William Morris once wrote, “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.” If we were to take an honest look around our own homes, most of us would find that we may be holding on to many things that are no longer useful or beautiful to us. Rather, we are holding onto these objects out of habit, guilt, or because we simply lack the time to organize our belongings. If we wish to live with only that which is beautiful and useful, it is important for us to earnestly evaluate our surroundings. We want to make sure that memories, experiences and beautiful, useful items are filling our lives, so that the useless objects do not overwhelm our homes.
In our consumer-driven society, it is easy to give our possessions more power than they actually hold. We are taught always to want more, to buy more, when we really don’t need more. In our constant quest for material possessions, we sometimes forget to practice the art of gratitude. We forget that the things that truly make us happy are not things at all. If something is useful, or beautiful to you, then it should remain in your life. But when your life is so crowded with objects that you forget to be grateful for what truly matters—family, friends, peace of mind and sense of self—then perhaps it is time to take a deeper look at the things filling your home.

“Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”
-WILLIAM MORRIS

Take, for instance, the snow globe that you bought on your trip to the Rockies four years ago. It is hidden away in your closet because you don’t have a place for it anymore, yet you can’t bring yourself to get rid of it, either. You had a lot of fun on that vacation, and when you happen upon the snow globe, it reminds you of that. What we must remember, though, is that our memories are not stored in objects. Our memories exist in our hearts and in our minds, and are relived meaningfully by reflecting back on an experience, or reminiscing with our loved ones. A snow globe, in essence, is not a memory; it’s simply a snow globe. So, if we give away the thing, we do not lose the memory associated with it. This is important to remember, as we begin to declutter our lives and learn to live with less.

The relief we feel when we unburden ourselves of unnecessary possessions is immediate and surprising. By freeing up space in our homes, we also free up space in our hearts, minds and souls, to be occupied by more meaningful things, like spending more time with our families and friends, creating new memories, having unique experiences, and so much more. In learning to live with less, we are able to cultivate a deeper appreciation for all that we have, and with that gratitude comes greater peace of mind for ourselves and those with whom we share our lives.

Health and Home

There exists a vital relationship between our health and the state of our homes. When our homes are in disarray, we experience the negative effects of that holistically, in all areas of our physical, mental and spiritual health. For example, we might trip over a stray object left in the
middle of a room; this could lead to range of injuries, from a simple stubbed toe to a more serious fall. Dust on shelves could be aggravating allergies that we didn’t even know we had. The clutter in your closet can lead to indecision on how to present yourself, and thus how you feel about yourself. These are just a few examples of how a disorderly home can affect your health.

Dr. John F. Demartini, a leading expert in human behavior, writes: “To prioritize is to organize, and to organize is to transform stress into success. Thus, you’re rewarded in life to the degree that you can master the ability to organize stressful disorder.” A disorganized home has the greatest effect on our mental health in the form of stress. Within the chaos of a cluttered home, we become more agitated without even realizing it. We don’t sleep or wake as well when we are crowded by our possessions. We’re late for appointments because we can’t locate things that we need. It becomes more difficult to move efficiently in our own space, leading to greater and greater stress and anxiety.

Clearing out and decluttering our homes has an immediate, positive impact on how we feel on every level. When we dedicate ourselves to giving each of our belongings a proper place and function in our home, we create an atmosphere of care and thoughtfulness that is reflected back onto us as we move through our spaces with ease and lightness. Our homes can become our sanctuaries again; they can once more become a safe space for us to nurture health and well-being for ourselves and our families.