

# HOUSE HUSHING



The Simple Method to  
Declutter and Decorate  
for a More Peaceful Home



MYQUILLYN SMITH

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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for a More Peaceful Home

**MYQUILLYN SMITH**



*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

**D**ecades ago, I created a method that helped me preserve the soul and beauty of my home while also decluttering and simplifying. It was quick, painless, wildly rewarding, and resulted in less stuff, greater clarity in my rooms, and—shocking to no one more than me—not a single regret.

I'd love to tell you that I sat down to design a thoughtful system, but the truth is, I made it up as I went. This practice is simply how I tamed my overwhelming house while in my jammies.

I call it House Hushing. At various points I've also called it "Quieting the House" and "Hushing the House," and somewhere in there I might've mumbled something about "Shushing the Stuff." Naming isn't my gift. Living with too many throw pillows is.

Over ten years ago I first shared this method online. I hosted a House Hushing Challenge. Magazines, news outlets, and YouTubers spread the word. The response was so huge, I finally thought, "Wait, could this be a book?"

But as I sat down to write, I realized House Hushing is bigger than a single method. There were other practices—*three more*, in fact—that I had been almost unconsciously implementing alongside it. Together, they helped me create and maintain a quieter, more meaningful home.

So now House Hushing has become the name for the *whole* mindset. A way of cultivating a home that's rooted in clarity, peace, and purpose. And my original practice now has a new name: *backwards decluttering*.

Backwards decluttering is one way, the *first* way, I learned to hush my house. And it still works. ■

A minimalist interior scene. On the left is a dark grey door with a large glass panel. In the center is a white armchair with a curved back. To the right is a white side table with a textured surface, holding a potted plant with green leaves. The background is a white wall with a decorative horizontal line. A geometric light fixture is visible in the top right corner.

*Silence is alive.*  
—Emily P. Freeman

# SIMPLICITY FOR THE BEAUTY OBSESSED

**W**e were watching season four of *Stranger Things* when it happened.

The kids in the show were all summoned (it's a long, sinister story) to a house—and can you guess what this house looked like? I'll give you a hint: *Stranger Things* is a sci-fi horror drama set in 1980s Hawkins, Indiana.

Do you think these kids were called to a brand-new, light-filled, open-concept condo at the top of a sparkling new high-rise? Do you think some disturbing entity drew them to an adorable English cottage with a thatched roof and a darling stone fireplace surrounded by overstuffed chairs and ruffled pillows?

Of course not. Even if you've never seen one episode of *Stranger Things*, you've seen scary movies or read thrillers. More likely than not, the setting for all the creepy stuff was an old Victorian home.

Maybe this is why I've always declared to my husband that I would take on the challenge of living in any kind of home except one: I hated Victorian houses. Yikes. I should have known better. Our track record of moving fifteen times in thirty years of marriage probably meant the chances were high we'd end up in every type of house imaginable.

It was unfortunate timing that I watched that season of *Stranger Things* mere weeks after moving into a 120-year-old Victorian house. And now I was offended. Why are Victorian homes *always* the haunted houses?

But the truth was, I was dealing with my own feelings about this house.

Weeks earlier, I'd spent my first night there alone. It was just me, a mattress, and a few random items. I definitely wondered how spooked I'd feel staying in a new old house by myself. By the next morning I hadn't met any souls, but I was surrounded by soul. This house—this big, old, empty house—somehow felt . . . homey? It seemed impossible.

I was used to moving, and every house had always felt so bare before we moved in, as if it was begging me to make it pretty and cozy and bring meaning to it with our stuff and life.

But this house . . . she already had that.

Almost every room had built-ins and heavy moldings and wood shutters on the windows. There were five fireplaces, a stairwell with a beautiful newel post and railings, pocket doors, textured wallpaper, window seats, and skeleton keys that actually unlocked doors! Every room had separation with actual walls, big windows, and a focal point. This house had something to say, and she was saying it before we even moved in.

This is the part where you should be thinking: *What's the problem, you spoiled brat?*

Right?! Poor me, having to deal with shutters and millwork and cute skeleton keys.

The problem was the same reason Victorian houses make good haunted houses: They're full of random intricate details. Most are wildly asymmetric, with a turret on this side and a surprise bay window over there for no real reason, and the wraparound porches don't line up and that door leads to where?

Victorian homes are bossy, overdramatic divas who don't always keep up with the times.

This loudmouth Victorian and her over-the-top details were not to be ignored—and I moved there anyway.

At first I felt regret. Or maybe intimidation. I questioned whether I had any business living in a house with such a strong, loud—have I mentioned dramatic?—voice. A soulful home with a personality.

But truthfully, every house we've ever lived in had its own personality. They've all had soul. So does every house you've ever lived in, including the one you're in right now.

And when that soul or any part of your house gets loud, it's simply trying to get your attention.





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## The Problem

Fast-forward to January, a year and a half later. Over the past few months, we set a personal record for how many people we hosted inside our home. Between Halloween, Thanksgiving, a neighborhood Christmas party that started forty-five minutes after I wrapped up a separate party for my online community, plus family events, out-of-town guests, and everyday life, the house has been wonderfully full.

And now? The guests are gone, the seasonal bins are open, my routine can return, and the house is crying out to be reset.

It's too loud.

Rewind to September, a decade earlier. Our three boys, who are into fixing cars, had just gone back to school after a hot, muddy summer on our twelve acres. There were mechanic magazines and Amazon boxes and half-built LEGO kits on the kitchen island. My sunglasses, gardening hat, and pool towels were piled by the back door. We were in a tiny farmhouse, and even though we'd barely decorated, the house was full. It was begging for mercy.

This is overwhelming. I need to make a change yesternow.

In both seasons, in both decades, and even in my new old Victorian, I didn't need more throw pillows or matching bins. I didn't need to decorate or declutter in the traditional way. I needed to hush my house.

## When Decorating Isn't the Answer

I have spent my entire life obsessing over decor. Decorating is my boyfriend, my BFF, my therapist. I believe making good decorating decisions solves all sorts of problems in our home. I've written four books and taught endless courses on decorating. I've devoted my life to decorating—not the fancy kind, but good old homestyle, approachable, everyday decorating for regulars like us who buy stuff from Facebook Marketplace and mix it with a dash of Crate & Barrel, a sprinkle of Target, some hand-me-downs, and some amazing vintage finds. I will never get tired of decorating and talking about home. I am convinced it greatly impacts our lives. But decorating is not necessarily the best tool for a room that's feeling overwhelming, chaotic, and loud.

What if you need to *undecorate*?

Say you've just been voluntold you're hosting Thanksgiving this year. Okay, you can get on board with that. Your house is centrally located to the extended family and you have enough chairs. But your dining room hasn't been used as an actual dining room since last Christmas, and it's filled with school projects, returns, and extra dishes.

Or maybe your college roommate is coming to visit from out of town and bringing her kids, and they're staying for a day-long playdate. You peek into the kids' rooms, which are an explosion of toys, games, kiddie chairs they're too big for, and walls covered in layers of finger paintings.

Maybe you walked into the house after a long day at work, and instead of your home "rising up to greet you," as Nate Berkus famously told us on *Oprah* all those years ago, you feel like it's struggling under the weight of everything it's filled with. Your house can't rise up—it's too bogged down with stuff. Your home feels like a rude reminder of unfinished projects, procrastinated decisions, and stuff you don't love but don't hate quite enough to do anything about.

You need to hush your house.

## When Traditional Decluttering Isn't the Answer Either

It seems obvious, right? It's time to declutter.

But you hesitate. And if you're like me, you've felt it too.

You feel like you need to declutter or possibly burn it all down. Maybe you read all the minimalist books and pin all sorts of simple spaces on Pinterest. You long for a home that's simple and peaceful and easy to maintain. It's time. Yes, it must happen. You understand the connection between clutter and cortisol and stress and your overflowing family room. You know you've participated in overconsumption in the past, and you don't want to continue.

But there's one tiny problem . . .

*You're obsessed with beauty.*

You see the potential in weird vintage pieces. You value storied rooms and layers of meaning and history and patina. Maybe you love pattern or color or statement pieces. You're a house girl. You value original art, whether your daughter made it or you saved for it and finally got it framed. You create rooms where you're surrounded by fabrics and cushy pillows and rugs. Nancy Meyers is your favorite decorator.

Your home isn't there to impress. You're creating a meaningful home because you believe it contributes to your personal story. Your home is the backdrop where your kids grow up, where your grandchildren will remember Christmas. It sets the comfortable, approachable tone when you're hosting. You romanticize the welcoming aesthetics of your home. The way it looks is important to you because you know it impacts the way people feel. Beauty matters, and your goal is creating spaces where people can connect, rest, and be nourished, loved, and healed. And you're good at it. You're getting better at it all the time.

Suddenly, as you think of simplifying, it seems to threaten all the things you hold dear when it comes to your welcoming home. You read a minimalist blog, and they had only two dishes, glasses, and utensils for each family member, but you host fifteen people regularly. You bought a book about living with less, and the images seemed so peaceful but also kind of cold. Does their house echo? You refuse to sacrifice your warm and inviting home and all the meaning it holds in the name of simplicity.

But you know something's got to change. Because now your overflowing home full of beauty and meaning and layers has gone so far that the very thing you created it for isn't happening. Your stuff is now in the way of living your life. You say home matters because you want to fully use it, but in reality, it's been a while. The holidays are around the corner. You're slightly exhausted at the thought of opening the door or decorating for fall or cleaning off the kitchen table. It's overwhelming.

Too much of a good thing is still bad.

## Another Way

If you can relate to a house that feels too loud, that doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. It means you're doing it. And by *it*, I mean living a gloriously full life. I like you already. When you step back and notice that your house and the stuff in it is screaming, that usually means it's a time of transition and your house is wanting so desperately to work with you to create the new kind of environment you need. Life is constantly changing—why would you expect your house to remain the same?

A loud house doesn't mean it's out of control or beyond hope. It's simply a way for your house and your stuff to get your attention. You're listening, and that's the perfect first step!

Now's not the time to decorate but to evaluate.

I've been right there with you.

We need a method to help us *undecorate* while still protecting all the things we value: the functionality, the beauty, the inviting ambiance, the cozy layers, the very soul of our home.

We've been told that a peaceful home means a nearly empty home. But peace isn't found in emptiness, it's found in intention.

That's why you're going to love hushing your house. You can learn to adjust your home's volume to create harmony, not silence.

I'm ready to help you and your home find your perfect balance. Life is ever-changing, and you need to know how to evaluate and adapt without compromising what you truly need from your home. You'll learn to adjust different dials, recalibrating your space into your ideal environment through yearly seasonal shifts and unexpected life changes. I'm going to help you create a home that anchors you through all of life's transitions. A nourishing, changeable, adaptable, beautiful, meaningful home that's ready to serve you, no matter your needs.

Really, I want you to have a home that *breathes*.

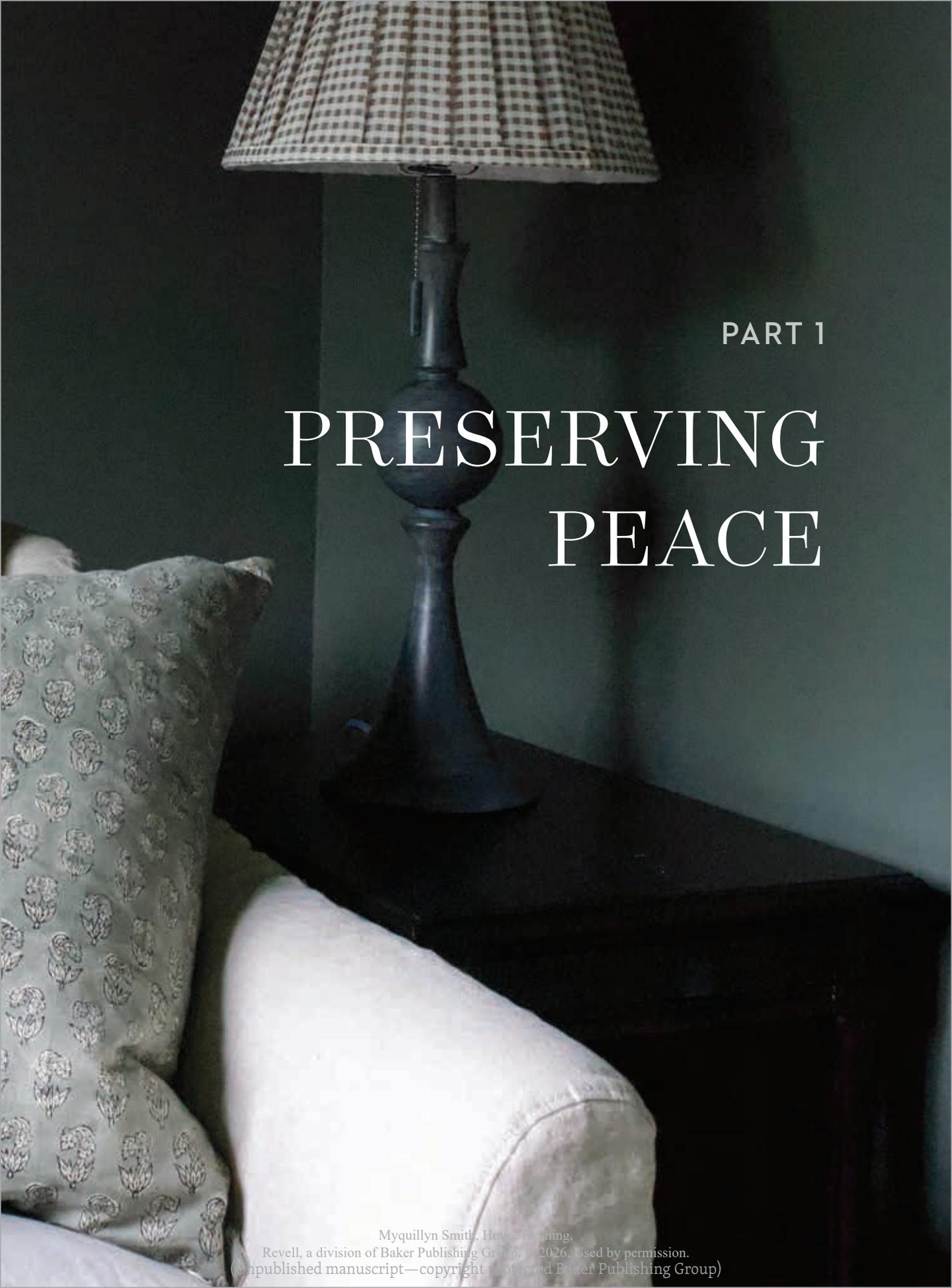
That might sound a little woo-woo, but stay with me. A house that breathes isn't static. It expands and contracts with your life. Like lungs filling with air, it makes room for the inhale of people, projects, dreams, and celebrations, then exhales into quieter moments of restoration, reflection, tranquility, and ordinary days. I want us to create rooms that rise and fall with the rhythm of our lives. Rooms that are buoyant enough to rise up and greet us. *Can I get an amen?*

House Hushing is about learning how to quiet the visual noise, but it isn't about suffocating your home with strict rules for what can stay. It's about giving your spaces permission to breathe. It's having empty corners that wait for inspiration, shelves that aren't packed to bursting, and rooms that can transform as you need them to. A breathing home has margins. It has pauses. It has room for the unexpected. It has room for meaning.

*It has room for you.* ■





A photograph of a lamp with a checkered shade on a dark table next to a patterned pillow on a sofa. The lamp has a dark, ornate base with a spherical detail. The pillow has a repeating floral pattern. The scene is dimly lit, with the lamp providing the primary light source.

PART 1

# PRESERVING PEACE

A photograph of a room with a dark blue door, a white armchair, and a black grand piano. The door is slightly ajar, revealing a glimpse of another room. The room has white walls and a light-colored floor. A white armchair is visible on the left, and a black grand piano is in the foreground on the right. A vase with dried flowers sits on a shelf in the background.

*Unnecessary noise is the most cruel absence of care  
which can be inflicted on either the sick or well.*

*—Florence Nightingale*

# House of Shouts

There is nothing I love more in life than the first few days after moving into a new-to-us house. It's my World Cup. My Met Gala. My personal Olympics of furniture placement. Playing with room layouts, unboxing forgotten treasures, seeing how my old things look new again in a fresh setting—I get an *unreasonable* amount of joy from setting up a house. It truly is the pinnacle of creativity and homemaking for me. Forget spa days. This is my self-care.

I could barely sleep the night before we moved into our new old Victorian. It had been almost thirty years since we'd lived in a house this big, and even then, it was more like extended squatting in someone else's Civil War-era mansion while it was on the market. But this time? It was *ours*. A big, old, historical home. Twice the size of the house we were leaving. I was thrilled. I was dreaming about floor plans. I was mentally rearranging furniture. And, let's be honest, I was already prejustifying all the new things I "had" to buy.

But when we finally moved in, the house wasn't just big. It was extra.

Somehow this house looked like Iris Apfel and Marie Kondo got married.

Iris Apfel was a fashion and design icon known for her bold, eclectic, "more is more" style packed with layered jewelry, patterns, and statement

pieces. Marie Kondo, on the other hand, is famous for her minimalist “spark joy” philosophy, encouraging us to pare down to only what we truly love. These ladies are my heroes, and they couldn’t be more opposite.

Half the rooms of this house were covered in loud, bossy paint and wallpaper and stuffed with furniture from different eras. The other half were stark white with darker trim and nothing in them, but they were far from empty. These rooms had *presence*. They had *attitude*. I should’ve noticed.

I did not. I forged ahead.

As always, my decorating strategy was simple: Highlight what feels like *us*, gently part ways with what doesn’t. You know, just a casual soul-searching, personality-matching, century-old-home balancing act. What usually happens is I remove the distractions so my quirky collections, like funky shaped furniture, too many vases, and occasional taxidermy, can finally shine. *Ta-da!*

Only . . . that is *not* what happened.

Take the living room. First, let me point out that this house had both a living room AND a family room. An embarrassment of riches! After setting up the family room, I couldn’t wait to get my hands on this extra room. In the living room, we painted over the bright pink walls and chose a nice woodsy neutral for the built-ins: Sherwin-Williams Shiitake, which sounds like something you might whisper after stubbing your toe but looks amazing on shelves. And then I did what I do best: I decorated.

The leather sofa was already in place. I added in a few small chairs and a couple of well-placed surfaces. I hung some art. I styled the coffee table. Arranged the shelves. Karate-chopped some anchor pillows. Lit a candle. Felt smug.

And then? I took a photo.

That’s when it became clear: I hated it.

The room felt like it was closing in on me, not because it was ugly but because it was loud. It didn’t matter that I liked every individual item I had brought into the space. Together, it all became too much. We hadn’t even lived in this room yet. There wasn’t even the regular daily stuff of life like stacks of books, flowers from the yard, or a cat bed. This wasn’t just a style issue. It wasn’t even a clutter issue. It was a *visual noise* issue. And I had managed to create a room that was shouting at me. Loudly. With gloved Victorian jazz hands.



Before



After



The problem? I had treated this space like a blank canvas, but it wasn't blank at all. This house came preloaded with character, charisma, and built-in drama: pocket doors, floor-to-ceiling corner fireplaces, an abundance of trim. And instead of listening, I rolled in hot with my baskets and layers and vases and more vases. The result? Visual chaos. Maybe *pretty* chaos, but chaos just the same.

This room wasn't asking for more.

It was asking to be heard.

## Visual Noise

Imagine everything you own has a voice.

You walk into your family room.

If you're like me, maybe your family room has a sofa, a love seat, some chairs, a coffee table, side tables, table lamps, floor lamps, a rug, drapes, some favorite meaningful art on the walls, plants, books, books, and books.

But there's more.

There are random necessary things like the tissue box, pretty pillows and throws that make your sofa look complete, and that basket on the floor that holds the secret stash—your favorite throw that's comfier but kind of ugly and too embarrassing to put on display. There are framed family photos and a couple random photos your sister gave you that you've yet to frame.

You've got your journal, hand lotion, lip mask, phone charger, laptop and charger, highlighters, extra pens, holders to put the extra pens in, a box camouflaged like a book where you never actually put the remote, even though you aspire to be a family that hides the remote in a pretend book!

He's got his reading glasses, car magazines, book about men's watches (actually a very cool book), ugly lumbar pillow that you've plotted to destroy, favorite coaster, a few pieces of mail he doesn't want to forget about, and of course HIS favorite throw draped over the back of the recliner.

There's a little vase that holds the last couple of climbing rose blooms from the yard.

A stack of magazines and mail you meant to go through.

A gym bag. A backpack. A cute straw basket of yarn for your knitting project.

Maybe there's the kids' toys, the kids' homework, the diaper basket, the discarded sweatshirt, the dog bed, the dog toys, the cat hair, the random

trophies, the snow globe from Disney World, the little metal cube your middle child made in welding class, and a discarded trumpet and sheet music.

The coffee table holds a vignette of pretty design books stacked with a funky ceramic object on top, a wide-mouthed vase with some flowers you picked up at the grocery store, a decorative box with a lid, and of course that remote holder disguised as a book and the remote that never made it inside the box.

Maybe it's also October, and you have pumpkins and fall candles and extra pillows in the shape of a cute black cat, and you're putting together little candy bags for the neighbor kids and the supplies sit in a grocery bag on the floor.

Maybe it's Christmas, and there's a tree and garland and the little village collection that grows exponentially every year and stockings and the nutcrackers your aunt gifted you and the ceramic light-up tree on the side table that you secretly hate (but it's tradition!) and gifts under the tree and you can barely walk through the room.

This is the stuff of life. And this is just the stuff you can see. There's at least another page's worth of stuff stashed behind the closed doors of the built-in cabinets and freestanding storage pieces. I could list this out for every room of the house and have the world's most overwhelming and boring book.

Your room is visually loud. My room is visually loud.

If every item in your room has a voice, then over time, as we add things—on purpose, by accident, by default, and out of necessity—before we know it, what started out as a lovely melody can become a roar. A visual roar.

And here's the twist: Not all that visual noise is coming from your stuff. Sometimes the house itself is chiming in. Big architectural features, paneling, built-ins, exposed beams, arched windows, two-story ceilings, busy flooring, textured walls, detailed fireplaces, unexpected angles, odd little nooks—all those things have their own visual volume. In my case, it was a chorus of pocket doors, built-ins, and overachieving millwork all singing in four-part harmony before I added even a single pillow.

If your house already has a lot to say, it doesn't take much for the room to start shouting. You might be wondering why a space feels cluttered even if it's not full, and that's the sneaky truth about visual noise. It's not always about quantity. *It's about how much is asking for your attention.*

## The Silent To-Do List

In his book *Goodbye, Things*, Fumio Sasaki introduces the concept of the silent to-do list. He suggests that everything we own is not only talking to us but assigning us tasks, making us feel guilty, and basically making us have a very bad day.

For example, that stack of magazines in your family room might be saying things like, “You paid good money for me. You’re wasting it if you don’t read me cover to cover and then find someplace you can donate me when you’re done.” Or maybe, “There’s a great recipe hidden somewhere in here, and you’ll be missing out if you don’t find it.” So you reluctantly hang on to every issue of *Magnolia Journal* until you have time to devote to reading three years’ worth of back issues.

The knitting basket is saying, “You’re neglecting me. You should keep working on that scarf. The yarn was expensive.”

If you look around the room, you might hear, “Water me, clean me, use me, fix me, move me, invest in me, read me, appreciate me . . .”

This is the silent to-do list, and none of us need our house talking back to us and making us feel like we aren’t doing enough.

## Your Stuff Threshold

Here’s what’s wild: If everything I just described were in *my mom’s* family room, it would be neat, tidy, and back in place daily. And she’d feel perfectly content. But if that same stuff is in *my* family room—and it has been—I’m overwhelmed. It looks like the authorities should be called.

That’s because my threshold for stuff is lower than hers.

In her book *Decluttering at the Speed of Life*, Dana K. White introduces the idea of a “clutter threshold,” the point where your stuff outpaces your ability to manage it. I agree completely. But I also think we should just call it a *stuff threshold*. Because some of us like to argue that our things aren’t clutter: *We like them! We need them!* But if your stuff, beloved or not, is making you miserable, it’s still too much.

How do you know you’ve passed your stuff threshold?

Your house tells you.

It tells you with piles, dust, and hesitation.

It tells you when you can't tidy up without first scheduling an entire organizing session.

It tells you when inviting someone in feels impossible, and when you swear the next house will be better.

It tells you when *you* feel overwhelmed in your own space.

Your stuff threshold is shaped by your lifestyle *and* your home. A larger home may hold more before tipping into overwhelm. If you have lots of closed storage, you might delay the overflow. That doesn't mean you should, but it explains why visual chaos can sneak up on you.

You'll know your threshold is exceeded when your home feels stressful, when tidying takes hydration and a game plan, or when everything from the floor to your face to your shoulders tells on you.

Even worse than the mess is how it makes you feel inside. A visually overwhelming environment triggers guilt and shame. It feels permanent and personal. It feels like it's your house's fault.

You walk in and instantly want to walk right back out and light a match because everything in your home is yelling at you.

That was me in my new-to-me old house. It may have looked fine—even pretty—to others, but I knew the truth: I had too much stuff. And I had to fix it.

## The Cost of Visual Noise

Visual noise doesn't just make a room feel cluttered. It makes *you* feel cluttered.

Even if you've technically decluttered. Even if your stuff is "good stuff." Even if your house is decorated in a way that checks all the boxes. If every corner is filled, if every surface is doing the most, if your eyes don't know where to land . . . it's still noisy.

And noise, even visual noise, is exhausting.

You walk into a loud room and your brain doesn't go, "Wow, look at all this inspiration!" It goes into problem-solving mode. *What needs to be moved? Fixed? Put away? Is that stack of paper just trash? Are we keeping that throw pillow? Why are there three remotes? Should I go through that basket? No? Then why is it sitting out? Should I light a candle? No? Then why are there twelve?*

Visual noise activates you when what you really need is to be deactivated.

Visual noise can be depleting.





And it's sneaky. You might not even realize how much it's impacting you until you've lived without it. When every space is filled, your brain never gets a break. You sit down to rest, and instead of relaxing, you're taking mental inventory. Every item in the room has a say, and they're all talking at once.

Visual noise costs us:

- mental clarity
- emotional margin
- creative energy
- our ability to relax

It's not just that your house feels overwhelmed, it's that *you* do.

And here's the kicker: The more responsibility you carry in a household (whether that's managing people, plans, plants, or pets), the more the visual noise tends to speak directly to *you*. Not in a kind tone either. It's usually a running list of all the things you haven't gotten around to yet. You might call it guilt. Or shame. Or just that low hum of never enough.

I've noticed that when my home feels like a visual to-do list, I turn into the worst version of myself. I get snippy over nothing. I avoid inviting people over, not because I don't want to see them but because the idea of prepping the house feels like too much. I procrastinate on simple things like mailing a card or folding laundry because the environment already feels like a full-time job. I start the day feeling behind, like I'm losing a race I never signed up for.

And it's not because I'm a horrible person. It's not even because my house is "that bad." It's just that the stuff I've chosen to surround myself with is doing exactly what stuff does when left unchecked: It's speaking up. Constantly. Loudly. And honestly, it's just telling the truth.

It's telling me I've brought in too much.

That I've been avoiding decisions.

That I haven't made space to hear myself think.

And when that happens, even the cozy, meaningful, beautiful stuff I love starts to feel like pressure instead of peace.

Your home should never make you feel like you're failing. But visual noise does exactly that.

Hushing your house isn't just about making things look nice. It's about creating a home that doesn't constantly demand your attention so you can finally give that attention to the people and things that really matter.

## Stuff Leads to Stuff

Once I started paying attention, I noticed something about clutter: It rarely shows up alone. It has a mob mentality and always calls in friends.

Have you ever kept your kitchen island cleared off for a few days and felt like a domestic genius? Not because you never used it but because after chopping vegetables or serving breakfast, you cleaned it up and left it empty. It looked amazing. It felt luxurious.

But then . . . one bag of groceries gets plopped down. Then the mail. Then the keys. And once your stuff is there, everyone else's stuff joins the party: hats, jackets, sunglasses, homework, recycling. Within hours, the surface is shouting again. Stuff leads to stuff.

The same thing happens with the sink. If I keep mine empty and rinse dishes right into the dishwasher, my family does too. But if I leave *one* dirty spoon in there, I've unwittingly given everyone else permission to do the same. One spoon turns into a disaster. Again, stuff leads to stuff.

It's not just anecdotal. There's research to back this up. In the book *Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century*, researchers documented the contents of thirty-two American homes, and one of the most interesting takeaways was about the refrigerator. The more cluttered it was on the outside—photos, magnets, school papers, flyers—the more cluttered the rest of the house tended to be. The fridge was a forecast.

At first this can feel dismal. But it's also hopeful. Because if *stuff leads to stuff*, then *less leads to less*. One clear surface inspires another. One quiet corner invites calm. Hallelujah, it works both ways.

Still, I don't want less just for the sake of less.

I want something better. A home that feels beautiful but not bossy. Inviting but not loud. Personal but not crowding my personal space. I'm not chasing minimalism or maximalism. I'm after something in between.

Something soulful. Something simple. ■



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