the day, well tied up and secured. Keep all rubbish hidden or under the sink as it's not a feature to admire or sculpture.

Get some scented candles, or use £1 perfume as room spray to hide curry, fish, onions and garlic smells. It's not comforting, it's just vile.

Buy a cheerful highly colored bucket and a cheerful highly colored mop so wiping the floors every day will be a joy and good exercise. I add fabric softener into floor water, as it smells better.

Keep the fridge clean and do not fill it with old salad dressing, old cheese, old sauces or odd bits. Rotting food in packets is not a sign of wealth.

### The eating area

Obviously you are getting a smaller table, or one that tips up straight after use and stores against the wall. Ikea has a 'corner table' that opens up for 4 people. The shape was great but if the top is terrible quality so buy a nice thick plastic highly patterned tablecloth like the French use.

Or cover the table with menus, newspapers, B&W photos, food photos or postcards and then place a slab of glass on top.

If you have less space use the coffee table to eat off. Get a couple of cheap wooden chairs, paint them bright colors and chop off the legs to make them shorter and stubby which looks cute and trendy. After you paint them tie on ribbons, add cushions, hammer in colored studs, entwine beads, and spray on a mural so they are bespoke and cheerful. Think Momos.

If there is no room for a table, fix up a food bar from Ikea with 2 legs, 2 wall brackets, 1 piece of Formica and 2 high bar stools. It looks great and saves so much space. Blend in pictures and a planted pot and voila, a bistro theme is created.

For spare chairs pull out canvas aluminum framed camping/ fishing chairs from Argos. They are practical, light and cheap and you can throw them under the bed later.

Padded wooden lap trays are not that bad and complete the TV supper experience. You won't die from eating off a tray, and its good for the core muscles and balance and these can be stowed under the bed when not being used.

Sit on the floor. Why not? Get cushions, take off the shoes, use a low table and sit on the floor. Plenty of cultures still sit to eat on the floor and our ancestors all bonded on the floor and look what happened to them.

## Living Area

The average human needs an average size of functioning living space and anything extra is a luxury. The basics are a short list with a million different combinations.

A bathroom is a bathroom and they don't vary in use that much except in age and cost. Hand basins vary a bit, a WC is standard, as are showers, but it being clean and bright is most important.

You won't have many doors in a smaller home but I am a great believer of taking them all off to create an illusion of more space. If you live alone, you don't need anything but a toilet door. Gone are the days when it's so cold each room needs to be hermetically sealed to keep you alive and if it's that cold then move.

### Hallways.

Pile up all the best LV, Gucci, RL, Fendi, Dunhill luggage, whicker picnic baskets, old leather suitcases and old school duffle/ fishing bags in your hallways. These are your new wardrobes.

Shoes, boots, handbags, ski gear, cruise wear, tennis clothes, jumpers and hats will all be stored here. Each suitcase holds a different category or season.

Put a tall plant next to them; add some large coffee table books, a couple of very large silver sports school trophies/ cups and top with a scented candle. Think Ralph Lauren.

### Copy the Experts

If you cannot imagine room sets, go into furniture stores and look at room settings to see how they used the space. Bloomingdales, Ikea, Habitat, Heals and Ralph Lauren offer something for every budget.

Go online and look at Italian kitchens, furniture, store layouts and save the details that you like and will fit your rooms.

Ralph Lauren creates room settings in his shops that are totally inspirational. Each one is joy and a loss when they are replaced seasonally but his principles are the same and the space his team uses is not large.

It's all about planning and a theme and he draws on some natural surroundings, beaches, alpine, cities, and countryside and creates a theatre stage, or a film set. It has nothing to do with money; it's a style he offers.

Cover walls in Scottish blue and red tartan fabric and padded every wall, use outside tiles, half logs of wood or simply paste up menus. Use props, items and materials to set a feeling you can live with.

### Go Up! Go Under!

Look up. Most of the wasted space in a room is above 5ft high, which is why the floors always suffer first. Put shelves up over doorways and anywhere else you can as a mass of storage can be used above doorways. Over door hooks are the greatest things but check they fit, as some doors are too thick.

Go Under. Go under beds, under sofas, under chairs, under drawers, under chair seats, and under the kitchen cabinets. Box it, wrap it, and pack it so it

stays clean, as the dust will collect.

Go behind. Corner armchairs have a mass of space behind them. Put your belongings behind sofas, wardrobes, doors, everything. Once you have identified every inch of unused space you, will have hidden a million items that probably previously had been displayed. Don't forget where they are.

Take photos on your camera and email them to yourself with the list, as this basic organizing will save you time and energy in the future. 'File' each item away *as* it comes out of the box, because you can always re file at a later date.

Do not clutter. Do not leave things out. Do not think about where to put them-just put things away immediately as you unpack.

Messy people don't understand how hard tidy people actually work at it, like fat people don't understand how thin people stay thin.

### TV, Wi-Fi, Kindle

Get the largest TV you can afford. Don't even pretend you won't use it. We have welcomed the TV into our homes like a lost relative, either openly or secretly, for 30 years. Don't be guilty about it, just learn how to use the new technology and embrace it. Like the trains, they are here to stay.

It's our friend, our educator, our amusement, our contact, our companion and a great source of joy.

A phenomenon of this century is that we now spend almost all our spare time on or with electronic machines even when family members are around us at home. Each person is engaged with/on a machine, and it's become the norm and grudgingly accepted.

Plus lying on a sofa, holding your own remote, is very good for you. It's a deep form of relaxation, good for the legs, good for the digestion, relieves depression, gives you perspective, and good for blood flow. That's why we all do it.

Do your home work and start with the big names, see what's on offer, get a good guarantee, get someone to set the whole system up for you and test it all before they leave the house. Take a short video on your phone on how to use the remote especially the buttons not to press and keep his telephone number near the TV. It will only go off on the weekends when no one can help you.

Write down or email to yourself **all** the relevant passwords, security numbers, login details, telephone numbers, billing reference info, etc. as these things are always stressful to find when your system is not working and contribute to high blood pressure.

## Books

Get rid of them. Cleanse. Only keep the ones you love, cannot replace, are signed, leather bound, gifts or handed down.

Unless they are meaningful, educational, future reference material, large coffee table, inherited, valuable or with great photos, get rid of them. Books can really bring out a stubborn side of a person as we think they represent 'who we are,' but they don't. You don't have space, as you are downsizing, not living in a library. Say goodbye, thank you, and pass the book on.

Then go buy a Kindle.

No one is impressed by your ability to read. We all read these days. They take up space, smell, like old magazines and newspapers as they all turn to

dust and clog your lungs. Only *National Geographic* magazines are acceptable in the bathroom. Get rid of all the rest unless they have a meaning.

Same with old CD's, tapes and videos please donate them all to a good cause.

Now that you have chosen and moved into your new home it's time to make it an environment where you will be more comfortable, calm, harmonious, peaceful, happy and enjoy your own company and choose delights around you.

## Decorating and Living in Your New Space

The key to decorating is choosing a theme. There are countless of themes NYC, country, beach, hunting, wine, tennis, and chalet, Mediterranean so choose one and build around it.

No theme, no style, no theme, no ambience, no theme, no color palate. No theme and it will look like a bric a brack shop of unrelated items.

Use colors and let them into your life and home, it will cheer you up, stimulate the economy and distract you from every day niggles. Think 'fashion'. Think 'season'.

"When we finish dressing ourselves, we dress our homes."

Top designers, like Michael Kors, use a palate of three basic colors, one of which is often either black or white. It's worth spending a few pounds on some colored matching accessories, and change them over twice a year, in spring and autumn. It sounds fussy, but once you start it's a welcome ritual.

Lime green goes well with pinks, pale blues, yellows, oranges, and lemon. If your base color is white, you have a wide array of choices to mix and match but remember one of those colors have to dominate while the others hang as accents. They can't all dominate.

In winter bring out all the reds, navy, dark green and anything else for the festive season. Throw white or cream in as a base tone and a few gold or silver bits for sparkle. Go to Ralph Lauren and see what he does with the basics. Get down to Zara, Michael Kors, Prada, and Mui Mui and see what colors are in season and in what combinations.

The Italians lead in style, the USA follows hot on its tracks, the English follow the USA and the French try to be different.

Pick out the colors on the most important special focal item in the room. A rug, painting, tapestry, lamp as easy cheaper immediate touches of color can be added:

Flat cotton toilet mats (thin ones like in European hotels)

A rug

Sheets/duvet set

Towel set

Bathroom toothbrush set: mug/holder/soap dishes

Water glasses

Tablecloth

Curtain /net

Lampshades



Colored candles

Throw/blanket

Plastic storage boxes to be left on show (retro ones with holes)

Vases or plants

Candles, plastic storage boxes, salad bowls/servers, picnic stuff

### To Light or Not to Light?

The word 'candle' originates from Middle English 'candel', from Latin 'candela' from before the 12th century and a quick glance at the unfathomable splendor of French Rococo chandeliers, before the Revolution, shows us they reflect more than just light.

Candles make us look good in soft lighting, induces charm, romance, hides the room faults, and marks on the carpets.

It saves on electricity, light bulbs, and adds a level of elegance to dining, reflect off mirrors, make a smaller room look larger and disguise what a box it really is.

If you can find reasonably priced candelabra for the table, buy it and collect all the tall colored tapered candles on sale otherwise stock yourself up with tea lights from Ikea. Small candles laid outside and spaced in lines give a pretty Four Seasons Hotel moment on patios, small gardens, or walled spaces.

A very good expensive scented candle can perfume a room without even

being lit, which is especially good for bathrooms, halls, and bedrooms.

Expensive candles should only be lit with folks you *really* like as I have regretted wasting some great candles.

Turn big candles upside down and burn the other end if the wick has disappeared inside but pay special attention to where this thing will drip. Candle wax only comes off easily in the films.

Madonna's trick of pouring hot wax onto a bare chested man does not work unless he is a masochist and it can't be ironed off.

## Flooring

The wrong floor can turn you into a slave no matter how small your home is. Floors are like ceilings, people stare at them so keep it simple, keep it clean and keep it out of your mind.

Rooms are never a perfect square so when tiling, put a 10 cm border in another color about 30 cm from the edge, and put long borders in hallways because it visually lengthens the space. Choose 12"x12" (30 cm) tiles if you need to keep the budget down as they are not too expensive, and aim for a classic Carrera white with black borders.

If you prefer to replace the carpet, don't buy deep pile carpet as they hold the dirt but go for wooden floors laid longwise (not across the room)

Don't forget the underlay I know it's an extra cost but so is silence and sanity.

Don't put down white/cream carpet.

Don't put down dark colors e.g. black/navy/brown/grey unless you are prepared to vacuum every day.

Don't invest in an expensive wool carpet if you have children/dogs/cats.

If you do have carpet steam all carpets at least once a year in spring and deodorize every week.

If tiling or replacing the carpets is out of your budget or experience level, get rugs at Ikea or T J Max. Local markets have false/copy nylon Persian carpets, which look great especially as runners in hallways on floorboards.

Don't use carpet squares - even if they are free.

Smaller rugs can be shaken outside every day save you buying a crazy, turbot V8 Hoover.

## Windows

Do you need curtains for privacy or warmth? Or both?

Do your windows over look neighbors? Can they see in?

If no, then its simply warmth you need.

If yes, it's a problem. Do not attract attention. It's not a film and you are not playing a role but it's a security issue and a serious one and the only people who will notice you, give you attention, and watch your movements are the mentally ill.

A window is for you to see out, not for others to see in.

Boutique hotels have taken the long white nets to an extreme, with ceiling to floor and wall to wall. It's chic and very expensive to clean but a few panels all squashed together can give a similar look. Nets need cleaning on a regular basis so if they drip-dry and save you ironing, you will wash them more often.

Get cheap great plain long white nets, which look full if you put in the extra panels, as they don't last forever and often rot.

They look better across the whole wall, not just across the window itself.

Finish the hems with brocade, beads, fringes, or lace if you can use a needle, but do not use a staple gun and don't expect to machine-wash them. Instead of hanging rails buy a bag of brass finish large headed tacks, pleat the nets and tack straight up onto the wood.

DIY glass frosting paper is wonderful for privacy with out loosing light, so choose bold 1930's shapes, which easily cuts into strips and probably won't annoy the landlord.

Blinds are a bigger nightmare. Especially individual blinds that cost a fortune are hard to clean and never fit another window. John Lewis does the best plain colored 'black out' blinds which are a decent value but remember the working parts of any blind are mostly plastic, made in China, hard to replace and do not last that long.

Mix up blinds/interesting nets/curtains/double glazing on the few windows there are, but stay simple in small spaces. Stay minimal. The window is no longer a feature. The swag and tails are long gone along with the yards and yards of material flopping over the floors.

If you are really low on funds and freezing from your drafty windows, bedspreads, blankets, tartan, throws, can be used instead of purchasing heavy curtains, which are expensive.

## Your Bedroom

A bed is a choice of single, sofa bed (French double with feet over the edge), double or king. If you're used to a king and can't stand to be near your partner get a mattress for them on the floor-it will give you space and ensure they will leave within a year.

Choosing a bed is a very personal thing, and linked to being comfortable. A person can sleep on trains, cars, sofas, beaches, office desks, under bridges, park benches almost anywhere they feel comfortable at the time, but if the bed is not right, they can't sleep.

Unfortunately, smaller homes, mean, smaller beds.

If you are alone, then at least it's your small bed, but if you have a partner then it's war. War over the duvet cover, war on which side you sleep, the foot space, heating, air flow, water bottle, lamp switch, rug, pillows, air con, etc. Downsize with someone you really love and it won't feel a fight to the death.

The most important thing about the bed is the mattress.

Is it clean? If not buy a new one and be prepared to either take it with you or leave it for the landlord.

The most efficient way is to order it online with free delivery. No one died from sleeping on a cheap mattress but you can be ill from sleeping on a damp or dirty one.

Most people fail to inspect the mattress on a viewing, and never take a photo in case it's actually swapped in for an older one *before* you move in.

Get a mattress cover, or use a double duvet from Primark £10 which both pads and protects your bed. Mattress pads from John Lewis make a bed feel like The Peninsula Hotel USA and a good mattress is a real investment, so cover it and protect it. Use cotton. Turn over mattresses at least every six months, as they do form hollows under your weight.

Do not allow the bed to squeak. Cheap beds seem to squeak automatically which ruins sleep, causes wrinkles, is terrible for the heart and gets the nerves totally wrecked. Get WD40, rags, tissues, foam, nails, padding, screwdrivers, Allen keys and fix that squeak!

Keep the headboards clean and simple. Old padded flower, velvet, leather headboards have to go and are a relic of 1980s. Make a new padded board with plywood, staple gun foam and new material but forget the button

back as they take skill.

Sturdy metal beds are classical but some of the newer ones are flimsy and still expensive so look in the auction houses for a good buy.

They say you buy a bed for life but personally, I've bought so many beds if I still had them all I could run a hotel.

Make the bed every day as it takes 3 seconds and is so rewarding. A bed is a place of rest and relaxation, not torture and frustration. So make it a clean, comfortable place of refuge and enjoy it.

### Sofa Beds

A sofa bed is not the worst thing in the world. No bed at all is worse.

The sofa bed has one problem and that is the mattress, as its always much too thin. It was originally designed to just be uncomfortable enough to make sure your guests left within the week.

Now they have now become the chosen bed for studios, student living, guest rooms and pool houses. The sofa bed trade is booming and Ikea probably has the best choice starting about £350. Active intercourse will break the legs, and the wooden slats, which are very difficult to replace or fix according to Google.

Fold back up then cover the sofa bed with all the spare duvets on the seat and the back, building it up to a softer, padded, higher sofa, then cover the lot and scatter a few cushions.

### Bedding

Buy plain sheets. Small rooms need to be calm and there is no space for ridiculous flowers, pictures (unless you are under 12) or acid colors.

Immediately throw out any sheets with stains or faded and old. Don't eat for a week, if necessary, but buy new fresh plain cotton fitted sheets. White is a luxury, like white towels, as they need constant washing.

Get two coordinating tones mix and match with a basic cream or pale grey as when you buy more in the future the shade will be slightly different but not clash.

Do not buy black, satin, nylon, or sheets trimmed with polyester, as the room will look like brothel.

Thirty years ago shops didn't understand the word 'duvet' and they certainly didn't stock 'duvet covers'.

Get *two* single individual duvets for a double bed and have your *own* duvet, as the Norwegians do and they are calm people. The worst feeling in the world is your partner removing your cover when you are in a deep sleep. It will induce violence, so give them their own cover, and let them toss and turn independently of you. Use the old double duvet covers as a mattress pad/cover and you will not have wasted them.

Fleece blankets do work, they wash, are cheap, fold, and actually do keep you warm so put the good looking tartans, woolen, or angora blankets on the sofa on winter nights.

It depends on your budget but new pillows are a must.

If you intend to keep them, pay for good feathers at John Lewis, and if you intend to throw them away a few polyester basics from Primark will work. Do not use old secondhand pillows under any circumstances.

Use old pillowcases as covers, and always make sure a pillow has an under slip.

Fold, smooth, plump up so the space is harmonious and if you have a great bedspread, use it. The bed will dominate the room and it's often the first thing you see as you open the door. Make sure your bed faces the sun and a window.

Do not clutter the bed, don't use it as a clothes horse, keep animals off it, never eat, smoke or drink in bed, don't leave items charging near your head and dust under it regularly.

The bed takes up a huge percentage of your living space so make it pleasant, comfortable and welcoming.

### Small Bathrooms

Keep it empty!

It's a bathroom not a chemist. Rows and rows of bottles displayed like 'trophies' is not a sign of wellbeing. It's a place of tranquility and contemplation, not a nightmare of printed messages, screaming names at you.

One bottle of shampoo and conditioner on display is sufficient. Clear the shower tray, clear the sink, and clear the shelves of everything except a toothbrush mug, razor, perfume and hairbrush. Everything else should be boxed, and hidden from view.

Regain your space.

No one cares any more if your shampoo is by Fred, John, Henry or Paul. Its been done. Next.

Only one bottle of toilet cleaner and a new toilet brush and if you are buying products in bulk hide them all.

As many loo rolls as you like, but preferably in white, as toilet rolls don't talk.



Buy cream, grey, taupe or olive extra large bath sheets.

Use one at a time and fold/roll the rest away. Long gone are the days you had to go to Saks or Bloomingdales to get a generous bath sheet bigger than a tea towel, and pay a fortune for it.

Forget the fluffy, germ invested, hard to wash, impossible to dry thick, fluffy bathroom mats. Get decent cotton bath mats, like they use in hotels, now about £3.50 in Primark and throw them in the wash all the time and dry. Buy 'Calvin Klein type' mushroom/grey/taupe colors, because black/navy/brown shows the fluff and bleach marks.

Hide the spare beach towels, odd towels, and spare towels under the mattress. Put make-up, nail varnish etc. goes into zipped make up bags as it breaks easily and gathers dust. Finish up everything over a year old and get rid of it, as it will rot, smell and poison you. Stay living 'aux current' not like a fossil.

If you need to use your shower as a space for dripping clothing items use plastic clean hangers and don't let guests see this abomination when they visit. It doesn't make you a better person, but just a domestic bore. Also use the back of the doors, with the multiple over door hangers and get it all dry and away quickly.

Buy a car window cleaner wipe to remove excess water from the shower walls, glass and spray damp areas with mold/shower/tile cleaner at least once a week so it drips into the same invisible holes you cannot see.

If the bathroom is right next to the bedroom wardrobe keep the shower door closed for 15 minutes after the shower to let the condensation settle, and drip from the surfaces. If it escapes into the bedroom or near a wardrobe, on a regular basis, you risk mold on your clothes, as the cottons, silks, leathers and cashmeres will soak it all up.

Ventilate everything well while you are at home, and do not leave wet towels in bathrooms. Cotton rots!

Clear all drains with extra strong drain cleaner every month. Be assured the previous user didn't, and smell is everything.

Leave a very strong expensive candle on a shelf that will emit aroma without being lit.

Buy a new clear plastic shower mat and clean it regularly because the USA has lawsuits, whilst Europe has people still skating on the soap.

The Romans sat in hot water, and planned an Empire, so your bathroom should be a place you *want* to be naked in, and *enjoy* being naked in.

### Clothes, Clothes, Clothes And Not A Thing To Wear

Downsizing your home means less wardrobe space, no shelves, no shoe rack, no belt hooks, no decent mirrors but just one or two primitive cupboards.

Clothes are a problem area. Its a massive industry, almost out of proportion, employing a percentage of the world's population just so we can find an item to go perfectly with that imaginary 'outfit' that has yet to be assembled.

Like the pieces of an enormous jigsaw, we have all the pieces for but no time, or space, to assemble them together.

Probably based on our reptilian past, and the constant desire to shed the 'old skins', we collect 'new skins' with relish, stuff them away, and forget about them.

Change your wardrobe over completely, every spring and late autumn,

storing all winter or summer items. It sounds like a difficult daunting task, but after a couple of seasons it's no more than a full day and a very satisfying one. My rule is everything should have been worn at least once, or it goes off to charity. I also happen to be that charity:)

Buy storage boxes in two colors and alternate them so it looks attractive or black and white, so they look neat and save everything falling down on heads.

Do NOT stick labels on the front of boxes but put a small discreet number on the corner and then list in an email to yourself. No one else needs, or wants to know where your socks are, its juvenile.

Take out the filler pillow and fill decorative pillows with jumpers, tracksuits, and cardigans and sweat shirts. The bigger the case the better, especially large lounge sofa cushions, leather cushions, puffs, and view each 'pillow' as a bag, which needs filling. Lace/satin bed pillows are perfect for stockings, spenders and small bits.

There is no way any UK house/flat/studio can accommodate both season's clothes unless you have a huge double dressing room. The fear is you will need the black tweed jacket in June, Hunters in August, the floating silk dress mid November and the strappy lilac sandals early March. You won't.

Number the boxes/bag as "summer/winter" so if you happen to go south of the equator, you can find it all easily. Pack each bag/box in 'groups' of clothing e.g. T's, beach, golf, tennis, sandals, evening, etc. If you need items for a trip, unzip, grab, and pack your case, but do not mix these items unless you are a poker player with a photographic memory.

Trust me you will never miss those items whilst at home, and unpacking them the next season is like a huge shopping trip, as 65% of items have been forgotten.

Use all decent designer luggage as storage bags and store in piles in the hallway according to sizes, then top off with the hatboxes. It will look like the luggage belt at terminal 5 but we are short of space so don't get fussy.

Roll all your cotton items into sausages it saves on ironing and space. Keep all silk blouses hung together on one big strong wooden hanger as they are a beast to iron then cover with a cotton bag or old sheet to keep off the dust. Place all valuable, good designer leather items on the top and in individual cotton bags, never in plastic, then photograph the lot if you are worried about theft.

Use old, precious, vintage handbags to store thin or thick belts, winter/summer belts, smaller purses, sunglasses, scarves, pop socks, tights and hair accessories. It saves time and searching about later on. Basically you are 'filling' away your wardrobe.

Fold trousers into half and lay on top of each other in piles according to seasons. That keeps them pressed and easy to recognize. Estimate about 10 pairs will only pile up about 6 inches high.

Don't hang cashmere as they will stretch or droop, instead wrap in tissue paper and regularly check that bag/drawer, as it is the first place the bugs will go to. Bugs don't eat cheap clothes and they don't lay eggs in nylon...would you?

Sprinkle washing powder into the cracks and spaces of old wardrobes so it smells nice, and so inhibits breeding grounds. Do not use bleach.

Kill all moths on sight, as you can't take the risk they will lay eggs and breed. Keep your windows closed at night when all the lights are on.

Allow extra time for dressing, or you will live in the same tracksuit and trainers for the rest of your life, as you now have to find your clothes so make extra time.

Plan one major, fully accessorized outfit per week and wear it everywhere whilst just changing the under T-shirts. Chances are you will not see the same people twice that week, and if you do, they will never see it again that season.

Be your own 'mistress of the wardrobe' so mend, clean, iron and fold

properly. Women over 70 years old in Paris still match up silk scarves, jewelry, handbags, rings, lipsticks, belts and hats to lunch in. They cast glances of despair around the room at a new generation in fleece, nylon, trainers, creases and rips.

Clothes are not meant to be dumped in corners or stored in dead spaces, they are natural fibers that live and breathe, not extra wall insulation.

Use the boot of the car for boots, ski boots, golf shoes but nothing so expensive it cannot be insured or replaced.

Pack away all missing 'partners' or ex's old clothes in bags or give them away to charity. They will understand there is no extra valuable wardrobe space for the 'missing'. None.

We are getting there but it's also a mental journey and we have a way further to go.

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## **PART 2**

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*About the Author*

*Dame DJ*

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Dame DJ describes herself as "married young, divorced young, had two children young, starved young, remarried a couple more times, & lived in different countries to learn about life"

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Our guest author is

**DAVID GREY**

New book

**THE POT HOLE.  
A Pot Delusion.**

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David Grey gives us a very personal and revealing account of his two-year drug habit in *The Pot Hole* as he describes his marijuana use, its potential addictiveness and consequences many pot smokers are likely to suffer. David’s honest insight into his conflict of wanting to advocate the legality and end prohibition of marijuana whilst struggling with the personal conflicts brought on by the dependence on a destructive drug habit. *The Pot Hole* gives us a fascinating intimate glimpse into the mind of a pot user and illustrates the conflicting perspectives of addiction and the powerful seduction of this forbidden plant. Following him for two years from his initial introduction by his pretty girlfriend CC in romantic Barcelona to isolation in a French



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