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COLLECTIONS UNDER CONTROL

Collections can look like work of arts, or they can look like piles of junk. It's all in the presentation and reservation. The key is deciding what to keep and setting limits, while properly storing and artfully displaying your collectibles. Whether you collect Barbie dolls or Bobbleheads, you'll want to follow these tips to keep the collection clutter-free and under control.

First off, gather together all your collectibles from one category. (If you collect multiple types of things, only tackle one genre at a time. You don't want to be working on coins and books at the same time.) By doing this, you'll be able to really see what you have. Some people are surprised by the volume they've accumulated once they see it all together.

To help you sort the cherished treasures from the not-so-special others, ask yourself, "Which of my keepsakes are really worth keeping?" For example, a tea cup given to you by your grandmother may hold significantly more memories than one you picked up at a garage sale. A rare baseball card worth lots of money might hold more value than entire boxes of run-of-the-mill cards. A thoughtfully written thank-you card from a dear friend holds more sentiment than a birthday card simply signed, sealed, and delivered. Traditional organizing strategies might ask you, "When was the last time you used this?" but for collections, this question is not appropriate. Collections are not only for use, but also for simple enjoyment. Allow yourself to part with items that are doing nothing but taking up space, time, and/or money. By clearing out those that you don't truly love, you appreciate your favorites even more. Remember, it's okay to let go of things, even if they were gifts from loved ones. You're not throwing away their love; you're just making room for more!

Once you've chosen what items to discard, find good homes for them. You'll feel better knowing someone else is enjoying your cast-offs. Round up your family and friends and let them choose their favorites. Donate to your local library, women's shelter, elementary and high schools, or even Goodwill or the Salvation Army. Sell valuable things to specialty stores or on eBay. And then maintain this new, manageable amount by following the in/out rule: For each new item brought home, an old one must go. Remember, the less you keep, the more likely that everything in your collection will be meaningful and loved. Don't be afraid to give or throw things away.

Decide on a space to display the collection, and confine it to that area only. By doing this, you'll help limit yourself a bit. (As you probably know, collections can sometimes get out of control!) You'll want to display if you have room, if items can be kept safe while on display, and if you really like them enough to look at every day. Before you designate a display area, you'll need to know how much space your collection takes up. Do you need a shelf or an entire bookcase? Make things look like they belong together by grouping things with similar color, shape, and size.

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Watch for excess. When collections turn into hoarding (for example, hundreds of butter tubs, years' worth of old newspapers, or thousands of books) it may be time to call in a professional organizer who specializes in chronic disorganization.

The rest can be stored. For safe storage of remaining items, keep them away from light, heat, extreme cold, and humidity.

Elizabeth Bowman is a professional organizer and the president of Innovatively Organized, a professional organizing services company. She has a passion to help busy professionals streamline their homes, work spaces, and schedules.

Visit www.InnovativelyOrganized.com for more information. You may also contact Elizabeth directly at 206.369.8853 or elizabeth@innovativelyorganized.com.

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