

lehigh valley style

The Magazine the Valley Lives For

hello,
Spring!

Fresh Home
Ideas from
Local Pros

A Custom
Outdoor
Retreat in
Saucon
Valley

Meet Vanessa
Ungvarsky, owner
& creator of
Taylor Made Polish

+2 Accomplished
Senior
Sensations



March 2018

march

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Owner and creator of Taylor Made Polish, Vanessa Ungvarsky, shot by Alexandra Whitney.

Valley native and professional organizer, Jeffrey Phillip, pg. 45



Jeffrey Phillip

Professional Organizer and
Interior Designer

By Amy Unger | Photography by Andrew Tomasino

Whether a cluttered closet is driving you batty, an overstocked kitchen has you flummoxed or your entire home is crying out for a redo, Jeffrey Phillip can help. Although he's more inclined to suit up in a freshly pressed Oxford shirt than a red cape and tights, this organization expert and master of domesticity has saved many damsels (and dudes) in distress when it comes to transforming dysfunctional spaces into workable and livable places. "I try to fix and make things better all the time," he says.

INSIGHT

Although he's only in his mid-thirties, Phillip has been perfecting the art of efficiency for decades. In fact, you could say he landed his first "client" when he was just a first grader at Bushkill Elementary School in Nazareth. "I ended up volunteering to stay and help [my teacher] organize her classroom at the end of the school year," Phillip recalls. It wasn't merely a one-time gig, either. Phillip says he continued to volunteer his services in the years that followed. And his love for all things orderly must have been contagious; a group of friends joined in and it became a team effort. "It's not the normal thing that kids do," Phillip says with a laugh.

And, to be fair, not all of his friends were so appreciative of his know-how. Phillip recalls a playdate with a friend when he was seven or eight years old in which he took all of the friend's toys out of the closet. "Then I told him, 'This is how you put them back,'" Phillip says. "His mom was thrilled. He was not." Phillip's own mother was also thrilled about her son's proclivity for design and space management. He recalls helping her plot out ways to rearrange the furniture in the family home. He also took a crack at organizing his parents' collection of VHS tapes.

"I ended up volunteering to stay and help [my teacher] organize her classroom at the end of the school year."

After graduating from Nazareth Area High School, Phillip moved to New York City to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology, where he studied the business side of fashion, as well as advertising and marketing. With a degree in hand, he entered the corporate world. But he had a nagging feeling that something was missing. "I asked myself, 'What do I want to do?'" And it always came back to design and organization," he says. But he wasn't sure how to convert his passion into a career that paid dividends. As Phillip recalls, HGTV was just coming into its own. Television shows about design and organization were just starting to trickle into the mainstream. Says Phillip, "I saw this and thought, 'You can actually do this for a living?'" He started small, spearheading projects on the side for family and friends, who then would refer him to friends and associates of their own. He placed an ad on Craigslist to widen his circle of clients. "At that

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point, I was doing whatever I could to put myself out there," Phillip recalls. He took the plunge and created his own company in 2008, but he was afraid to completely cut the cord to corporate America, and the steady income that came with it. "I vacillated back and forth so much," he says.

Within two years, he felt confident enough to quit his corporate job and devote his energies to his business full-time. And it seems the choice he made after so much introspection and soul-searching was the right one. Less than a decade after he took the plunge, the resume he's built in the career he loves is an impressive one. Phillip has been invited to share his advice on *Good Morning America*, *The Dr. Oz Show* and lifestyle show *The Better Show*. He made multiple appearances on Katie Couric's daytime talk show during its two-year run, tackling both design and organizational projects. During one memorable segment, he reworked her bathroom—a task that proved to be quite daunting. Couric was the first to admit she has a clutter problem. "She kept everything," says Phillip. "It was a tiny bathroom. The amount of stuff that came out of it was insane." Multiple toothbrushes, expired medication and a mountain of old and unused beauty products were among the items culled from the heap and dumped in front of the studio audience. Luckily, Couric was a good sport about the whole process. She's referred to Phillip as her "declutter guru," and told her audience, with a big grin, "Everyone needs a Jeffrey in their life!"

Whether the person in need of his know-how is an A-lister or not, Phillip says he prides himself on providing a custom solution for each and every one of his clients. "I've always been someone who's been a relationship person," he says. For



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that reason, he doesn't parcel out the work to staff members or associates. While he'll rely on freelancers to help him with some of his bigger projects, he carries the vast majority of the workload on his own shoulders. "It's very personal work," he says. "You see things and talk about things that sometimes their best friend doesn't see." He's referring to the tokens, trinkets and sometimes tacky yet sentimental objects buried in closets, and pushed into the back corner of drawers, that emerge during the decluttering phase of the process. Phillip preaches purging as one of the key tenets of organization. "When you unload everything from a space and you start to stare at it, it has a much different impact than when you're staring at it stuffed in the space," he says.

Phillip says one of the biggest misconceptions about his job is that living in cramped quarters is a prerequisite for employing his services. "People think, 'Oh, you live in the city, space is important.' It's not just a small-space thing," he explains. While he does a lot of his work in the New York City area, his client list now reaches into Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Delaware.

In fact, sometimes Phillip is called into action before the client even settles into his or her new digs. "There are times when someone moves into a house and I've unpacked almost every single item and put it away," he says. It's taxing work that can translate into 14-hour days, but Phillip says the resolution always justifies the time investment. "The response at the end of a project is really fulfilling."

Even those who never personally employ Phillip can still benefit from his tips and tricks, thanks to his generous social media offerings. His YouTube channel features dozens of quick, easy-to-digest videos that tackle everything from how to store and dispose of old paint to how to take the stress and chaos out of moving day. A series he's dubbed #TossItTuesday will aid the overly attached in cutting the cord with common household items that are often neglected or no longer needed, like fad exercise equipment, chipped dinnerware and (somewhat ironically) storage containers. Phillip even offers a tour of his own New York City apartment, so the organizationally challenged can see the master at work.

Regardless of the size and scope of the project, Phillip says there's a common denominator to his handiwork that keeps him engaged. "The thing I love about it is also the hardest thing about it—trying to figure out the puzzle," he says. "When you're in the thick of it, you have overwhelming moments when you're surrounded. You have to make it all fit and look good in the process."

jeffreyphillip.com 