

CUPBOARD LOVE

Selling your house or just need a tidy up? Call in Susanna Hammond, preaches a converted **Caroline Phillips**



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES



Think organised. Think organised squared... and that's Susanna Hammond. In the space of a day she can change your life for the better. Susanna should be available on the National Health.' These are the words of Emma Burns, the talented director of interior design company Colefax and Fowler. Indeed, a similar view is held by Susanna's high profile private clients. Plus a number of other top designers who have her in their armory. She's their weapon of mass re-construction.

Susanna offers the ultimate de-cluttering and systemising service, making properties tidier than tidy. She has perfected the art of efficient house moves – executing these from packing to unpacking, and ensuring that the new property becomes the best of all possible worlds. 'Moving,' she says later, 'doesn't have to be the hell period that most people make it.' Forget Dante's *Inferno*: she offers Paradise Regained.

She also 'dresses up' houses to put on the market; a beautifully organised home, she believes, often sells faster. Additionally she helps clients decide where to place everything from furniture to TV points. 'Her expertise,' reveals one client, 'extends to lighting, planning electrics and where to source skilled craftsmen and fantastic products.' Our heroine even manages building projects. She is said to be the 'ne plus ultra' of her world.

I'm organisationally challenged so I book an appointment. (Although she often works for orderly people who are simply over-stretched.) Before she comes, she calls to ask what I want out of the day. 'Let's start with my office,' I say tentatively, thinking that the attic, bedrooms, sitting room and especially the children could also benefit from being organised.

She arrives with bags full of box files, baskets, storage boxes. Shoe boxes, hat boxes, makeup organisers. Magazine storage, desk accessories, space saver bags, plastic storage boxes. Boxes, boxes and boxes. She keeps magicking things from her bottomless bags like Mary Poppins. If we need anything, she says, she has more in the car. Already we have enough storage solutions, space savers, string, tape and plastic bags to set up a shop.

She produces an album filled with pictures. These are not snaps of her children. This is her 'Book of Ideas' – how best to utilise that last millimetre of space upstairs, downstairs and in my lady's chamber. I solemnly point out things that I like. Some people care about ageing relations. I care about the space under my stairs.

Then Susanna sets to work in my office like a cheerful tornado. She transforms my piles of filing and tackles my 'to do tomorrow' projects today. Soon everything is categorised, ordered, boxed, labelled, classified, co-ordinated. A room that was formerly an out-of-control spaceship, now oozes Zen and the art of cupboard maintenance. She whisks out her camera, supplementing her 'before'

photos, with 'after' ones. Compulsively efficient, I call it.

We whizz around the house, as she re-homes and re-cycles my possessions: all done with sensitivity and with my permission. She sorts treasures from useless clutter. 'Would you like to give this to family, friends, an auction house or the dump?' It's clear that it's time for the DUMP. 'Do you want this? Cut the cord,' she cries with relish. And out it goes.

It soon becomes apparent that she can fit as much into my bathroom as most squeeze into a mansion. Plus she blends her storage solutions with the style of each room, approaching her tasks with an interior decorator's eye.

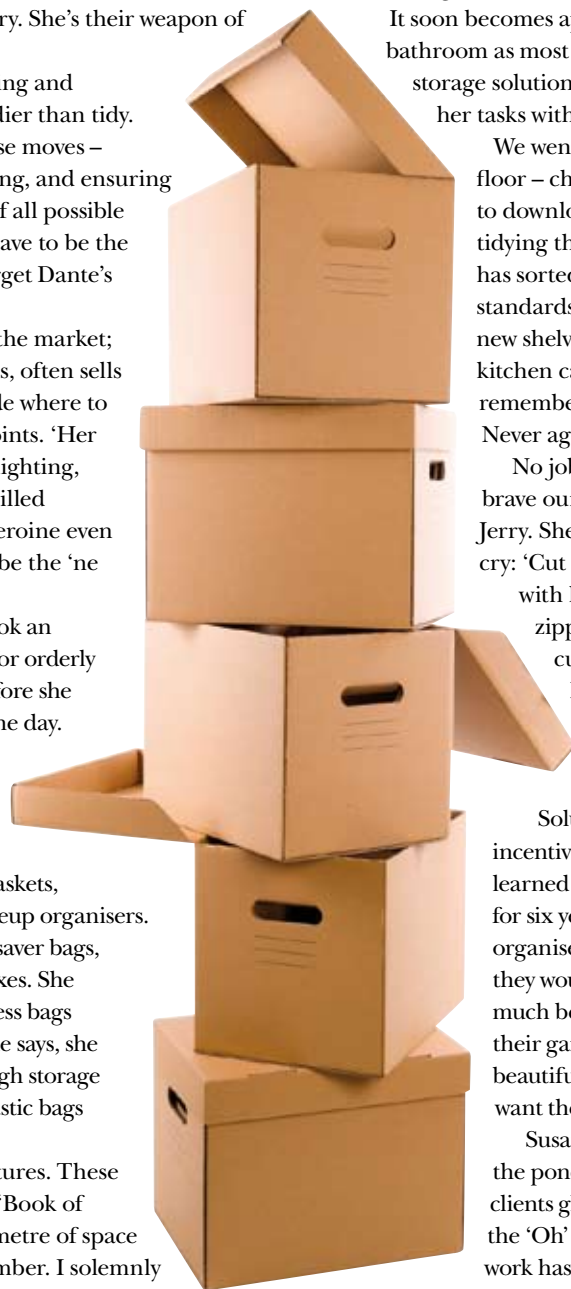
We wend our logical and efficient way from floor to floor – chucking unwanted DVDs; contacting someone to download our CDs into our sound system; and tidying the cables at the back of the TVs. Soon she has sorted my airing cupboard to hospital matron-standards; found previously undiscovered nooks for new shelves; and put Post-It notes on the doors of the kitchen cabinets, a temporary measure until I can remember where everything has been re-located. Never again will I have a bad cupboard day.

No job is too grubby or unglamorous for her. We brave our cellar, a place usually best left to Tom and Jerry. She whips out her torch and up goes the battle cry: 'Cut the cord.' But first she does some minor work with her drill, steadying a wobbly shelf. Soon she's zipping (unseasonal) ski clothes and unwanted cushions into giant plastic storage bags and Hoovering unwanted air from it. After all, why waste space with air unless you're breathing it?

Her career before becoming Mrs Home Solutions spanned interior design, running staff incentive programmes and event management. She learned much of her trade when she lived in the States for six years. 'It was there that I discovered "personal organisers", individuals who householders call as they would a plumber. Americans use their space so much better than us,' she explains. 'They even make their garages, basements and laundry rooms into beautifully arranged places where you find what you want the first time you look.'

Susanna has transported her discoveries across the pond, like Christopher Columbus in reverse. Her clients globally are universal in their praise. 'She puts the 'Oh' into organization,' reveals one. Until now her work has come exclusively through word of mouth. She looks at me. 'People will aspire to your organised cupboards,' she says with a satisfied smile. I can think of few higher aspirations than having my closets becoming the envy of all my friends. It's possible to hire her for a week. Now there's a thought...

Hourly rate £35, daily rate within 25 miles (eight working hours plus travel time), £240, daily rate for elsewhere in the UK (eight working hours excluding travel time), £260. (07855 304 570; sortedliving.co.uk)



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