

## Closet Liberation

Looking at a heaping mess of clothes can make your head spin, and even the thought of knowing you could or should be more organized is enough to induce pangs of dread. We shadow a reader as her walk-in gets a revamp from a local pro and she gains clarity through the process. BY MINA KING

“It looks fine, but it could be better,” professional organizer Marla Ottenstein says to describe the average closet. Let’s be honest: The classic trope in comics, one that’s nearing eruption and hiding chaotic piles of junk, is hardly the case in reality. But with Ottenstein’s expertise, we learned that behind every door there is still something to be improved upon.

We caught Ottenstein in the midst of spring cleaning, a time forever connected to decluttering and the resulting purity of mind and spirit. She was working with her friend Karin Ciesla, whose closet captured what Ottenstein described to a T. Says Ciesla, “In the past, my closet would have passed as being ‘organized,’ but with Marla’s help, it’s gone to the next level.” Before the overhaul, Ciesla had several major issues, but each was rescued by simple yet effective solutions that can be applied to any closet.

### Problem 1: Jam-Packed

Three out of Ciesla’s six shelves were brimming with piles of sweaters. “Not only were they toppling over, but when I needed to wear one, they always had wrinkles in the wrong places,” Ciesla says. Her other shelves contained storage boxes that held bathing suits and random seasonal items only worn on occasion.

### Solution 1: Maximize Your Space

Ottenstein removed the bulky boxes, transferring them to a cabinet underneath the bathroom sink (suitably alongside sunblock) and opening up additional shelves. As a result, the sweaters are now folded and stacked in a more manageable fashion.

### Problem 2: Scattered Disarray

Ciesla’s handbags were strewn about in a hazy clump, with no regard for size or material. The bags were losing their shape, and she struggled to select a bag without wasting time sorting through the pile.



Karin Ciesla, Marla Ottenstein



### Solution 2: Make It Practical

Small handbags and evening bags were moved to the inside of a cabinet, and larger bags were stuffed to preserve their form and lined up on a diagonal so that Ciesla could see what she had and grab it.

### Problem 3: Excess

Admittedly or not, we are all guilty of holding onto items just because. Ciesla had pieces that she hadn’t used in ages: “The thought of ‘I will wear them again one day’ kept me from purging. I needed a nudge.”

### Solution 3: Let Go

Ottenstein swears by her “too rule.” If it’s too tight or too loose, too trendy or too outdated, get it out the door as fast as you can—and an added benefit is that it may go to a person who could actually use it. Ciesla wound up consigning 10 scarves, 12 tops and 18 pieces of costume jewelry, and she donated more than 20 items to charity. “It’s a process of reassessing your needs,” Ottenstein says. Ciesla adds, “I’m relieved knowing that I’ll actually wear what’s in my closet now.”



MELANIE HEMBREE

Spring cleaning is more about lessons learned through the act than the final result. “Getting organized is liberating because you realize what’s important and what’s not, and you see what you really need and don’t need,” Ottenstein says. “One of the things I always tell my clients is that what you own does not define who you are.”

### EXTREME MAKEOVER, Marla Edition

If you feel you’re at the point of no return, or if you just need that extra push, Marla Ottenstein is at the ready. A member of the National Association of Professional Organizers and lifesaver for the worst closet cases, Ottenstein does everything from home organizing to downsizing to aiding clients on moving day—all to make life a little easier. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 239-597-6277 or go to [professionalorganizerflorida.com](http://professionalorganizerflorida.com).