

Decorating for Two

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No one wants to end up like the couple from *When Harry Met Sally* who begin their lives together with an argument over the merits of a wagon wheel coffee table. Moving in together can be stressful – especially if you hate his antique sword collection and his passive-aggressive comments about your Laura Ashley draperies. Before ordering monogrammed towels and putting both names on the mailbox, follow these tips for creating a harmonious home a deux.



Expect a rollercoaster of emotions: Despite the excitement over moving in with her boyfriend, Tony, Kristine Hansen confesses that she was a little anxious, too. "I kept thinking, 'Am I going to lose my style? Is it going to feel like my space?'" she recalls. A little nervousness about combining lives - and living spaces - is normal, says Regina Leeds, a professional organizer and author of *One Year to an Organized Life* and *Sharing a Place Without Losing Your Space: A Couple's Guide to Blending Homes, Lives, and Clutter*, who works with couples to create shared spaces.

Mix medieval swords and paisley pillowcases: Hansen knew that the Oriental rug and antique weathervane that filled the living room in her Milwaukee, Wisconsin, home-to-be weren't exactly a match for her collection of seashells and woven baskets. Rather than packing away his traditional accessories or relegating her beach-inspired finds to the attic, the couple broke all the decorating rules and combined their favorite pieces into the décor. "I realized that it isn't my style verses his style; we're building a new style together," Hansen explains. As it turns out, opposites attract: His dark wood tones and her colorful accessories work perfectly together.

Establish his-and-hers spaces: Yes, the whole point of moving in together is to go from "his" and "hers" to "ours" but it makes sense to maintain some solo spaces, says Portland, Oregon-based professional organizer [Vicki Norris](#). Separate drawers in the bathroom can spare you the agony of digging through 14 tubes of lipstick, three eyelash curlers and a flat iron just to find the single toothbrush you have stashed in the drawer. A space that's all your own, whether it's a single drawer or an entire room, gives you license to be as messy - or as neat - as you choose without worrying about how your habits impact your partner.

Unpack boxes and uncover other issues: There is more lurking in those cardboard boxes than Def Leppard CDs. "The possessions we move into our new homes are the witnesses to the lives we've led," explains Leeds. "Arguments are never over boxes of books or ultra-feminine bedspreads; those things are just a cover for talking about the real issues." Leeds advises couples to talk about the feelings that arise over certain objects: Do you object to the black leather sofa because he bought it when he lived with an ex? Does he despise the bodice-ripper novels stacked on the bedside table because they make him self-conscious?

Become a novice CSI: All those evening spent in front of the TV are about to pay off. Moving in together requires some recon work. "I call it 'forensic organizing' because you have to look for clues about what a person needs," says [Norris](#). Instead of waiting for your partner to go shopping for a closet organizer or to offer up his opinion on plastic versus wooden hangers, case the bedroom to find out how he organizes his clothes. (He might not use hangers at all)! If he prefers piles, give him more shelf space in the closet; if he's more of a toss-and-go kind of guy, add some hanging pegs to the back of the closet door. "Organizing is all about figuring out what works for your life right now - not what worked before you moved in together," Norris says.

Expose his Achilles heel: Caroline Tiger is passionate about good design (the Philadelphia native blogs about all things design-related at [design-plan.squarespace.com](#) but her husband, Jonathan, is all about function, not form. "I collect antique and vintage china and we joke that he doesn't understand why I'm hanging plates on the wall when we can't eat off of them," she says. After several attempts to explain that the plates are pieces of art, Tiger decided to take a different approach: She appealed to his love of history. "When I explain the antique plates and platters in the context of history - what they say about the time and place they were made - he gets it."

Learn to compromise: We had to say it: Living happily ever after is all about compromise. Once Tiger convinced her husband to love or accept, the plates hanging on the walls of their Philadelphia row house, the pair tackled their disparate organizing styles. "When I was living alone, I'd read [the newspapers] and recycle them the same day but he doesn't do this," says Tiger. "I bought a big basket - hand-woven in Amish country! - for all of the newspapers that pile up in the living room during the week. He puts all of the papers in the basket, which keeps them out of sight and keeps the living room uncluttered until he's ready to recycle them." Who knew that a basket could help keep the harmony in a marriage?

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