

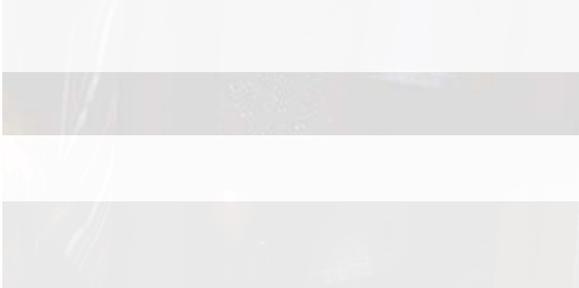


Customize It

Local pros help homeowners get organized

By Karina Timmel

If you're like many homeowners, you're choosing to stay in your home rather than sell because of the housing market. Even if it's not your ideal space, you can make the most of it by getting organized with a custom storage or closet solution. "Whether it's the closet, pantry, garage, home office or craft room, homeowners are looking for creative, attractive and affordable solutions to solve their organizational challenges," says Barbara Snook of SpaceMakers in Alpharetta (www.spacemakersclosets.com.)



www.atlantahomeimprovement.com

Although closets (all those shoes!), pantries (all those cans!) and garages (all those tools!) tend to be the most common areas in need of organization, home offices are also a focus now with the rise in telecommuting. Creating additional living space in basements and attics is another trend. Whatever your need, there are custom systems and accessories available to fit your style and budget. Here's where to start:

Think about your lifestyle

First, assess what you need out of your closet or organization system based on your lifestyle. Consider things such as what room and types of items need to be organized, what your goals are (increased storage or better visibility of items, for example) and what you want the piece to look like (color, style and material.) "Homeowners should look for a custom system that is adjustable for their changing needs, personalized for what they are trying to accommodate and functional for all their storage concerns," says Lisa Shaak of Inspirations Kitchen & Bath Design Studio in Alpharetta (www.inspirationskb.com.) Ashley Duncan at Echols Custom Closets in Buford (www.echolsglass.com) adds, "You want items you use on a daily basis to be easily seen and easy to get to, and items that you don't use as much to be out of the way, but still organized."

Hire a pro

Before you buy a custom closet or home organization system, Snook suggests asking the companies you are considering these important questions:

- How long have you been in business?
- Do you have a showroom I can visit to see and experience the product?
- Do you have two or three credible references that I can call and/or visit to look at the quality of your work?
- Do you provide three-dimensional plans of the space? Can you design on-site?
- Are you able to create completely custom designs?
- What material, color and design choices do you offer?
- Are you a franchisee, an independent business or a corporate-owned local business?
- What is your warranty, and is it backed by your manufacturer or national franchise?
- Do your products meet the California Air Resources Board (CARB) II standard, and do you offer Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified products?
- Can you explain the construction of your product?

Take advantage of design services

Most custom closet and home organization companies will do a design consultation at no charge. "During the complimentary, in-home consultation, a design consultant will look over your spaces with you and provide a review and demonstration of the available products as well as present their recommendations and methods," say Ron and Debbie Moon of Pull Out Shelf Company (www.pulloutshelf.com.) Be prepared to answer a lot of questions!

Some companies are going high-tech, too. At SpaceMakers and Echols Custom Closets, design consultants use advanced computer software to create a full-color, three-dimensional rendering of your organization solution to provide a better idea of what it will look like before ordering. ➤



Photo courtesy of ORG

Choose your style

Wall vs. floor systems

A wall-hung system attaches to the wall using a cleat or hangs on a rail. “This type of system keeps the floor space open, allowing for easy cleaning underneath and the ability to change out the carpet or flooring without impacting the system,” Snook says. A wall-hung system typically uses less material than a floor-based system, offering a more economical solution. “This is a great option for pantries or garages because you are able to sweep below the system or put items on the floor,” Duncan says.

A floor-based system offers a built-in furniture appearance, and adding trim molding or a toe-kick gives it a finished, clean look. “We often design solutions using a combination of systems where floor-based sections include drawers, shelving and baskets, while the wall-hung sections are reserved for hanging clothes,” Snook says.

Both wall-hung and floor-based systems are very sturdy, and which one you choose depends on your personal preference. There are some instances where wall construction or project scheduling will dictate which system is best to use.

Materials and more

When it comes to details and other features, “there are as many options as there are opinions, personal tastes and budgets!” Shaak says, noting that the trend is toward efficiency rather than flashy and trendy systems.

The choices for door styles, hardware and accessories grow every year. Here are the top trends for 2012:

Door styles*

Homeowners are going for everything from flat-panel contemporary doors (\$) to intricate raised-panel doors (\$\$\$).

Materials*

There are lots of choices for materials, from solid-color melamine (\$) to wood-grain melamine (\$\$) to stained or painted wood (\$\$\$). “Materials that create design interest with longer, thicker accents are all the rage,” Snook says, adding that SpaceMakers now offers ORG’s bold, modern Forterra line of 2-inch-thick engineered structured panels that can span greater distances horizontally.

*\$ = budget, \$\$ = mid-range, \$\$\$ = expensive

Finishes

Choose from any color and finish imaginable, including solid and wood grains, painted and stained wood options as well as systems that allow for custom faux finishing and more. Wood-grain finishes with warm color tones are a popular choice with Atlanta homeowners, Snook says. Colors in the gray family with washed effects are also gaining traction. “We are seeing a high level of interest in textured finishes and the use of horizontal grains, especially on doors and drawers.” Textured finishes tend to run slightly higher in cost compared to other finishes, and horizontal grains can also increase the cost of the project. Duncan ranks antique white, dressed up with oil-rubbed bronze hardware, as the top trend in Atlanta right now. “The dark color of the hardware really makes the antique pop!” she says.



Photo courtesy of SpaceMakers



Photo courtesy of Echols Custom Closets



TRAY AND BIN SHELVES increase accessibility and organization in the kitchen of a home in Hoschton. Cost: \$400-\$600

Hardware

Chrome, brushed nickel, gold and oil-rubbed bronze are among the most trendy hardware choices right now.

Accessory options

Accessories range from jewelry trays and drawer liners to wardrobe valet rods, baskets and belt racks, to name a few. A new and unique option worth asking your designer about is remote-controlled locks, which are perfect for securing jewelry, safes, guns and other valuables. Here are some other storage solutions for common household items:

Linens: Open shelves that are large enough to hold folded towels or linens. “There’s nothing worse than having your linens falling off the shelves,” Duncan says.

Seasonal décor: Open shelves with doors “to help keep dust off the décor,” Duncan says.

Tools and equipment: Heavy-duty cabinets and wall storage with a wide array of hooks, baskets and bins that are designed and engineered for the tough garage environment.

Toys: “Cabinets with baskets and adjustable shelves behind doors conceal children’s toys and games, yet keep them within reach, making it easy to gather and put items away,” Snook says.

Small home office: File drawers with locks and open shelves with doors to hide clutter.

Jewelry: Jewelry inserts—custom velvet, even!

Shoes: Install shoe fences at the edge of each shelf to keep shoes from slipping off.

Laundry: Tilt-out hampers, canvas inserts, valet racks and fold-out ironing boards.

Kitchen cabinets: Custom glide-out shelves that are made with a solid bottom surface (as opposed to ventilated or wire shelves), pull-out spice racks and wine racks. These adjustable systems, such as those from ShelfGenie ▶



SHELFGENIE-NORTH ATLANTA installed glide-out shelves inside a Cumming homeowner’s kitchen cabinets and pantry to improve accessibility and organization. Cost: \$3,500-\$4,000

Photos courtesy of ShelfGenie



Photo courtesy of Pull-Out Shelf Company

and Pull Out Shelf Company, eliminate wasted space and make hard-to-reach items more accessible.

CDs, DVDs and games: “Deep, pull-out shelves work well for items that are typically here, there and everywhere,” the Moons say.

Multi-purpose/hobby rooms: Cubbies or bins and dispensers for rolls of gift wrap, rods for spools of ribbons, racks for colored tissue and

drawers with dividers for tiny beads and jewels help keep essential elements in order and easily accessible.

Consider the cost

As a starting point, a standard reach-in closet with simple hangers can start at just a few hundred dollars, which

includes professional design and installation services. Solid colors with Euro-style door and drawer fronts offer the most economical solution while providing a clean, modern appearance. Upgrade to a wood grain or even a stained or painted wood veneer, which can be matched with existing woodwork for a cohesive look. “Because custom systems are personalized for each homeowner’s space, style and budget, pricing can vary greatly,” Snook says.

Check the warranty

What kind of warranty a custom organization system company offers really depends from company to company. Some offer a lifetime warranty for labor and materials, while others offer a warranty of one or more years for parts and another may present a lifetime warranty, period. Your best bet is to choose an experienced company with warranty “rules” that you feel comfortable with.

Get it quick

Typically, once designs are finalized and approved, and the order is placed, homeowners can expect installation of their project between two and six weeks, depending on the company and scope of the project. Often, installation itself takes no more than a day. 🏠

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