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## Author offers advice on attacking clutter

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SPECIAL TO THE RECORD | THE RECORD

You could say Francine Jay was ahead of the curve.

The blogger-author, aka Miss Minimalist, originally self-published "The Joy of Less" in 2010. Since then, decluttering and minimalist living have grown into a movement.

Marie "KonMari" Kondo's much-talked-about "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up" was published in the U.S. in 2014, and her follow-up, "Spark Joy," was released in January. Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, aka The Minimalists, launched their website in 2010 and have written several books on the topic, including the 2013 memoir "Everything That Remains"; their documentary, "Minimalism," was to screen in several theaters in New York this month.

The popularity of Jay's book prompted her to partner with Chronicle Books to release a streamlined and revised edition of "The Joy of Less" last month. The new edition also is being released in 17 languages and as an audiobook.

The Portland, Ore., resident recently spoke to The Record about "The Joy of Less," and why she thinks clearing out space in the home leads to a healthier lifestyle.

Q. What's changed in this edition of the book?

The biggest change is the addition of "The Clutter-Free Family" chapter, and that's actually what I'm really excited about. In the intervening years between the first edition and the second, I've had a child [now 4], and I'm much more understanding of the challenges of getting a partner and children onboard when you're trying to declutter. And exactly what life is like when that new clutter comes in on a daily basis. It's a lot different than when you're just dealing with your own stuff.

Q. How do you deal with the toys?

Every evening, the three of us in our family do what we call an evening sweep, and we actually gather up our personal items, whether they landed on the coffee table or the dining table or the kitchen counters ... and put them away where they belong. So we're hoping to teach her that things have a place and they belong there. And I think within that, she's kind of getting the concept of, "If I don't have a ton of stuff, I don't have a ton of stuff to put away at the end of the day."

Q. It seems like minimalist living is more of a movement now than when the book first came out. Why do you think that is?

Most definitely, and that's really exciting for me to see, too, because I feel like I was one of the only people talking about it six years ago, and now it's much more mainstream, which is great. I think there's this growing discontent with having clutter in our lives, and ... I think we've reached this moment of peak stuff. I don't know if you're familiar with the Ikea chief sustainability officer; back in January, he said that he feels like the West has reached peak stuff, where people just have everything they need and it's going to be a lot harder to sell to them in the future. And I feel like in our personal lives, we're experiencing the same thing. It's just been so easy to obtain consumer goods, and we all have enough.



Francine Jay: "I think there's this growing discontent with having clutter in our lives."

Q. How does your method differ from the KonMari method?

There's a significant difference. And I love Marie Kondo, I feel like she's kind of my decluttering soul sister, and we have things in common. But our key difference is that she looks at doing this decluttering and tidying in one fell swoop. Do it once, and you'll never have to do it again. That's her method. Whereas mine is more of a lifestyle. So that, as new clutter comes into your life, which it's going to — to me, you can't declutter one time and be done with it. Events happen, like you have a baby or you get married, and all this new clutter comes into your life. So I think that if you make it a lifestyle change, where you're actually changing your mind-set about stuff, and putting these habits and routines into place in order for clutter not to build up again, it's much easier.

I emphasize always keeping an "out box," which is just a cardboard box that you keep in your hall closet or somewhere accessible, and anytime you come across something, it goes straight in the box. You just make it easy for it to leave the house. Depending on how quickly it fills up, once a month — once every few months — take it all to charity, go through it, see what you want to do with it.

Q. Is that the sort of thing people can keep up with?

I feel like it's actually easier because it's this little-by-little approach, where it doesn't have to be this big formal event. You may be just getting rid of one thing a day, and I think that's fine. But it also comes with the attitude of limiting the influence on your house, too. So once you have this mind-set, where you're decluttering or you're living a more minimalist lifestyle, you're also questioning, like when you're out shopping. You ask why before you buy. "Do I really need this? Do I really want to bring that home and find a space for it?"

As you have these little victories — you cleaned out your junk drawer, or your desk, or you're starting on your closet — it really builds confidence so that then you can tackle the larger projects.

Q. The people who come to you for advice, are they trying to get control of their home, or are they anticipating moving to another home and they need to downsize?

I think there are the people who are moving or downsizing, but I think the vast majority really just want to take control of the stuff in their homes and make a little more space. Studies have shown that clutter can raise our stress levels by making us feel distracted, overwhelmed, out of control. And it can be annoying, just in daily life. You're looking to find your keys, or a piece of paperwork or whatever, and it makes us anxious and stressed out.

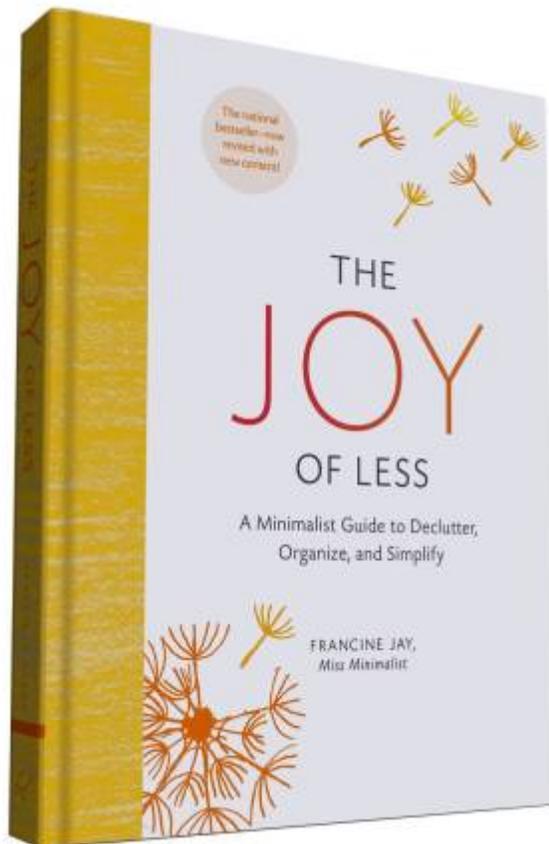
Q. In the book you suggest organizing things in each room by how often they're used, instead of by size or in a more traditional way. How would that work visually?

In your kitchen or at your desk, you would have the things you use on a daily basis within reach of where you usually are. So if you're sitting in your desk chair, the things that you use daily would be the things that you don't have to get up in order to reach — in your desk drawer, on the bulletin board behind your desk, on the side of your desk. Which means then that the stuff you don't use on a daily basis, the stuff you use either from once a week to once a year — office supplies, backups of things — they would go in storage closets or something that's a little harder to reach. ... We're optimizing our possessions to fit how we live.

Q. You focus a lot on horizontal clutter — on desks or dressers. Is there such a thing as vertical clutter?

I wouldn't think so. Actually, if you need to store things, I like to see them vertically rather than horizontally, because there doesn't seem to be the potential for them to pile up as much as on a horizontal surface. So again, if you're at your desk, I love using vertical files and bulletin boards and things like that for notes, rather than just piling them on your desk where they're all underneath each other, and you have to shuffle through everything in order to get to them.

And even in places like your garage, I also recommend hanging things. I think it's important to try to keep the floor as clear as possible, because the floor is an invitation for clutter.



Q. Teenagers are usually expected to want the newest tech toys or the most stylish clothes, but you said that teenagers are big followers of your blog. Why do you think that's the case?

Teenagers and millennials, it's been great. I have so many younger readers. I do hear from some teenagers who live in cluttered homes, and they're just desperate to kind of carve out their own little oasis of space in there. That's usually the type of email I get from somebody who's younger who wants to declutter. And they're dealing with parents who may not want them to declutter, and "How do I get rid of this stuff without upsetting my family?"

I just think that this younger generation really doesn't put as much emphasis on stuff as they do on experiences. ... And what I love is that I don't think there's any longer this notion that stuff is a measure of success, like the whole status symbol thing that I remember when I was younger, growing up in the '80s, that was huge. ... And I see that notion falling away, and it's so encouraging.

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