



The Closet Lady

Bubbling fountains and soothing spa background music invite customers to relax and look around as they enter the showroom of Creative Closets, Ltd. Creative Closet's dog and mascot, Diesel, wanders casually around the studio, amicably greeting potential clients. The tranquil atmosphere is meant to reflect one of the philosophies of Ellyn Gellar-Elstein, president of the company also known as "The Closet Lady:" that proper organization and well-designed storage spaces can decrease the everyday stresses that make life difficult. In fact, her ultimate goal is to prevent dysfunctional, disorganized spaces in the bedroom, kitchen, office, garage and laundry room from becoming points of stress. In all that she does, the Closet Lady shows her understanding of people's specific needs and commitment to creating efficient comfortable environments in which to live and work.

Precision and Versatility

The Closet Lady's work is far from generic. By focusing on individuals' specific needs and traits, she is able to create specialized custom-designed storage spaces that help even the messiest people stay on top of their stuff. In her initial consultation, Gellar-Elstein visits the client at home to measure and give a cost estimate. Measurements like counting the number of shoes, pieces of jewelry and bottles of wine ensure that the newly-designed space will be just what the client needs.

Special needs are also taken into account. Handicapped people and those in assisted living are specific niche markets that Gellar-Elstein has pursued. Her 10-year nursing career before Creative Closets helps Gellar-Elstein know how to deal with people's physical pain. Now, as the Closet Lady, she has the opportunity to ease a different kind of pain by providing her clients with accessible organization and peace of mind.



Diesel and Gellar-Elstein welcome clients to the showroom.

Gellar-Elstein's greatest strength is her ability to fit all of her clients' different budgets, temperaments, preferences for materials and special circumstances. "There's nothing we don't do," she says. Unique among storage space designers is her versatility in using different materials for closet structures. Materials range from wire, laminate and wood grain laminate, to many different kinds of hard wood. Her meticulous attention to detail ensures that existing structures in the house are used to their fullest potential. Closets are designed to match the wood and even carved designs of existing furniture. "We're much more detail-oriented than cabinet makers," says Gellar-Elstein.

Versatility in working with budgets is another important aspect of the Closet Lady's work. The initial consultation, which involves a cost estimate, is free. From there, the client is able to determine what price range will fit his or her need. "If I'm not meeting that need, I'm not taking care of them," says Gellar-Elstein. She is able to modify both the design and type of material in order to accommodate any kind of budget. She also is not limited by the size of the space to be redesigned. "No space is too large or too small," says Gellar-Elstein. "I just want to help."

Knowing how to custom design a closet, however, takes more than just counting shoes or determining a budget. Gellar-Elstein's policy is not to add any drawer or shelf without the knowledge that it will be used for a specific purpose. This involves getting to know the client's temperament and habits. One of the most important aspects of recreating a closet is making the design easy to use and to keep organized. Gellar-Elstein will design a neat person's closet differently than a messy person's simply because they will use their spaces differently.

Beyond Design

Since most of Gellar-Elstein's work—about 70 percent, in fact— involves retro-fitting designs into existing rooms, teaching her clients how to get organized and stay organized is a huge part of each project. Gellar-Elstein conducts seminars for moms, children and husbands on strategies for keeping organization a priority in the home. And she is full of ideas and suggestions on the best methods to accomplish this organization.

Take the mud closet, for example. This is where the whole family throws coats, shoes, hats, gloves and scarves into one place. According to Gellar-Elstein, it is also the most important closet of the whole house. If things are not easily accessible in the mud closet, precious time is lost trying to find belongings, adding stress to the whole family's comings and goings. Gellar-Elstein's strategy is to create individual spaces for each person of the family within the closet. Drawers are stacked, from the youngest child at the bottom, to the oldest on top. Instead of separating belongings into hats, gloves and scarves, each person is responsible for all of their possessions. "This helps Mom's job be less difficult," says Gellar-Elstein.



Mud closets keep families organized.

Gellar-Elstein also emphasizes the importance of good design in children's closets. She says people who are frustrated with their kids' inability to keep their rooms neat usually have misguided expectations. She questions how kids can be expected to stay organized when closet shelves and clothes bars are too high for their reach. When she designs kids' closets, Gellar-Elstein always uses lower bars and adjustable shelves to make tidiness possible for even the smallest child. The children themselves are participants in the designs of their own spaces. Gellar-Elstein refers to the kids' own drawings of what they want their closet to look like when she begins the designing process.

Another common problem for those in need of the Closet Lady's

services is extreme clutter. Before Gellar-Elstein can begin designing shelves, drawers and slots to create a closet, the existing space must be completely empty. For those who struggle with accumulating junk, this task can be an intimidating challenge. However, even for the worst clutter cases, Gellar-Elstein has helpful suggestions and reassurances. Her first rule is that cleaning up for the Closet Lady's visit is prohibited. Without seeing the mess as it really is, Gellar-Elstein cannot do her job of diagnosing and solving the problem. To those who are embarrassed about their clutter, Gellar-Elstein promises, "I am sworn to secrecy." In advising clients on how to get started, Gellar-Elstein says, "I tell them not to do it in one day." In fact, a scheduled clean-up of 15 minutes per day is often enough to get the job done without being overwhelming or discouraging. Gellar-Elstein's expertise goes beyond knowing how to redesign closets—she also acts as motivation and encouragement for those who need her help.

Strong Commitment and Staff

Much of Gellar-Elstein's ability to pay attention to every detail of her clients' needs comes from her strong group of employees. In fact, she sees them as a part of her team, not just staff. It is their unified commitment to the client that makes Creative Closets stand out as a business. "We work with each client as if they were our only client," says Gellar-Elstein, highlighting her business' attention to individual needs. Having such a strong team of employees makes it easier to overcome one of Gellar-Elstein's biggest challenges which is: "To show people how detail-oriented we are and how important that is." Successful organization depends on showing clients a new way of thinking and allowing them to picture how their new closet will work. Organized spaces must be designed so that everything has its proper place. Gellar-Elstein's job is to provide people with customized, well-designed space and then give them a map on how to use it. For those who are unsure of where to begin or how to deal with overwhelming disorganization, the first step is clear: ask the Closet Lady.

Creative Closet Design Studio is located at 7248 Penn Dr., in Allentown, Pa. For more information, please call 610-433-0933, or 1-800-222-4464, or visit creativeclosets.com.