Vancouver-based DEKORA home-staging company shares tips on turning overstuffed quarters into a restful respite

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By Matthew Burrows

Just as car mechanics often drive beaters, de-cluttering experts often have a tale or two of their own about the state of their homes.

Case in point is John Carter, of Vancouver-based home-staging company DEKORA (www.dekora.com). His job is to help people improve their home's look – either for a potential sale or just for the owner's peace of mind – but he found he had a mountain of his own stored furnishings to deal with after returning from a three-year stint in San Francisco.

Friends had agreed to store the couple's stuff in their garage until their return, and Carter was preparing to move the mountain off to a paid facility. It suddenly dawned on him that he may be rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

"My wife and I went into the garage thinking we were going to have to pay $100 a month for storage," said Carter, born and raised in Vancouver and who has a background in film through his set design work.

"But we got ruthless and we went from half a garage full of stuff to six large Tupperware containers."

Six large Tupperware containers of…..?

"We had financial records from my old firm, family mementos, copies of newspaper clippings, old files, and clothes.

"It's just junk – stuff you just don't need. Like the old bow-and-arrow set from my grandfather. Yes it was nice, but we can live with out it."

The purge in his own affairs is a microcosm of what DEKORA does on a much grander scale, and with a house sale Carter says a clean, clutter-free environment can add thousands to the property sale price.

"In San Francisco and the whole Bay Area, almost every home has been staged – not all of them need it – and for almost every listing a stager comes in and stages it to some extent," said Carter. "So it's really common and prevalent down there and it's becoming that way here too."

Carter is not all business, and appreciates that not everyone is in the homeowner bracket and ready to pay DEKORA $95 and hour for "straight de-cluttering."

But he is adamant that a crisp, clean environment cuts across all social and financial barriers when it comes to making a show suite out of your everyday life.

"The big issue is time," he said. "You come home, you've been working hard and you've got work papers and they start piling up. My wife and I force ourselves every few weeks to take a Saturday and just purge through it all."

And the benefits can be invigorating.

"People gravitate towards that Zen garden type feel – that simplicity – where it's just a bed and a cup and a stone garden.

"Living in that kind of environment clears your mind and it's that which people are drawn to. It reflects people's mental health as well. If you're living in a beautifully-organized simple space, emotionally and spiritually you feel better."

So, even if you're not selling your home, and even if you're strapped for cash and short on time, Carter recommends starting in on the junk piles in earnest.

"I used 1-800-GOT-JUNK the other days," adds Carter, with pride in his voice. "But even if you can't get to it all, you can get someone to come in for an hour or so. For $150 it's worth it. If you look at the cost of renting a storage space over a year (around $1,200), if you de-clutter that cost is gone."