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Should you hire your own Marie Kondo to organize your home?

by [Grace Dickinson](#), Updated: February 5, 2019



If Netflix's *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* has you panicked about the disarray of your living space, take heart: You can start decluttering today, and you don't need to go at it alone. Scattered throughout the region are professional organizers for hire who will bring order to your home — sans the tell-all/see-all reality-TV exposure.

Is an organizer right for you? We talked to three of Philly's dozens of professionals about what they do, who their clients are, what their rates are like, and if Kondo's way is the only way.

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You may think professional organizers only tackle closets, kitchens, and kids' bedrooms, but they also take on more detailed tasks, like sifting through old hard drives and overflowing file cabinets. No project is too small — something as simple as creating a labeling system for a home office is common.

"It's like hiring a painter," explains veteran organizer Darla DeMorrow, owner of Wayne's Heart Work Organizing. "Sure, you could probably paint the house yourself, but you might feel more comfortable and get the job done a lot quicker if you hire a professional."

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Organizers keep clients accountable — forcing them to make time and mental space for tidying up. As Debbie Sokoli, 61, will tell you, there's no getting away with keeping multiples of anything once your hired organizer shows up.

"I have three kids, so I save things for three kids," says Sokoli, who recently used a professional organizer while renovating her Merion home of 28 years. "Ninety-five percent of the walls were being repainted, so piles of stuff were just everywhere, and I didn't know where to start. Having an organizer pushed me to realize my kids can buy their own pie pan when they get married, and their own baby clothes and their own books."

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Organizers work alongside their clients and aim to enable them to continue organizing on their own, like a personal trainer would. You might argue that organizers are part therapists, too — because, more often than not, decluttering requires letting go of emotional attachments as much as tossing out objects themselves.

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"A lot of people hold onto things just because it came from a loved one or elicits a certain memory," says Annie Kilbride, owner of Havertown organizing outfit Life Simplified.

When Kilbride works with clients, she asks about the memories each object holds. It helps her determine if an object warrants physical space inside a person's home — or if there's a neater way to preserve the memories.

"I'll often have people take photos of items that feel meaningful, and we'll make an album," Kilbride says. "Or, if they feel joy in being able to touch and hold certain items, we'll create something tangible, like a memory quilt."

“There’s no course in school about conscious consumerism,” DeMorrow says. “We discuss ways to be more mindful ... so that you don’t end up in this yo-yo pattern of purging and then rebuying and then purging and then rebuying.”



Spices labeled by professional organizer Darla DeMorrow in her client’s kitchen in Wayne.

What’s the cost (and the reward)?

While costs depend on an organizer’s experience level, professional organizers aren’t cheap. Even Christina Rosenbruch, owner of Bucks County’s SparkJoy.Space, describes her service as a last resort.

“I tell people to go the professional route when they’re completely frustrated with their space, can no longer function within in it in a way that’s not stressing them out, and have tried on their own to make changes but just aren’t making progress,” Rosenbruch says. “People get so overwhelmed that they don’t have the motivation to get started, and that’s when it’s going to be worth the investment.”

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Rosenbruch charges \$375 for a five-hour session. For \$1,687, customers get five sessions over 25 hours — which doesn't necessarily guarantee a complete reorganization, Rosenbruch notes. That depends on the size of the space and degree of disarray.

Kilbride agrees that the time required for each project is space-dependent. At Life Simplified, she charges an hourly rate of \$70 but also offers discounted packages, including 16 hours for \$1,000.

Some organizers charge by the project and won't give an estimate until they assess the space. For instance, DeMorrow charges \$350 (or \$495 for two professionals) for an initial home visit, which entails about a half-day of professional organizing. She strongly emphasizes that a project's degree of difficulty varies from house to house.

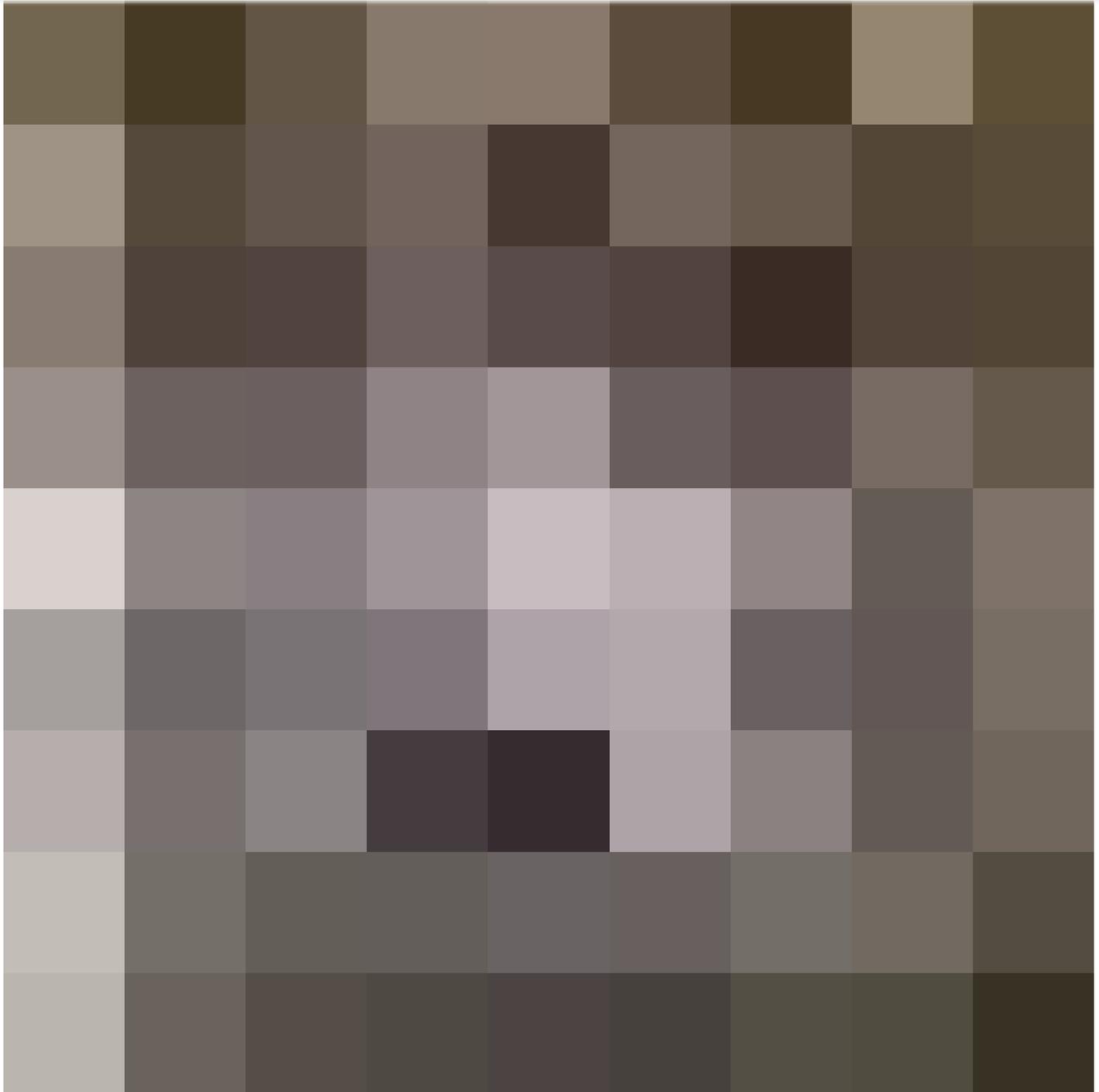
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To reorganize an entire room, you can expect to pay at least a hundred dollars, often more. For a whole house, the average is closer to \$1,000-plus. Project assessments are generally free and often entail sending photos of your space.

The National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals' website (napo.net) lets you plug in your zip code and pull up a list of professionals in your area; from there, you can do a little price shopping.

And while hiring an organizer is a step to a tidier space, sometimes that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"This process begins this mindfulness in other areas of your life, and you start questioning why you're doing the things you're doing," Rosenbruch says. "It's not unusual to get calls from clients six months after the process where they tell me they've changed careers, or sell their house, or get out of a bad relationship, or make some other big life change."



GRACE DICKINSON / STAFF

Allentown resident Shire Ketterer hired KonMari-certified consultant Christina Rosenbruch for a home office reorganization. Pictured is a before and after of the room.

Is 'Tidying Up' the only way?

If you do hire a professional organizer, don't expect every session to look like an episode of *Tidying Up*. The show's star and author of the best-selling 2014 book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, Kondo has a trademark strategy – literally.

Rosenbruch is one of two Philadelphia-based organizers certified in the KonMari Method. She and other KonMari-certified organizers straighten up by category rather than location. Start with clothes, move to books, papers, and so on. Sentimental items such as photos and

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It's easier to give away a T-shirt than it is a piece of furniture," she says. And it's easier to let go of a chair than an item that's sentimental to you."

Other professional organizers can be less austere in their methods.

"It's often too overwhelming for my clients to go grab items all throughout the house," Kilbride says. "We start by getting them comfortable in their main living spaces and then work towards organizing the peripherals. Sometimes we're just tackling one drawer at a time — you need to get rid of things at your own pace."

DeMorrow agrees, pointing out that Americans on average own much larger homes than those in other countries.

"Culturally, Kondo's used to working in much smaller spaces than my clients'," DeMorrow says. "It's not all about giving up stuff. If you have the space for something — like an extra spatula — that doesn't necessarily bring you joy but that you'll use, it's OK to keep it."

Kilbride has seen clients throw out everything at once, only to end up buying the same things months later.

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"When you're not ready yet to actually let go, it can end up being destructive" Kilbride says.

If you're feeling inspired to tidy up but don't want to shell out for a pro, they have plenty of advice for tackling projects on your own.



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