

IS IT OKAY TO LIVE

Do you have to try the latest decluttering trend, or do you prefer to

'YES... I find super-tidy homes unnerving'

Writer Kate Morris says clutter makes her feel more creative and less like she's living in a hotel



Orderly environments, in contrast, encourage convention and playing it safe.'

I find super-tidy houses unnerving. Some are so ordered that it's more like stepping into a hotel suite than a home, giving no clues as to who lives there. One vase on the mantelpiece of a

enough to ensure that our house doesn't tip into disorder. He doesn't welcome my messiness but tolerates it, and I've become better at cleaning and tidying up over the years. We have two adult children at university, but when they were young, I attempted to curtail my wayward ways and make the effort required for some semblance of order.

I do a frenetic tidy-up if people are coming for supper, stuffing clean

laundry into the coat cupboard and shoving any excess things into a drawer in the kitchen that we call 'the drawer that has everything'. There's that part of me, then, that's happy to live in my mess but not to flaunt it in front of friends.

But I love our crowded and unruly mantelpiece, topped with things we've collected over the years and that mean something to us: two beautiful ceramic vases given to me by my best friend, a stack of cards marking special

anniversaries, a paw print of our beloved cat who died last Christmas, a tiny painting of a bee that I won in a competition, and photographs of our children when they were young. The huge shelves next to our fireplace also display haphazard items - cookbooks, a collection of plastic toys, small cocktail glasses, a sculpture of our daughter when she was seven. There are times when the mess upsets me, particularly when the children are home and dump their belongings, but I'd rather live with a bit of disarray than in a pristine house where the sofa cushions are plumped up several times a day and displayed in a rigid row.

I can be messy but creative!

minimalist interior may look good in a magazine, but in real life, it creates a soulless, repressed atmosphere. Fanatically tidy people are not relaxing to be around. We were at a friend's house for lunch recently and after the main course, the husband produced a

hand-held vacuum and started sucking up the crumbs between our plates. I decided it was a signal for us all to leave.

Perhaps I can be messy because my husband is tidy. Not obsessively - he wouldn't hand-vacuum the table - but

I procrastinate when it comes to tidying up. I forget to bring my morning cup of camomile tea downstairs from the bedside table. I leave my pyjamas on the bathroom floor. I don't always make the bed because I'm distracted and keen to start the day. I want to get out and take the dog for a walk and get to my untidy desk.

Albert Einstein (who also had an untidy desk) once asked: 'If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?' A study by the University of Minnesota suggests that a messy desk is linked to someone's intelligence. If you don't spend much time cleaning and organising everything around you, your brain is obviously occupied with more important thoughts and ideas. The study went on to show that a messy environment led to a more creative workflow. I'm a writer, and this research obviously appeals to me. I can be messy but creative! Tidy people seem more unadventurous than those who can tolerate some mess, a bit boring and static.

Psychological scientist, Kathleen Vohs, who worked on the study, says: 'Disorderly environments seem to inspire breaking free of tradition, which can produce fresh insights.'

MR. MESSY

By Roger Hargreaves



IN A MESSY HOUSE?

take a more laid-back approach? Two women share their views

'NO... I like things in a certain way'

Katie Mortram is GH's household advice editor and says mess makes her feel irritable and stressed



the homes team, testing appliances and household products day-in, day-out. Now I'm household advice editor, which combines my passion for cleaning with writing and testing. I adore trying out the latest cleaning hacks and decluttering methods for myself.

brought for me while on holiday. Every item makes me feel good about myself and brings back happy memories.

Of course, not everything is so organised. Since I met my partner, I've had to make allowances. It's true that opposites attract and he's generally much more of a messy person. When we first got together eight years ago, I was shocked by the state of his flat and had to hold myself back from getting out a cloth and

cleaning it myself. I thought it seemed a bit overbearing for a new girlfriend.

When I finally did suggest a clear-up, I found dirty glasses and plates under the bed, a pizza box (with pizza still in it!) on top of the wardrobe, and dust

behind the TV was so thick I could write my name in it. It's amazing that we've stayed together!

Since we started living together, I've learned to meet in the middle, but there are habits that still drive me crazy.

His floordrobe (leaving clothes scattered on the bedroom floor) gets to me; not just because it obstructs the vacuum and creates a tripping hazard in the night, but because it leaves me feeling irritable and stressed. Thankfully, he's trying to break this habit now and generally makes a conscious effort when he can see the mess upsets me.

I don't judge anyone on their homes. Even if your shelves are filled to the brim with memories, if you feel comfortable and are happy with your system, stick to it. While I like my space to be tidy, every person is different and having a home that makes you happy should be what's most important. □

Having a tidy home makes me feel peaceful, orderly and ultimately relaxed, which is why I strive to keep things a certain way. I don't like clutter, but it doesn't mean that it's spartan. I like to think that by only keeping what means the most, my home reflects my personality. On a bookshelf is a photo of my grandfather building a model plane as a young man. It's next to an orchid I saved from being chucked away (that has flowered every year since), which is beside a trio of hand-painted candleholders a friend

My home reflects my personality

I've always been neat and tidy. As a child, I even folded up my dirty laundry at night - my mum looked on in disbelief! And it didn't stop there; my fluffy toys would be lined up single file alongside my bed, and my Puppy In My Pocket figurines would be stored and carried around in a lunchbox so I'd never lose any.

Unsurprisingly, once I started collecting *Little Miss* books, *Miss Neat* and *Miss Tidy* were some of my first! And, once I realised the spines spelled out '*My Little Miss Library*', I had to get them all, so they could sit lined up proudly on display.

While I've moved on from folding dirty laundry, I still like things to be a certain way. My books need to be organised by category as well as height; alphabetised is likely more logical, but I prefer a streamlined look. My shoes and trainers are stacked on shoe organisers, so they take up half the space, and they sit on a shoe rack within my wardrobe. Even my detergents and household cleaners are lined up by order of use on the shelf above the washing machine and under my sink.

Given my nature, it's no surprise that the Good Housekeeping Institute is where I wanted to work. I can still remember how excited I felt at my interview for a job as junior tester on

LITTLE MISS TIDY

Roger Hargreaves



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