

ANNA-CARIN MCNAMARA

MAKE A HOME TO LOVE

How to bring joy, order and beauty into your home the Scandinavian way



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN ALEXANDER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RICHARD BRIGGS





CHAPTER 1 REVIEW

*Review your home—
perform a Home Diagnosis*

‘If one does not
know to which port
one is sailing, no
wind is favourable.’

Lucius
Annaeus
Seneca

Whether you like it or not, your home is the result of a series of decisions. You own the furniture and objects you do because you chose to acquire them or accepted them as gifts. The décor, the windows and the wall colours are an amalgamation of personal preference or inheritance. Whether you're a neat freak or your clutter knows no bounds, your home is a product of who you are and the choices you have made.

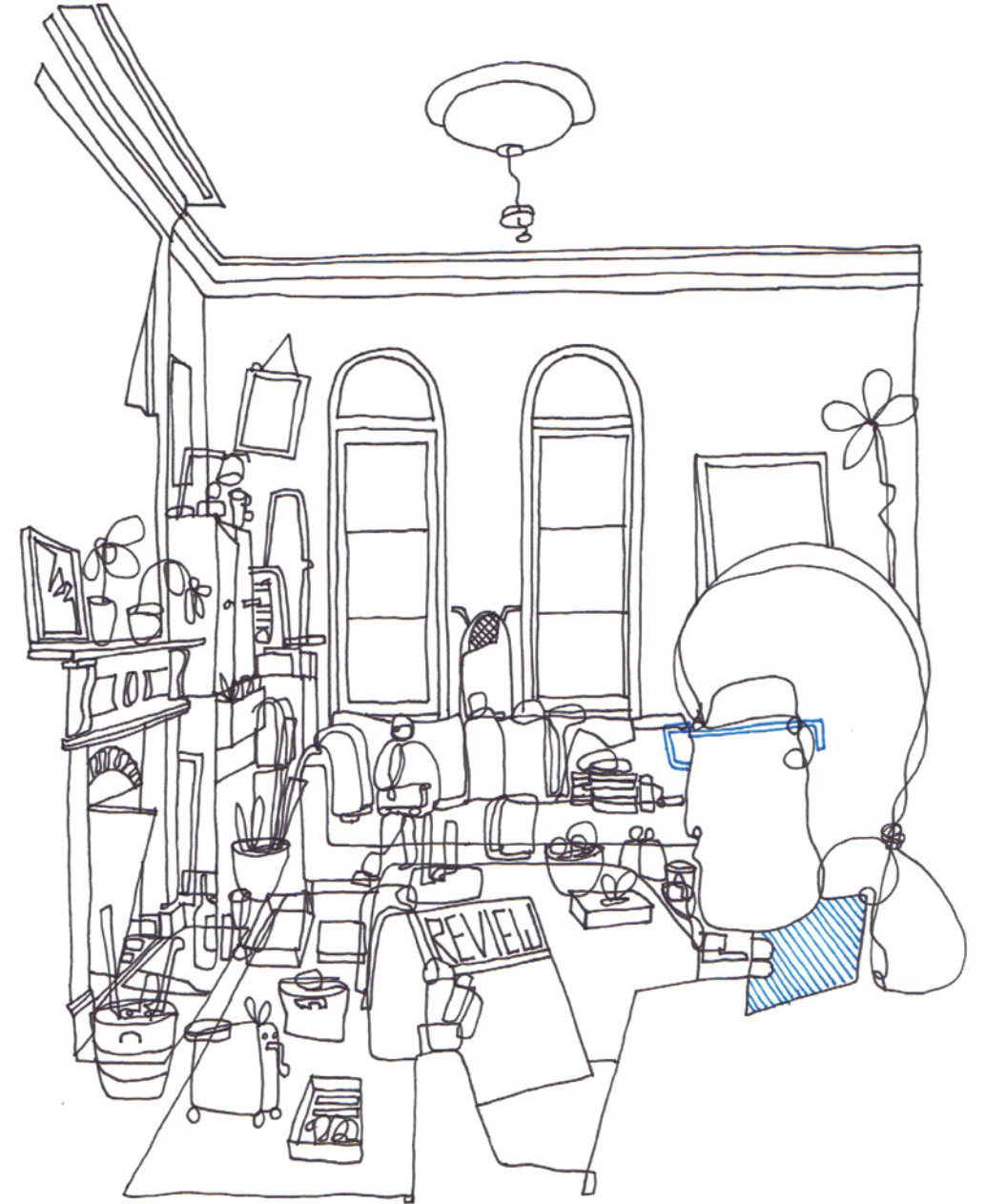
'But, but, but ...' I hear you say. 'My home is not really me and it's not what I want because ...'

- I can't afford what I really want.
- I just ended up here.
- I'm just renting.
- I don't know why I have all this stuff.
- I've had this since I was a student.
- Someone gave me this for my birthday.
- My partner bought this and I don't want to offend him or her.
- My mother gave me this for 'just in case'.

On the subject of surplus 'stuff', I would like to present you with some statistics I first about read in a book called *Organizing from the Inside Out* by Julie Morgenstern. The statistics are American, but apply to Australians as well.

- We waste nine million hours a day searching for misplaced items (American Demographics Society).
- The average executive wastes six weeks per year searching for missing information in messy desks and files (*The Wall Street Journal*).
- Cleaning professionals say that getting rid of excess clutter would eliminate 40 per cent of the housework in an average home (National Soap & Detergent Association).
- Real estate agents regard 'first impression' improvements such as decluttering closets to be one of the smartest ways to speed the sale of a home and fetch a better price (New York State Association of Realtors).

I thoroughly recommend Morgenstern's book for the invaluable information and methodology it contains. These figures don't lie. Many of us are guilty of excess clutter, which takes up as much headspace as it does floor and surface space, and clouds our vision of our personal sanctuaries.





Excess clutter takes up as much headspace as it does floor and surface space, and clouds our vision of our personal sanctuaries.

HOME DIAGNOSIS

Just as a doctor examines our bodies to work out what is causing pain, we will start our Home Diagnosis by examining every room and deciphering what causes discomfort and distress. First, close your eyes, click your heels, and say, 'There's no place like home.' Just kidding. Rather, simply walk through your home and take note of all the things you don't like about each room or space. It could be the layout, the lighting, the furniture, the wall colour, the curtains, the mess, the smell, or the temperature. While I was joking about pretending to be Dorothy, it can help the process to close your eyes for a moment, take a deep breath, and open them up, writing down your instant impressions and feelings. Sometimes we're so overfamiliar with our abodes, it's hard to notice what feelings they bring forth.

The process of 'decluttering' is very popular at the moment. However, just as important is examining aspects of each room and testing yourself. Is this corner the best place for this table? Is this sofa the right size for this space? Why do I have this chair here? Is the lighting sufficient?

The diagnosis is an acknowledgement and analysis of what brought you to this point and what made you create each room in its present format. Did you arrange your furniture because that was how the previous occupants arranged theirs? Did you place something in a certain position soon after buying it and it's never been moved since? Are you holding on to broken or ugly objects purely because loved ones gave them to you? Is something placed where it is because your partner wanted it there and you never discussed an alternative? Is it all just habit?

It's also a good time to question your 'hierarchy of values'. If you truly want a home that you love and that you're comfortable in, then ask yourself why you haven't prioritised this before. What would it take for you to prioritise making your home beautiful now? Reading this book is a great start, but now you need to commit some time to the task. If this means blocking out a weekend or three, then so be it, and don't get distracted!

Enough theorising, it's time for some action. Let's start at the beginning: the entrance to your home.

HALLWAY

The hallway is a transition into the house. It serves two purposes: one functional and one emotional. We will deal with the functional first by taking an objective look at your hallway and asking the following questions:

- Is there somewhere that you can store your things as you come in?
- Are there shoes everywhere?
- Are items on the floor lining up to go out to the car or into the house?
- Essentially, is there a place for everything that needs to be there?

As you enter a house you leave the outside world behind. You, your family and any guests need, at a bare minimum, somewhere to put your coats, bags, shoes and keys. Without this, the hallway simply won't function, nor will you feel that there's a sense of an entrance. Make a note of anything lacking in your hallway, or anything that's hindering its proper functioning.



There is also a safety element to hallways, in that they should be left as clear as possible of clutter to allow for speedy exits. Do you have bikes, surfboards, skateboards, or the kids' collection of loose marbles in the hallway? Make a list of everything that shouldn't be there. Ideally, outdoor gear should be left outdoors, in a garage or a shed. If you don't currently have space for the family's bicycle collection and you're planning renovations, now is the time to incorporate a bike shed into your outdoor plans with clear access to the road.

Seasonal items such as bulky coats and sunhats don't need to be on display all year round—the space they leave behind on their journey to the attic will breathe new life into a cramped hallway. Address your outside gear with proper hooks, shelves, boxes or built-in units—invaluable space-saving items that also look neat and conceal their contents, giving a smooth entrance and exit line.

Australians aren't great at hallways because often the house is designed in a way whereby you just walk straight into the living space. Equally, hallways are frequently neglected in warmer climates. In Sweden, most homes feature a proper hall with a cupboard in which to hang coats and stack your snow boots, and there's often a little extra heated cupboard where you can warm up your clothes

while you're inside so they're dry when you leave again. There might be somewhere to sit, to put your shoes on or take them off.

Some Australian homes might benefit from a heated hallway cupboard à la the Swedes. Damp beach gear could dry there without leaving sandy puddles elsewhere in the house. If you're living on the coast and considering renovating, this might be something to think about. People in the country with pets that like getting wet could also benefit.

Now for the emotional aspect. When you enter a person's home, you should immediately feel welcome. A big part of feeling welcome is being greeted. If you look at your hallway now, do you feel that you're being greeted when you enter?

There are many ways in which you can increase the welcoming aspect to your hallway. A mirror is an excellent addition as if there's no one else to greet you, your reflection can do the honours! (Equally, you can check your appearance before you leave and as you enter.) Lighting is also important: if natural light is lacking, then experiment with lamps in warm, flattering colours. Avoid anything too harsh as that will give the opposite effect to the one you seek. Similarly, peeling

wallpaper, cracked paintwork, missing flooring or funny smells detract from any hospitable vibes.

Ask yourself if your hallway reflects the rest of the house as a whole. A hallway is like an introduction to a book, or the beginning of a piece of music. Your passage through your home should tell a coherent story, and that is something you should both be aware of now and address later as we move through this book.

Look at your hallway now. Do you feel that you're being greeted when you enter?



BATHROOM

While the bathroom isn't necessarily the next room you will come to during our virtual tour of your house, it provides the perfect example of how your list of likes and dislikes might develop during your review. You can use this list as a blueprint for all the rooms to follow, factoring in all the senses, from sight to smell to touch, as well as practicalities such as layout and function. Here's an example of how your bathroom list might look:

LIKES

- The layout works well.
- I like the tiles on the floor.
- I like the mirror.
- The window is really nice and I could make more of the deep windowsill.

DISLIKES

- It smells a bit murky as you walk in.
- The wall tiles look tired and the grouting is patchy.

- There isn't enough lighting; one globe hasn't worked for years.
- The lock is broken, which makes me feel a bit uneasy!
- The towels are mismatched and stained.
- The vanity unit is not functional.
- One of the taps drips constantly and the sound drives me mad.
- The ceiling needs to be painted.
- There are too many toiletries on the vanity top.
- There is nowhere to store toilet paper.

The list above suggests you have a structurally sound bathroom that can be transformed with a little cash and TLC. Sometimes when you really get down to it and analyse what you actively dislike about a space, you realise issues you have lived with for years can be fixed in a matter of hours. A quick visit from a locksmith will sort out any privacy issues; a couple of hours spent painting can transform a ceiling. Inexpensive new towels will give that feeling of luxury and honour the daily bathing ritual. And in one afternoon, a plumber can fix a leaking tap (and possibly the murky smell), while a carpenter can whip up a new vanity unit that hides your toiletries, leaving minimalist calm in its wake.

Using a Likes/Dislikes (or Pros/Cons) list like this, you can now proceed with the same sense of clarity and purpose throughout your house review.

A Likes/Dislikes list will provide a sense of clarity and purpose throughout your house review.

LIVING ROOM

What you call your main living space depends on your type of house. If you have a big house you might have a formal sitting room plus a more casual family room adjacent to the kitchen. A formal sitting room is a place where people sit and talk, and there's less likely to be a TV. Few family rooms exist these days without a screen as a central point of interest. For the purposes of this book I will call this area the living room.

Our lives mostly follow a sequence of daily rituals—sleeping, waking, bathing, eating, entertaining, engaging, and interacting with friends or family. The environment that we create should support these rituals. As you enter each room during our review, think about the rituals that take place there.

Is your living room furniture arranged in a way that is conducive to conversation, reading, playing games, watching films, doing crafts or whatever way your family chooses to unwind?

Are you sitting at the correct distance from your TV? Is there somewhere to store all the remote controls? If you have kids, there's probably some kind of gaming console. Is there a convenient place to store it when no one's playing? Note down everything that isn't quite working the way it should.





When it comes to the question of ‘function versus design’, it’s important to have a ‘focal point’ in the room. All too often that’s a TV screen, but if you’re lucky enough to have a fireplace, then consider shifting the balance so that the proportions of the room complement the fireplace. It might just be a case of reconfiguring a modular sofa and moving the TV to a corner, but please do experiment with other options before committing to knocking down walls in the interest of design! The Swedish part of me would also encourage you to group candles together if you don’t have a fireplace, as it will really enhance the atmosphere. Try it.

Take note of all the items in your living room that do and do not give you joy, and all the other aspects that might or might not work. Then visualise someone else in the room. Ask yourself if it makes you happy to see them there. Does it annoy you? If it annoys you, then now is the time to acknowledge that this may be the wrong room for that type of activity.

It’s important during your review to be open to changing spaces to better suit your lifestyle—and the lifestyles of those you love. In every room you assess, ask the simple question, ‘Is this the best use of this space?’

I’ve lost count of the number of clients who, after a Home Diagnosis, decide their current living room may be better as a dining room, often because it’s right in the middle of the house. These interchangeable spaces often come about because of habit—your couch is where it is because that’s where the previous occupants had it when you bought the house, and its placement is never questioned. It’s a case of history versus lifestyle.

Whenever I suggest something new in my home, at first everyone objects. Things work well enough as they are so why interfere? I like to just change things up every now and again, and generally the response is, ‘Why on earth didn’t we do that before?’

For every room, ask yourself the simple question, ‘Is this the best use of this space?’



KITCHEN

A Swedish kitchen is a special space. As with many cultures, the kitchen is the heart of the home, but Swedes honour the meaning behind that—the *heima*—particularly well. The kitchen and dining rooms are frequently combined, and meals are eaten around a traditional dining table, rather than a large, central kitchen island or bench. Eating together is important to Swedes. They love their breakfast, and most families follow the Scandinavian tradition of a sit-down cooked meal by candlelight. Yes, candles at breakfast time!

Candles are important to Scandinavians. You can't have too many. Nothing creates more atmosphere than a room filled with candles in strategic places. In our family, we light candles at the dining table for every meal. As soon as anyone comes down into the kitchen in the morning, the first thing they do is light the candles.

I light candles with a match and not a lighter. I love the smell of the sulphur; it takes me back to my primary school days. Our teacher began each day by reading a chapter from a book. Before he started, he would turn the lights off. In winter, that meant it was pitch black at 9.00 a.m. He then sat down at his

desk, took out the matchbox, and struck a match to light a candle. The sulphur smell would fill the classroom; after a deep breath, he would start to read. It was the highlight of the day, and that smell still invokes a state of wonder and anticipation. Lighting a candle is like saying, ‘Come gather here and relax. It’s time to share food and enjoy time together.’

Australian kitchens are also very much part of family life. They often connect to other areas, such as the family room or dining room, and also directly to the outdoors. The kitchen becomes the hub of the house with a vantage point to both inside and out.

When reviewing your kitchen, consider the following:

- Does the current layout support the sort of cooking and the entertaining I want to do?
- Is it a space conducive to eating?
- Does it have all those practical elements that I need to store, prepare and cook food?
- Is there a large enough workspace, free from debris?
- Is it functional—is the stove the right size, for example? Are all the burners working?

- Does it have enough lighting?
- Does it have enough seating?
- Is there ample storage?
- Do I really need all those utensils, crockery, glassware and gadgets?

You’ll probably find you only use 20 per cent of your utensils on a regular basis. The other 80 per cent you might use once in a blue moon or when you’re making a specific dish. Take a good, honest look at your utensils and think about how often they are used. Kitchens are regularly groaning under the weight of excess things—even the pantry will likely be full of food that has expired!

Whether we’re talking appliances or the ingredients themselves, think about what is it that makes you constantly bring these things home before you use what’s already sitting there on the shelf. The best way to re-evaluate your habits is to physically go through your cupboards and drawers, item by item. I bet you’ll find there are items you’re unaware you even own, needlessly taking up space.



Many Australian kitchens feature a big island bench where people can sit around having a drink and talking while the host prepares the food and entertains. While most people cite this as an ideal social space, there is a downside to arranging your kitchen in this way. I recently designed a kitchen for a client who told me, 'I don't want an island bench. I feel like I'm constantly on call, or behind a bar just serving everyone. I never really get to sit down and eat because everyone interrupts me. Even when we're not entertaining, the kids sit around the bench, waiting to be served, and I feel like a barmaid.'

With this in mind, we designed a galley kitchen with the sink opposite, and a beautiful dining area adjacent so that my client would never feel like a barmaid again! After all, it's her kitchen, and why shouldn't she find it a relaxing space too? Now she sits down and eats with her kids at the table, and is much happier for it. My point here is that the design should always take your lifestyle into consideration.

Other families have very different needs and often clients are adamant that an island bench is the only way. Everyone can come and help with the food preparation, so it's not just one person cooking while everyone else is sitting at the table with their tongues hanging out. There are advantages and disad-

vantages with both styles. Consider whether your current layout helps or hinders your enjoyment of the heart of your home.

One final point is to make sure your current ventilation is adequate. Many city apartments don't have any exhausts at all and the air just recycles within the apartment. The only way to remove odours is to open the window. Furthermore, the bedroom is often situated next door to the kitchen, so cooking smelly things like fish can cause problems!

Fragrance is often the first thing you notice when you enter a room. Strong smells will take over as the dominant sense and you will react negatively, often on a subconscious level. Adequate ventilation in the kitchen, the bathroom, and throughout your home should definitely be top of your list.

LAUNDRY

The laundry can be small. It can be a cupboard in a wall, literally a door that you open and there's a washing machine, a dryer, a bench and a sink and that's it. Mine is tiny. As such, it's not often prioritised. But I'm including it here because it relates directly to the ritual of washing clothes, folding them, and putting them away. Many people do this every day of their lives, and as such it should be as pleasant—and logical—an experience as possible.

I actually love laundries. When I design a laundry I try to make sure there's natural lighting, it's well ventilated, and there's enough room to stand comfortably, with access to a work surface. There must be somewhere that you can hang clothes when it's raining and you can't put everything in the dryer. Even just a rod in the ceiling with hangers will do. If you have room, the laundry should be in an accessible position in the house and not necessarily always tucked back in the worst spot. You spend a lot of time there, after all.

Acknowledging your daily routines and rituals forms a critical part of your home review. Japanese organising consultant and author Marie Kondo introduced us to the fine art of cherishing





your possessions in her decluttering bible, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: the Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*. She taught us how to honour possessions by thanking them at the end of each day. While appreciating your handbag verbally might not be your style, most of us adhere to certain rituals, especially with items we treasure.

My husband, for example, loves fountain pens. Every night he lines his collection up in his own personal ritual, so they are there waiting for him at the start of each new day. If we value our possessions, we look after them and we make sure that they are always in their best condition, ready for use. In this way the laundry—small though it may be—is important, as it facilitates the cleaning of the clothing we choose to present ourselves in to others. Little rooms can make big first impressions.

DINING ROOM

Take an objective look at your dining room. Is it an inviting space to sit in? You should naturally be drawn to your dining table and there should be an emotional pull to sit at it. Sometimes the positioning of the table is awkward and it's hard to manoeuvre around the chairs. If the table is pushed into a cor-

ner, for example, some of the chairs are going to be squashed, while others claim all the space. Remember that our objects are not just objects; they're innate beings that need to be given ample space! All the chairs should be given room to breathe and to feel equal.

Your table needs to be the right size for the room, and that fact alone should supersede any thoughts or feelings you may have about furniture you have inherited or fallen in love with. Until that time when your furniture fits the space—the same principles apply to undersize or sparse dining furniture—the room simply will not feel *right*. If space is at a premium, you may be better off with an extendable table that can sit in its smaller configuration until needed for extra guests. Equally, a dining table that is positioned so far away from the kitchen that nobody can be bothered to go and eat at it, clearly needs some rethinking.

Your dining room's primary use is for eating but if your house is small and you only have the one table, then it might have to double as a baking table, a homework table, a sewing table, a writing table, or a place where you congregate for drinks or card games. However you use it, the ritual of setting it—and of course eating at it—is special, whether that means sitting together as a family every night, or dining on your own. Setting

the table and lighting candles as I anticipate a lovely meal is one of the highlights of my day.

But what else should be considered in a dining area?

- **Chairs:** The comfort of the chairs is another factor in inviting family and guests to sit at your table. They don't necessarily need to be upholstered, soft, and arm width, but they should be comfortable enough that you can sit there for extended periods. If necessary, you can always add a little pad or seat cushion to increase the comfort factor.
- **Lighting:** You need to be able to see what you're eating but no one wants to sit and eat in bright light with the plates glaring back at you. If you've gone to the trouble of cooking and presenting food appealingly, then you should be able to dim the lights when you sit down to eat. If you can't, make sure you have candles and small lamps dotted around the room to create some atmosphere.

BEDROOM

I can't think of any room, other than the living room, which is more important when it comes to making a home you love. Your bedroom is where you begin and end each day; it holds your clothes, jewellery and most treasured possessions. It's your sanctuary, your escape from the world, a place where you unwind, relax and recharge.

Continuing the theme of daily rituals, sleeping is every bit as important as eating. A healthy body is well rested, as is a healthy mind. The ritual of going to bed demands that the bedroom should be cosy and conducive to sleep. Items I would recommend to encourage that welcoming feeling include:

- Candles: There's something special about flickering candlelight just before bed, and a subtle fragrance can be wonderful too. Small lamps can have a similar effect.
- Incense: If smell is important to you, then you might like to drift off with the aid of a safe incense burner. Essential oil sprays such as lavender are also relaxing.

- Green plants: These look beautiful and are healthy for you as they boost the oxygen content in the room while you sleep.

Just as we are conscious of embracing our daily rituals during this home review, it is every bit as important to honour ourselves. Undoubtedly, the most important feature of the bedroom is the bed. During our bathroom review, we considered the state of the towels and decided to get rid of those that were mismatched and stained. The same now applies to your bedding. If your sheets are dirty, torn or threadbare ... again, you're not honouring yourself, are you?

Clean, crisp sheets are an affordable luxury that will well serve your sleeping ritual. They don't need to be clean every night but certainly they should be clean enough not to look and smell like they haven't seen the inside of a washing machine for weeks. Furthermore, if you're honouring yourself and your sleeping ritual, make your bed every day. If you're not doing this, ask yourself, why not?

In *The Slight Edge*, author and entrepreneur Jeff Olson talks about the little things in life that are really easy to do, but just as easy *not* to do. And these little things, when not done, impact us over time. For example, if you get into the habit of



exercising ten minutes each day when you're twenty, by the time you turn fifty, you'll likely be fit and agile because you've exercised gradually.

The same principle applies to how we look after our homes. If you get into the habit of making your bed every day, that ritual will have a spin-off effect. Even if the rest of the room is messy and not the most relaxing space, a well-made bed has a certain aura to it that will make you think, *Yes, I want to come in here.*

Next on the list is storage, which in a bedroom usually revolves around clothing. If you love clothes you'll likely have a lot and you'll need to spend money on accommodating them during the redesign and renovate stages of this book. As Marie Kondo tells us, clothes should be allowed enough space to breathe, rather than being crammed into a musty, dark cupboard. Honour them as you honour yourself!

We don't wash all our clothes after every use, especially when it comes to coats and jackets. So it makes sense to have a place in the bedroom (other than the wardrobe) where you can hang things that you might not use today but you might want to use the day after tomorrow. A beautiful rack or some carefully chosen wall hooks might make all the difference here, because wardrobes start to smell off if you leave dirty clothes in them

for too long. Additionally, these items will be on hand when you wake up the next morning, saving you precious time in hunting for them.

If you're anything like me, you might have a lot of books in your bedroom. Is there anywhere else you can store them, or is there a more effective way they can be accommodated?

Jewellery presents another storage issue, particularly for women. Why not have a few small pieces on display in a pretty dish to add a little sparkle to the room? I enjoy creating small pieces of visual art by arranging items together on a shelf. This could be as simple as a candle, a flower, and a stand displaying

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your necklaces on top of your chest of drawers. This simple decoration is a perfect blend of beauty and nature.

If you own a lot of valuable jewellery, the bedroom might not be the best place to store it because it's an obvious place for thieves to look. So consider a lockable drawer or safe elsewhere in the house during your review.

Some people believe you shouldn't have mirrors in a bedroom. On the advice of a friend, I once removed mine and then found it impossible to get dressed without it! I now know a full-length mirror is a necessity, whether it's hidden in a wardrobe or in full view.

I use a lot of mirrors in my interiors because not only do they reflect light, but they also give the visual impression of expanding the space. So review your mirrors and question if they are in the right spot, or if they might be more effective elsewhere. It's important that mirrors are flattering when you look in them. That means placing them ideally in an area where the light is coming from behind, so it's not too harsh and that you actually feel good about your appearance. (Obviously don't have the lighting so dim that you leave the house with spinach in between your teeth!) A well-positioned mirror is beneficial because it makes you feel better. No one else cares as

much about your appearance as you. And if you feel good about yourself each morning, you act in a more positive, confident and decisive way throughout the day ... it's the ripple effect!

Lighting is crucial in the bedroom. As per the dining room, the lighting should complement your individual lifestyle and not be too harsh. For example, if you love to read in bed, then you'll need a good reading light. As a general rule, the best bedroom lights can be dimmed but also can be turned up when you need to see properly to clean and change the bed.

One final point to consider is the bedroom's purpose. Occasionally in my designs I might swap the master bedroom with a smaller bedroom because the client prefers the outlook from that side of the house. Life presents us with continual change, and so too a room's function must shift as families grow. Nurseries become bedrooms, bedrooms become studies, studies become games rooms for grandkids, and so on. Bear this in mind as you review each and every detail during your Home Diagnosis.



THAT'S IT!

You've done it! Time for a well-earned rest. Once you have completed this process for every room, you will have an action plan to which you can refer throughout the next steps.

Take a moment to reflect on the spaces that you've created and be thankful that you have a house—gratitude helps with the more painful steps to come! Your home might not be exactly the way you want it—yet—but it's no less extraordinary that you have it. Your Home Diagnosis may have even taught you more about yourself and why you have all the things that you have. Your review list is the blueprint and foundation for the next steps to transform your house into a home to love.



Would you like a home of which you can be proud? A home that you are happy to return to every single day? A home that you truly love? If so, then this book is for you.

Make a Home to Love takes you through ten simple steps that will help you to review your home and turn it into a place you can love and be proud of for years to come. Written by Swedish-born interior designer Anna-Carin McNamara, the book offers practical, accessible advice on how to turn any home into a stylish Scandinavian sanctuary.