

Setting up house

What you need is what you should get

By Helen S. Bas

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Spring is the time for graduation, and after that comes the new job and the new apartment. Many young people never have lived away from Mom and Dad's or the dorm.

With finances low and the prospect of furnishing an empty apartment, newly independent members of the work force have some decisions to make. Couch or chairs? Mugs or cups and saucers? How many towels, sheets, forks?

Betty Huotari, a professional organizer and owner of Logical Placement in Fenton, has tips for those who never

have lived on their own.

"One of the first things you should do is make sure that rela-

tives and friends know you're setting up household for the first time," she said. "Maybe they have extra furniture or household items. If they know you need it, they can let it go."

Huotari has been helping people organize their homes and offices since 2001, when she was laid off from a computer sales job. She decided to open a business, and

knew one of her strengths was organizing.

"I knew I could help people implement systems that would make their homes and offices work

better and look better," she said. "I began to get

really excited about it when my research showed how much time and money people waste when they're not organized."

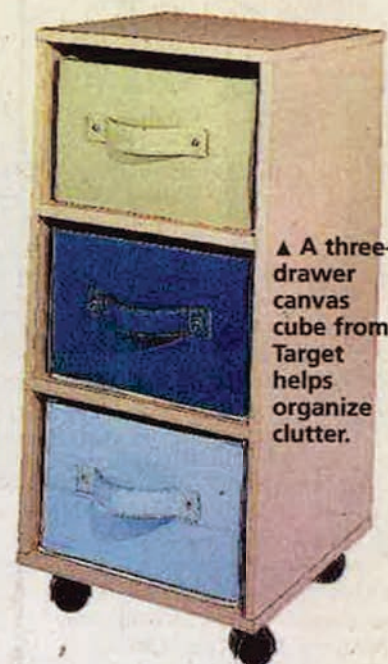
A professional organizer can provide ideas, information, systems and solutions, Huotari said. Setting up a first apartment requires all of those.

After seeing what is donated, a new grad faces the task of buying those things that are lacking. It's important, on a tight budget, to buy what's needed and avoid frivolous things. Huotari started with the kitchen. Pots and pans are big-ticket items.

"You need two or three saucepans, a couple of frying pans and a casserole dish or two," she said. "If you can find a set that

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▲ Stylish desk chairs from online store ApartmentZero can be a nice addition to a first apartment.



▲ A three-drawer canvas cube from Target helps organize clutter.



▲ Footlocker-style travel cases from Target double as home storage.

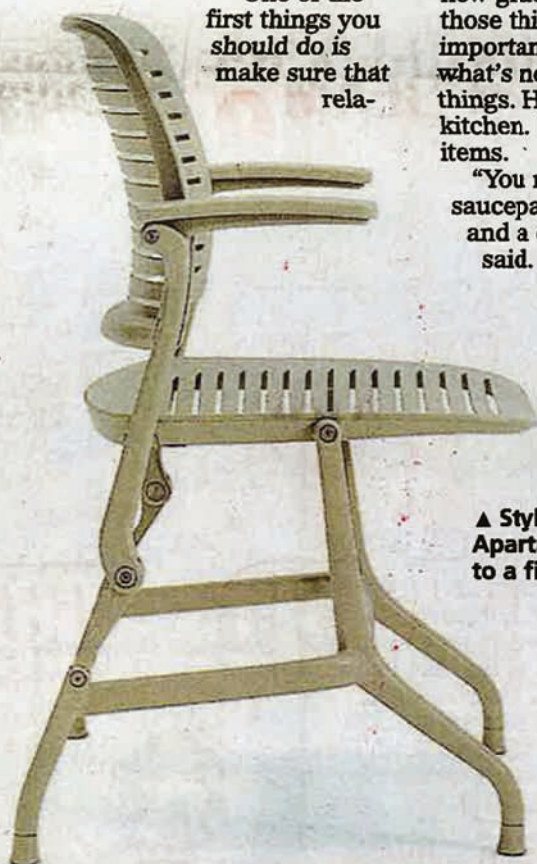


▲ A compact, rolling bar from Target performs double duty as a storage unit.

Warm up your space

To make your new space seem more like home, try some of these design tips from designer Brian Ogan of TheMagazine, an online, modern furniture store. Contact the store at www.themagazine.info or (510) 549-2282.

- Warm up a wall (if apartment management is OK with it). Paint a single wall in soft sage or warm wine to add a touch of color and warmth.
- Get smart about storage. Carefully plan every piece of furniture to control clutter. Open shelving keeps the wall exposed and maintains an open feeling.
- Use lighting as art. Simple wall sconces provide soft illumination without using valuable surface space. Track, cove (indirect lighting from horizontal recesses) and bookshelf lighting are other choices to change a space.
- Streamline window spaces. Select an approach that suits you. Sheers let in light; drapes offer privacy and shade.
- Use area rugs as anchors. They break a space into separate living areas without sacrificing openness. They also warm up bare floors and reduce echoes. A striking carpet can be the focal point of a room.
- Make use of mirrors. Reflective surfaces extend space and make a room feel more open. A full-length mirror leaned against a wall is practical and makes the room seem bigger.
- Maintain open space. Arrange furniture so it doesn't block views to windows and doors. Tables with clear glass tops add surface space and minimize a cluttered look.
- Layer your bed linens. To make a small bedroom seem more spacious, choose bedspreads, shams and throws that use a mixture of patterns and colors. Accent pillows add visual interest without taking up room.



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has those components, great. But don't buy a huge set with half a dozen pans you won't use."

Huotari noted that nice-looking, inexpensive dishes often come "bundled" in packs of four place settings. She suggested that if you'll be doing any entertaining, eight might be prudent; 12 if you're planning to have family or friends over more often.

Flatware and glasses can be purchased in bundles too. Large and small drinking glasses and full place settings of flatware are nice.

An apartment usually has a stove and refrigerator, but be careful of purchasing too many small appliances. A toaster and coffee maker may be all that's needed.

"And only get those if you use them regularly," Huotari said. "Buy inexpensive ones and pass up the blender, mixer and food processor."

Round out the kitchenware with a couple of cookie sheets, two cutting boards, a dozen dish towels and cloths, a tablecloth or two if you like them and a block with basic knives. Serrated steak knives aren't a bad idea if you'll use them.

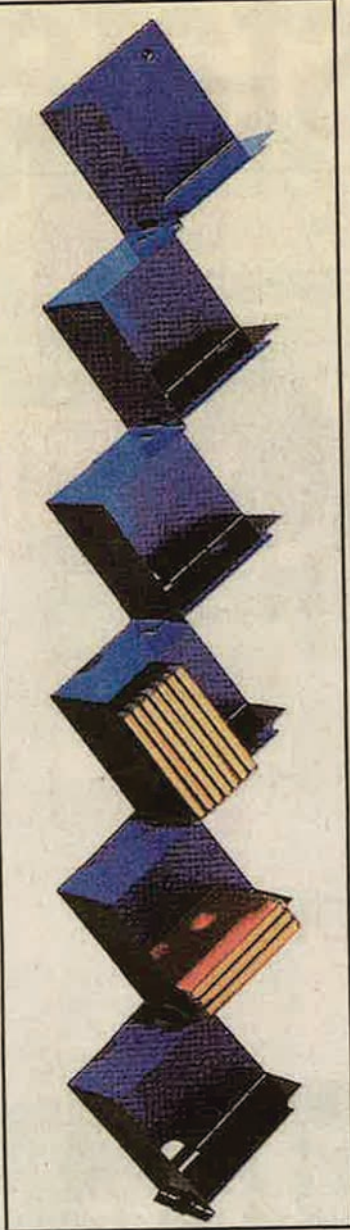
For linens, Huotari advises having two or three sets of sheets. "People tend to wash, dry and replace sheets on the bed all at once, but it's nice to have extras for guests or an emergency," she said.

Eight or 10 bath towels and a few washcloths should be sufficient — more washcloths for women.

For furniture, remember to ask for donations first. Then look for items that will do double duty — a bed with storage drawers underneath, end tables with shelves and an entertainment center with attached cabinets.

"That keeps stuff out of sight and organized," Huotari said. "And watch size, especially if you plan to move a lot. Do you really want to lug around a king-size bed? Will it even fit?"

Huotari said traditional furniture is a better choice than trendy styles; and put your money into quality. "I still have a lot of what I bought right out of school," she said. "I saved and bought



▲ This hanging CD rack from online store ApartmentZero can ease clutter by getting CDs off surfaces.

good, conservative stuff — it will last years more (than trendy, cheaper furniture)."

Don't forget to make room for the little things: CDs can be stored in a variety of space-efficient holders from online store ApartmentZero.

Target sells an assortment of attractive, space-efficient, inexpensive storage containers and double-duty furniture, such as a movable bar that has shelves for storing glasses and dishes.

"Target has a lot of really nice things," Huotari said. "It's one of my favorite places to shop."

Cleaning supplies should not be neglected, but you don't need every fancy product you see on TV.

"Windex, Fantastic and paper towels are your basics," Huotari said. "Use a damp cloth for dusting — I never use polish. And Comet cleanser works great for the toilet."

A couple of specialty products she advises are a spray

cleaner to use right after each shower; and a Mr. Clean Magic Eraser.

"It's incredible; it can save having to paint. It takes off black marks, fingerprints, most anything on the walls. And they're pretty cheap, too."

A vacuum cleaner is a necessity. If one isn't donated, try to spring for a decent one. Canisters are better, giving you more power for your money, Huotari said. A broom and a dustpan finish off the cleaning supplies.

Window coverings should be inexpensive; they probably won't fit a future apartment. If there will be a TV in the bedroom, check out mounting devices, if allowed by management. They can save dresser space and don't cost a lot.

In the closet, you'll need hangers and a shoe organizer. They aren't expensive, said Huotari, and help keep clutter off the floor.

A "white board" for the refrigerator will help keep life organized. And Huotari suggested that a file cabinet is worth the cost and will help develop lifelong organizational habits.

"Get hanging files and manila folders," she said. "Set up the basic categories: bank records, credit card information, a folder for your company, insurance, health care, interests or hobbies, and vacation pamphlets are some that most people will need."

When mail or other paper comes into the house, make a decision on what to do with it. A bill-paying center in the kitchen helps enormously and doesn't require a big financial investment.

"You should keep bills there, and have stamps, return-address labels, extra envelopes, phone numbers, pens, notepads and a small shredder," Huotari said. "A shredder only costs about \$20 and you should sort mail and shred right away — touch each piece of mail only once, if possible."

Artwork may seem frivolous, but Huotari thinks it helps make an apartment cozier, more like home. "But go to a discount store and buy prints, not the real thing," she said. "Don't spend a lot of money."

"If you're going to spend a lot of money on anything, though, make it furniture. Good stuff, with proper care, can last a long, long time."

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