

MAKE YOUR HOME A CLUTTER-FREE ZONE

If you find it hard to part with items, then why not enlist the help of a declutterer? You may even be able to recoup the cost – and more – by finding long-lost valuables or by selling big-ticket items on eBay. And if you prefer to do it yourself, pick up a few tips from the professionals

BY HANNAH NEMETH

Tidying expert Marie Kondo has captured the imagination of millions around the world with her method for decluttering, known as KonMari. In her Netflix series *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* on Netflix and bestselling books, she helps people sort out everything from clothes, books and paperwork to ‘komono’ – miscellaneous items such as make-up and toys – before tackling items of sentimental value, discarding possessions that don’t ‘spark joy’.

But while Marie Kondo is perhaps the best-known declutterer, she is not alone: professionals can be found busily tidying homes across the UK.

What are the advantages of hiring a declutterer?

Professional home organiser Jo Jacob says that sometimes people need the detachment of an outsider to get started.

“Most clients say they don’t know where to start – they’re

overwhelmed and strapped for time. I think it comes down to our experience and the fact that we’re not emotionally attached to a person’s things and can encourage them to let go. You can photograph and scan items rather than keep the tangible things,” Jo says.

Jo, who covers the Hampshire, Surrey and Sussex areas, first trained as an interior designer, learning the ropes from Ann Maurice, who presented Channel 5’s *House Doctor*. She then worked with Dawna Walter, presenter of BBC2’s *The Life Laundry*, before setting up her own company, Benella.co.uk, in 2005.

She qualified last year as a certified photograph organiser with the Association of Professional Declutterers & Organisers (APDO), and finds this service helpful for relationship break-ups where both people want to keep shared photographs.

“I can digitally scan the couple’s photographs and then present



them each with a memory stick,” she adds.

Jane Fern, a KonMari consultant in the Manchester area who trained with Marie Kondo in New York, says: “I work with a lot of people who’ve become stuck in their lives, so it’s difficult for them to do the process. I’m there for them,

Below: KonMari consultant Jane Fern in London with Marie Kondo





encouraging them and helping them to decide what to keep.

“There is a lot of decision-making during the process but the plan is that by the end, life will be a lot simpler.”

How a declutterer works

A typical decluttering session involves discussing your goals and which area to start, and coming up with a plan, followed by hands-on clearing. Some declutterers will supply bags for charity or provide storage boxes and will remove a car-load for an additional fee.

While the Netflix series shows Marie Kondo instructing clients to pile their clothes on their beds to sort through before she leaves them to it for a week, in reality consultants declutter with you.

There are currently 19 KonMari consultants in the UK, who will have attended seminars and taken practice sessions and an exam before they can set up shop.

While they follow the KonMari method – a system of organising your home and discarding tangle items that do not spark joy in your

“I FOUND £125 WORTH OF GIFT VOUCHERS AND CASH”

Jo Jacob (pictured right) was asked to help tidy a chest of drawers in the hallway for a single mum with three young children in Hampshire.

“She’d recently started her own business, so things were busy. It was a ‘mess mountain’, with the kids dumping things on it whenever they went through the front door,” Jo explains.

As well as finding £125 worth of gift vouchers and cash, Jo helped sort out the paperwork, getting the information her client needed to make a claim for mis-sold PPI.



life – consultants will adapt to individual clients.

Jane says: “You get to know your clients before you start working with them. It may not mean every client taking everything out; some people might need to do it in sections, in smaller chunks, depending on their stamina and the time they’ve got.

“I will always talk to clients about doing the whole process because what generally happens is that they’ll sort out a room or a cupboard and in a very short time it’s back to how it was because there is no real change [in behaviour]. It’s

Above: Marie Kondo says you can keep a coffee-table book if it sparks joy. Credit: KonMari Media Inc

that lifetime change, making that big leap to knowing that everything has a home.”

Consultants may also have their own take on organising. Jo says that while she credits Marie Kondo for making tidying more popular, she feels the decluttering guru’s KonMari method sometimes goes too far. For example, while the method rules out keeping clothes you won’t wear again, she believes sometimes it’s OK to store some clothes in the attic.

“If you have a girl aged nine or 10, for example, what about when she gets older? She may like to have

some of your clothes or wear them for a fancy-dress party.”

How can it save you money?

One way declutterers can save you money is by finding valuables among the mess. For example, Jo has found cash and important paperwork for one client (see box on page 67) and has sold items on eBay.

“I once found three shipwreck coins in their original packaging, which the owner wanted to give away. But I said: ‘Do you think it could be worth something? Let’s look it up.’ I eventually sold the coins for £400 on behalf of my client. They couldn’t believe it,” she says.

Beverly Wade of Cluttergone.co.uk, which covers most of England and north Wales, says: “We can give advice on what you want to sell. I would suggest getting a box together of expensive items [over £100] and see what price they are achieving on eBay. Always try to sell big-ticket items that are in demand first in case you run out of steam.”

You may also find once things are in order you are less likely to waste money buying items you don’t need. “I had a client who had seven rolls of Sellotape,” says Jane. “You buy a present, want to wrap it, but can’t find the Sellotape so you buy a new one. It’s like that with many items – we tend to overbuy because we can’t find the things we need.”

One of the most difficult areas to declutter is paperwork – but organising documents can pay off.

Beverly adds: “I know the deadline for making PPI claims is approaching, but this is an area where we can help. If I notice that a client is paying a lot of insurance on their credit cards, I will suggest that they phone their bank to make a claim. I’ve worked with someone who claimed back a few thousand pounds.”

Choosing the right person

When choosing an organiser, you need to feel comfortable about someone going through personal, and often sentimental, items. Phone them first to find out how they work and whether you have a rapport.



To hire someone with the right experience, a good starting point is APDO’s search tool (Apdo.co.uk/find-an-organiser) or Konmari.com/pages/consultants. APDO members will hold professional indemnity and public liability insurance. KonMari consultants work as individual business owners, so check first.

How much it costs depends on where you live and the declutterer’s level of experience but expect to pay at least £35 an hour for a minimum three-hour session.

Storage solutions

While it is tempting to buy boxes, the aim is to reduce clutter rather than store it. Make use of old shoe-boxes, and if you do need to buy containers, these can be found fairly cheaply at Ikea, Lakeland and Dunelm.

Do it yourself

If you don’t want to hire a consultant, you can always have a go yourself. If you need inspiration, you could try

5 TIPS TO MAKE CASH FROM YOUR CLUTTER

- 1 Sell items on eBay or hire a professional eBay seller, such as Cleanupyourclutter.co.uk and Stuffusell.co.uk, to list it for you.
- 2 Trade in old mobile phones and tablets – check out sites such as musicMagpie.co.uk or Mazumamobile.com.
- 3 Sell unwanted gift cards and vouchers for cash at online sites such as Cardyard.co.uk or Zapper.co.uk (gift cards only).
- 4 Trade in old books, CDs, DVDs, LEGO and electronic games for cash at Zapper or musicMagpie.
- 5 Sell broken or unwanted gold jewellery – take it into a reputable jeweller for a valuation and check online reviews before selling it via a cash-for-gold company or on eBay.

Above: Variera shelf insert and Observatör clip-on basket, both £3, IKEA

Above left: Drawer dividers interlock and can be cut to fit; £6.49 for a pack of five, Lakeland

some background research. If you have Netflix, *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* will inspire you (Netflix has a free 30-day trial), while her book *Spark Joy* (£7.41, Amazon) offers a more in-depth guide. You can also listen to free podcasts – such as Declutterhub.com in the UK and Sparkjoypodcast.com, which is produced by two KonMari consultants in the US. **mw**