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COMPLIMENTARY

# YVW woman

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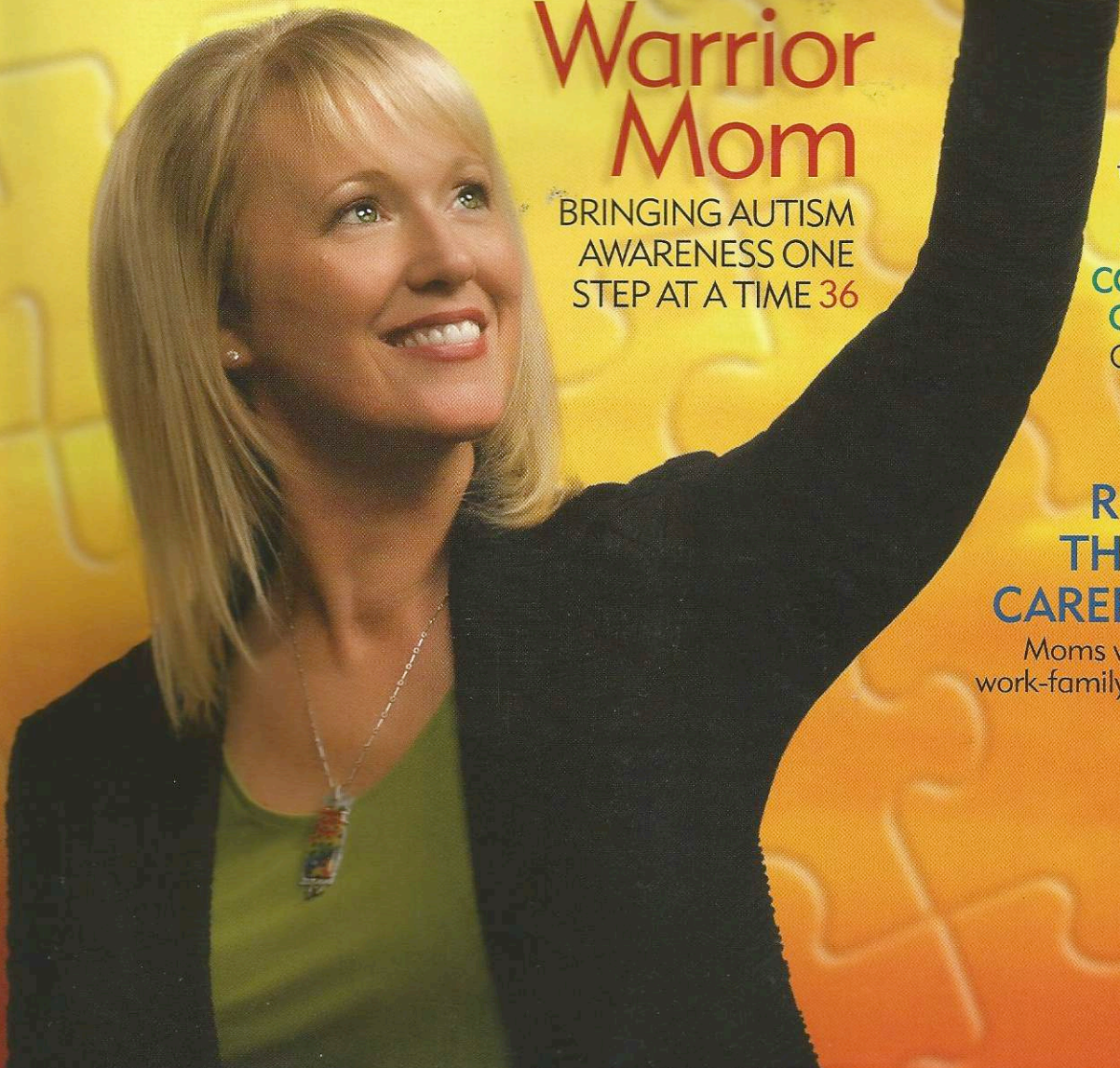
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# CRACKING THE CODE OF CLOSET ORGANIZATION

“I want to make the world a better place,” she says.

“I would like to see the world a simpler place and for people to be happy.”



## Clearing the clutter and streamlining your wardrobe

I cracked the code in half an hour.

“This would look great on your daughter,” and, “I can see you working in the garden in this,” and, finally, “This would totally work on the soccer field,” were all euphemisms for throw it away.

I get it. I’m not young and cool anymore. (On reflection, I’m not sure I ever was cool.) It’s been some years now since Judith Viorst’s poetry collection, “It’s Hard to Be Hip Over Thirty,” gave me the first thrill of recognition. But did I really need some trendy young thing telling me what to wear?

Evidently, yes.

BY SARAH BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY BY BECKY BROCKIE

**“Y**ou’re kind of a hippy!” says the trendy young thing in black skinny jeans and cork wedges inspecting my clothes now spread across my bed.

Is that a good thing?

“I love your style!” she says, holding up a hand-stitched, wrap-around skirt bought in a Magazine Street thrift store in pre-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. “Your environment is antiques and your closet is adorable!”

Still not sure.

I was having my closet organized by Courtney Conner, who this summer launched her organizing and styling business, Courtney’s Couture Closets. Into art and style from a young age, Courtney, 30, skipped fashion school and went straight into retail, working at big-name stores like Ralph Lauren, bebe and Nordstrom, as well as boutiques like JMR in Salt Lake City and Billings’ own Bottega, where she works now as the visual merchandising manager.

**“Courtney was born with an eye  
– for color, for style,”**

~ LAURIE CONNOR MACCAULEY

A self-described “organized catastrophe,” Courtney’s vision is sweeping: “I want to make the world a better place,” she says. “I would like to see the world a simpler place and for people to be happy.”

She’s not the first one to equate home organization with enlightenment.

The Hebrew proverb told us, “Cleanliness is close to Godliness.” More recently, life coach and author of *Throw Out Fifty Things: Clear the Clutter, Find Your Life* Gail Blanke attributes increased, “energy, momentum and courage” to purging one’s “life plaque.” Even the esteemed Anna Quindlen muses about the uselessness of stuff in her current New York Times bestselling memoir *Lots Of Candles, Plenty Of Cake*.

Still, some of us just want to be able to close the bureau drawers without breaking a sweat and put ourselves together without too much fuss.

“The key is that everything in there fits and I wear everything,” says Tricia Parkan, 43, an at-home mother and skin care consultant.

**“I take a look at you and what you like, how  
you should dress for your figure and your  
personality.”**

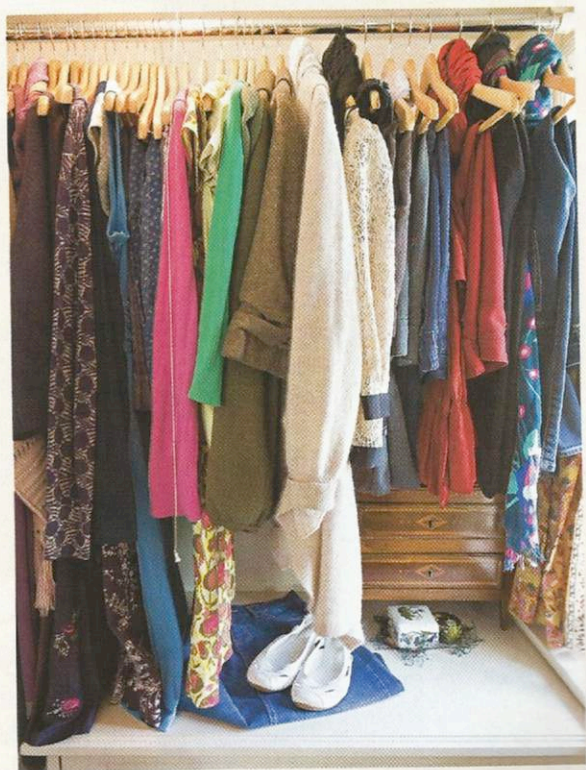
~ COURTNEY CONNER

Tricia, whose weight fluctuates, had many years of aspirational shopping – buying things she hoped would one day fit – behind her when she had Courtney come sort her out earlier this year.

Together, Tricia and Courtney removed seven garbage bags of clothes from her closet. In the mix were items of all sizes, clothes from when



Courtney did her usual magic: remove clothes, clean closet, eliminate dated and unflattering items and re-hang by color on uniform hangers.



## NOT SURE HOW TO OVERHAUL YOUR CLOSET?

# Just ask Courtney



If you haven't worn it for a whole season, toss it.

Take everything out of your closet and clean

it. "You are starting over, beginning again," Courtney says.

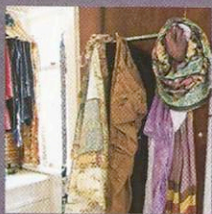
Use all the same hangers, preferably no plastic and no wire. "When all the hangers are the same, the clothes hang right, they're all level and much more appealing," Courtney says.



Color-coordinate your clothes, for appearance sake and for outfit building.

Display your clothes as if you

were hanging them in a boutique. Use hooks and door knobs and countertops to make a beautiful display so you can easily see what you have.



Use organizers such as drawer dividers, see through boxes, etc.

Change your closet around periodically. "Putting your clothes together differently in your closet can help you put yourself together differently," Courtney says. "Change is good."

she taught school in Napa, CA before her three children were born, the outfit she wore at her rehearsal dinner in 1998 and, "pants old enough to vote, maybe even drink," she recalls a friend quipping at the time.

Courtney did her usual magic: remove clothes, clean closet, eliminate dated and unflattering items and re-hang by color on uniform hangers.

She also made suggestions.

"I didn't just want to be organized, I wanted some fashion schooling, too," says Tricia, sporting a Courtney-approved outfit of an ironed, black button-down shirt with tatty, rolled-up designer jeans. "My take away from this is that you can have mommy clothes or rainy day clothes, but they can be cute, they don't have to be baggy or worn out or too small."

So how does she do it?

"I'm a very sympathetic person," Courtney says. "I take a look at you and what you like, how you should dress for your figure and your personality."

And it's always been so, says her mother, Laurie Connor MacCauley, 53.

"Courtney was born with an eye – for color, for style," Laurie says.

When Courtney wasn't making collages out of fashion magazines or arranging her blocks by color, she was redoing her closet, constantly changing things around and staging different looks, "totally the opposite of how other people would see it," her mother says – and it worked.

It still does. When stumped about an outfit, Courtney's mother and her best friend, Christy Fenno, 31, do what they call the JAC – Just Ask Courtney.

"She intervenes all the time!" says Christy. "Whenever we go anywhere, I always ask her and she always makes a change and she is always right."

Call it a knack or call it an obsession, she looks great – and wants you to, too.

"I know what I am going to wear to the airport, to a seafood dinner, to a country

dive bar," says Courtney. "Clothing is an art."

Back at my tiny 1930s-era closet – "The smallest I've ever seen!" – Courtney is wrapping her head around me.

"You're vintage!" "You're eclectic!"

'You're stumped,' I thought, 'I'm beyond help.'

I left for half an hour to walk the dog and pick up sandwiches. When I returned, she'd done it: she'd hung my wide-ranging wardrobe by color on matched pine hangers

*"I know how excited women get when they shop. I want them to have that same feeling when they open their closet every day."*



and on the floor amid the jumble of mismatched hangers, were the casualties: two pairs of white jeans, a sweat-stained button down top, an Indian-print, mirrored belt (later retrieved), suede purple flats she deemed "thrashed."

I'll spare you the details.

On the previously unused hooks on the back of the closet door, she'd looped wrap-around skirts (yup, there was more than one) and cargo pants ("Totally you!"). She also moved the scarves ranging from a hand-me-down Gucci to threadbare batik sarong I found on a Greek beach when I was 18 – to compliment like-colors in the closet. On the built-in bureau, she'd arranged a boutique-style tableaux with an Old Navy

jean skirt and little white flats angled just so.

It was quite lovely.

"Closets are merchandizing," Courtney says. "It's just placing clothes in the appropriate way to make it more appealing to the customer."

And merchandizing has always been Courtney's thing, most recently at Bottega, where she put together a spring window with silk flowers and white lights that had customers pouring in and, of course, asking for Courtney, says owner Katie Cline Ellis.

Courtney tries to recreate the feeling of a boutique right in your own closet, in part by treating the clothes with respect – always hanging them by color on matching hangers right side out, buttons fastened, and carefully folding and stacking them.

"I know how excited women get when they shop," she says. "I want them to have that same feeling when they open their closet every day."

A few days later, the shop display element wasn't working for me. I moved the scarves back together and hung the skirts and cargos on hangers, albeit turned right side out on matching hangers. The dainty white shoes went back on the rack with my fleece-lined snow clogs.

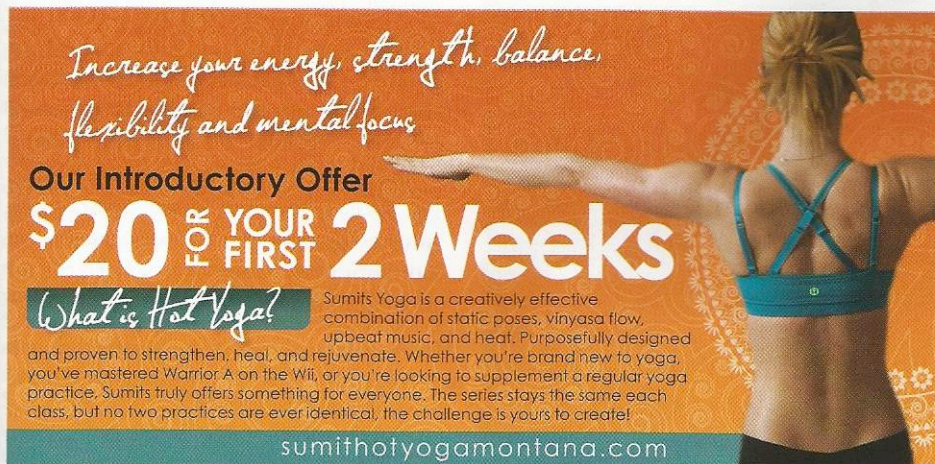
And despite numerous texts about the nude cork wedges with which I absolutely must replace my formerly-nude Danskos sandals, I haven't bought anything new (one wrong step in the Albertsons parking lot and I'd be toast, I explained).

But the fundamentals have stuck – and even expanded.

With fewer clothes in my closet, I'm wearing more of them than I used to. I'm also putting them together differently, now I can see more of them.

At \$150 for three hours, Courtney is not cheap. But the lessons she imparts can last a lifetime – or at least a season. I don't know that I am any closer to God now, but I have learned a thing or two about my stuff, not least about the multi-colored suede shoulder bag I carry every day, everywhere.

"Use it at the market!" Courtney says. "Or camping!"



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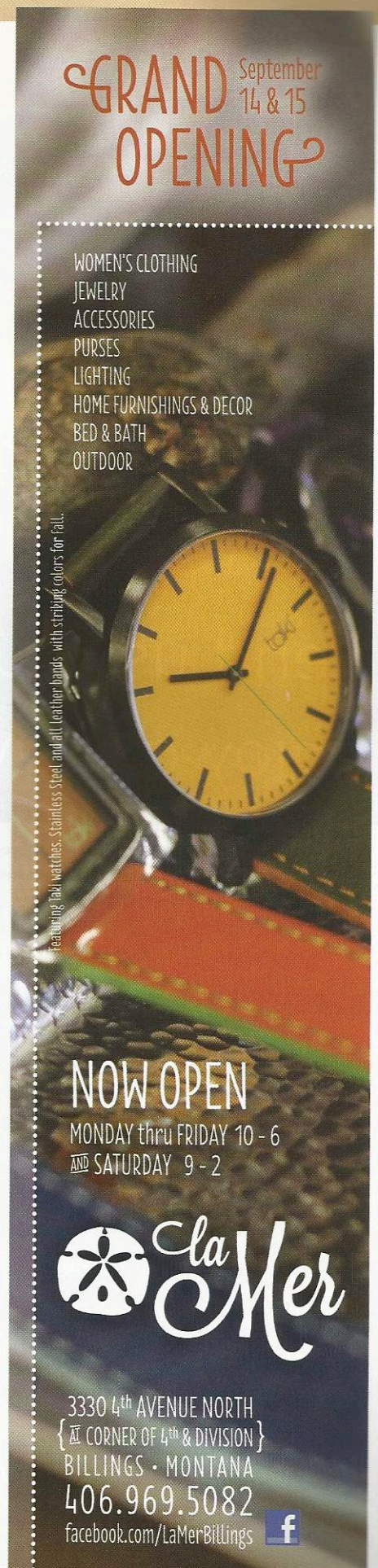
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