

Professional Organizer Laura Cattano on Sex Toys, Sofas, and Sentimental Items

On Cohabitation: “Your home should reflect what’s important to you. Before you move in with your partner, you should both create a list of how you want to live. Is cooking important? Is having a proper dining table? A desk? Or is a laptop on a chair good enough? Do you like to entertain? Dinner parties, watching the game, cocktail parties? Do you need a space to meditate and pray? A comfortable reading spot? You should also think about how you want each room to feel. Do you like a calming space or do you need to be energized? Is color important? Lots of family photos or art? Or do you prefer a minimalist aesthetic? Once your lists are complete, compare. You will have some overlapping needs—and when you don’t agree, don’t compromise. I once commented on a client’s sofa and they responded that neither of them liked it, but it was the only one they could agree on. I thought that was depressing. It’s important that you each get ‘wins.’ For instance, you can pick the sofa if your partner gets to pick the wall color. This way, no one feels slighted. Just because you’re a couple doesn’t mean you’re not still your own person.

“A balance of open and closed storage is key. Some things don’t need to be seen: pills, sex toys, glasses, and tissues. That’s what closed nightstands with drawers are for. No one wants to see office supplies, chargers, extra totes, and old mail. Think drawers, cabinets, and boxes are for the crap. And Muji bins are your best friend. So is The Container Store.”



On Merging Belongings: “The most important thing is respecting each other’s things. George Carlin said it best: ‘Have you ever noticed that their stuff is shit and your shit is stuff?’ So true . . . that’s why it’s best to deal with your stuff before talking to your partner about theirs. It’s also why it’s so important that you each have a space that you can do with what you please. Even if it’s just a room or a closet. I worked with a newlywed couple who was expecting a baby and she wanted to throw out all his baseball caps and Grateful Dead paraphernalia but he wanted to hang on to them. So we organized all of his beloved belongings in bins on the top of his closet where she couldn’t see them but he could still enjoy them. He needed to hold on to the relics of his past life. You don’t have to lose your personal identity just because you’re becoming a dad!”

On the Mission of Your Home: “Come up with three words and make them your mission statement. For example, my three words are ‘simple, modern, and elegant.’ I try to relate everything I take into my life to those words—even my pens, my bracelets, my sweaters. Otherwise you’re filling your life with stuff that doesn’t inspire you.”

On the Burden of Stuff: “You carry a mental inventory of everything you own with you everywhere you go. It ends up being a huge burden, even when it’s not surrounding you physically. My motto is: ‘It’s not about having a lot of stuff, it’s about having the *right* stuff.’ The *right* stuff adds to your life. And if something isn’t adding to your life, it’s directly taking away from it.”

On Sentimental Items: “I get asked a lot about sentimental items. They serve a purpose as long as they evoke a positive memory. There is so much negativity coming at us as soon as we leave the house: traffic, a crowded subway, an unappreciative boss or customers, bad weather, etc. It’s so important to keep our home free of bad energy. Sometimes you need to let go of the past to make room for positivity. Toss images or cards that have lost their meaning. Don’t save something because you think you’re ‘supposed’ to. For larger things that take up too much room, consider taking pictures of them and making a photo book. A client once begged me to get her husband to toss his collection of printed T-shirts he’d

collected over the years. After I kicked her out of the room to discuss this with him alone, he told me the images on the shirts were the important part and agreed to take photos of each. We made a little assembly line and did it right there. Everyone won."

Therapist and Financial Wellness Expert Amanda Clayman on Debt, Compromise, and Communication



On Starting the Conversation: "Money comes up all the time when you're dating. A good way to talk about budget and income is by offering to treat them. Or say 'Thanks for the four-star restaurant, but I would love to go bowling the next time.' It's awkward to bring it up, but it's better in the long run. Once you start getting more serious, you can have the harder talks about student debt, credit card debt, and your income. Talk about it in a general sense: The goal is to get the bullet points of the other person's financial life. You want to suss out

your own comfort level and how honest the communication is. No one is financially perfect. Most couples come from different financial backgrounds. One person is usually more risk averse than another. One person might want to invest in foreign markets or new tech companies. One might be into solid dividends, blue chips, and bonds. There is no road map here. We all come to relationships with our distortions when it comes to money."

On Debt: "Debt doesn't have to be a dealbreaker. But it is a red flag if someone is totally unconcerned about it. Be open though—people evolve over the course of a long-term relationship. You can say: 'I was raised that credit card