

EDITED BY ALIYA S. KING

# Urban Storage Wars

TURN ANY SMALL CLOSET SPACE FROM CLUTTERED MESS TO CLASSIC BEST WITH DESIGNER SAUDAH SALEEM'S EASY DIY TIPS

By KYM ALLISON BACKER

**W**ho doesn't dream of a gorgeously appointed closet that combines a sleek customized layout with useful built-ins? For most city dwellers, the reality—tiny, dismal spaces that often end up becoming catchalls—is much less appealing.

Photographs by LUIS ANTONIO THOMPSON

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including shelving and storage, came from a nearby IKEA store. "That's an ideal place for someone considering a makeover because it offers smart, space-saving storage solutions at a great value. It also allows homeowners to experiment with decor trends and more modern looks without breaking the bank."

Although the prospect of revamping your own space may be overwhelming, Saleem says it's much easier than you think. Below, she breaks down three rules that will take your space from drab to fab:

**•BE CRITICAL**

Purge, sort and assess. The key to an organized closet is editing your wardrobe as you would a curated collection. If you don't wear an item regularly, find somewhere else to put it. Period.

**•BE CREATIVE**

Maximizing storage space often requires coming up with creative solutions. Instead of using traditional containers to hold accessories, think outside the box. For example, try hanging jewelry on picture frames and using towel rods to hang clothes and accessories. Install shelving as high up as you can. Store items you rarely use there, and put frequently used items where you can see them. Utilize a collapsible stool to access hard-to-reach items overhead.

**•BE YOU**

Remember, your closet has to serve you. The key element of good design is that it reflects your own personality. King's new decor incorporated details such as pretty hardware, lined drawers and contrasting carpet with a bold black-and-white graphic rug. The chandelier is the pièce de résistance of the makeover, providing both an impressive flair and an unexpected touch of drama to her small space.



TOP: The crowded space is transformed into an organized, functional storage area. BOTTOM: A custom design board maps out the details and accessories for the closet makeover.

"Some of the issues I've encountered from clients include frustration about the lack of overall space to store everyday items and questions on how to create multipurpose storage solutions," she explains.

For King's redo, the expert took her client's needs, personal style and lifestyle into consideration when gauging the possibilities of the existing space. Then after a virtual home tour via Skype, Saleem created a detailed design board to preview her final ideas, which were tailored to King's budget.

After Saleem's long-distance consultation, she traveled to New Jersey to oversee the installation of King's updated space and to help her sort her improved system.

Many of the new elements,

If the aforementioned pertains to you, know that you're not alone. EBONY Entertainment Editor Aliya S. King readily admits that the linen closet in her New Jersey home has long doubled as her personal storage space. And that's not all: Over time, it's also morphed into a junk graveyard, where everything from jewelry and shoes to off-season clothing

and items slated for donation can be found. The challenge was to organize and personalize this area to fit the busy work-at-home mom's needs, giving her a practical area that she won't have to share with her hubby, two kids and dog.

Designer Saudah Saleem of Baltimore, Md.-based Saudah Saleem Interiors says King's struggle is a common one.

### How She Did It

Saudah Saleem's Closet Transformation Tips

**• More space was freed up** in the closet by relocating less-frequently used and seasonal items to underbed storage containers. Your closet should only house what you use on a day-to-day basis. Clothes that are too tight or too loose should either be donated or folded and put away out of sight.

**• A DIY project proved to be a great solution for tangled necklaces and bracelets.** I framed a wallpaper remnant, then installed hooks at varying heights within the frame to hang frequently used jewelry pieces so they are front, center and ready to wear.

**• Although the closet was short on horizontal space,** it had ample vertical room. I chose shelving with a glossy lacquer-like finish for a high-fashion boutique feel and installed it as close to the ceiling as possible.

**• Handbags and belts can really get out of hand** in a small closet. We added plenty of wall hooks and towel bars for items that need to be reachable but not in the way.

**• I customized the space by** adding chic, feminine touches, such as flower petal knobs, paper-lined drawers and, of course, the miniature crystal chandelier.



**• Shoe bins with easy-to-open flip-down mesh lids** from IKEA created just the right amount of concealed storage. You can even take photos of your shoes and attach to the front for even more organization and to make them easier to locate.



**• I added minidrawers that could be hung on the wall** to store cosmetics and a monogrammed mug, which is a perfect way to corral makeup brushes and other accessories.

**• Instead of using traditional containers to hold accessories,** I lined the drawers of a dresser with printed contact paper, using lilac bowls to hold change and hair clips.



**• On the floor, the clean lines of the black boxes** from IKEA were great for towels and blankets.

**• Invest in good hangers that are uniform,** which sounds simple but makes a huge impact. I outfitted the closet with sleek white hangers; they give it a retail-space look. In addition, it's less distracting and allows you to focus on the clothes and not the different colored and sized hangers.



**• The mirror was definitely a "small change, big impact" addition.** The round shape in the narrow space reflects the light from the chandelier, which instantly expands the feel, adding a sense of brightness to the previously dreary and cramped closet.



### → Aliya's Takeaways

The biggest thing I learned was that I really didn't need a wall-to-wall closet rod because

most of the clothes I wear on a daily basis are foldable. I wasn't sure about putting a dresser in the closet, but it was exactly what I needed, especially since one can't fit in my bedroom. Also, I really wanted my closet to do double duty as a vanity. My bathroom is where I had stored all my makeup and hair products, and I have a 17-year-old who likes to "share." Now my good stuff is on a high shelf, and I have a gorgeous step stool that doubles as a vanity seat when it's time to beat my face! My favorite thing? THE CHANDELIER. When Saudah sent

me the plan, I wasn't interested in adding one—after all, who puts that in the closet? But I fell in love with it. Although it may not be a practical purchase, it adds a bit of sophistication. It's like a piece of artwork, and I think it's terrific. I also adore the floor. Having texture and color in that area really makes the whole space pop. In addition, I raved over her decision to place jewelry hooks inside the photo frame. Saudah was able to see my space and create something that serviced all my needs. Now I want to move into my closet.