

Intention + Attention = Happy, Healthy Homes

By Elizabeth Barbour

When there is harmony in the house, there will be peace in the world.

--- Chinese Proverb

Have you ever visited a home where you immediately felt welcome and comfortable? You know the kind. The lights twinkle, conversation flows smoothly and the energy just feels good. Healthy and prosperous homes are usually filled with love and respect as the inhabitants care for one another, their possessions and their space with both intention and attention. To create harmony in your home or living space, follow these five simple steps for some powerful and lasting results.

1. **Surround yourself with inspiring things.** Colors can have psychological and physiological impacts on your life. Family heirlooms can help you feel connected to your ancestors. Big windows and lots of light can put you in tune with nature. Think about your environment with intention and make subtle changes that can have big impact. “Think about places where you feel the happiest and most relaxed, perhaps where you’ve traveled,” says Asheville based interior designer, Nathalie Gray, owner of Vie de la Maison. “Consider ways where you can use color, fabric and texture to evoke that feeling at home. For example, if you love the beach, consider decorating your home with sand and linen toned fabrics, dark chocolate brown accents (found in a lot of exotic seashells), pinks and sea blue.” Consider what brings you joy – photos of your children, artwork from a foreign land, the color purple – and be sure to incorporate them in the decorating scheme of your home.
2. **Reduce clutter by implementing systems.** Life happens. Between junk mail, the kids’ muddy soccer cleats, the home office and pet toys, homes can get a little chaotic. Put systems in place like a coat rack by the door, a dish for everyone to collect their keys and cell phones, a folder filing system for bills and a hook to keep Fido’s leash convenient. An easy way to figure out what systems you need is to do a quick inventory of your home. Walk around your home with a sheet of paper and catalog the “hot spots”, the areas where there is either a mess or the energy feels chaotic. After you’ve made your list, choose the top area that feels like it could use the most attention and analyze it. Why are things out of place here? What kind of system could we implement to make the flow better? You can do this alone but having an objective perspective from a friend or professional organizer or interior designer can certainly expedite the process. After you’ve implemented a system or two, chances are, you’ll feel some relief and be motivated to go to item number two on your list!
3. **Create mini-sanctuaries within your home.** It can be hard to keep all of the rooms of your home clean and tidy all of the time. But with some conscious choices and clear boundaries, you can create pockets in your home that feel like

sacred space. For example, if you like to meditate, create a meditation room or a meditation corner. Include special pillows, a prayer shawl, candle, icons – anything that supports you in breathing easy. Make bedrooms food, work and noise-free zones. Televisions, computers and phones don't help us to sleep. Instead, snuggle with a pet or loved one, listen to classical music or read an inspiring book before you crawl into bed. Or try keeping just one room in your house always neat and tidy. Doesn't it feel great to walk into a room that is clutter free? Your eyes have enough time to rest on pretty artwork, admire playful throw pillows or cherish your grandmother's silver. Reduce the amount of "stuff" you have and you'll feel liberated.

3. **Establish mealtimes as sacred.** Food is fuel for our bodies and eating in a relaxed environment can greatly enhance our digestion and our satisfaction with the meal experience. Sharing meals with a loved one can make a positive impact on the overall health of your home's inhabitants. Whitney Williams, an acupuncturist and owner of Source in Black Mountain, is a single mom. She works while her daughter, Hailey, is in school, but most evenings they make dinner time special time. Hailey gets to tell her Mom all about her day and can look forward to that intimate one-on-one time together. "Sometimes it's really hard to shop, cook and serve healthy meals when I've got a business and home to run by myself. But it's worth it to go the extra mile to ensure that our dinners are sacred. We get to bond as mother and daughter and I wouldn't trade that for the world," says Williams.
4. **Make family connection and communication priority number one.** Whether you're single and have time with your pets or friends or roommates, or whether you're partnered or have children, establishing time every day and every week for connection is critical to a happy home. One easy solution is to reduce television viewing time. "When a large television is sitting out in the middle of the family room, it loudly beckons family members to sit and watch it" says Gray. "Drape the television with a beautiful cloth or store it in a cabinet, and watch the TV usage in your home drop dramatically." Also, try adding in a new activity that all family members will enjoy. Scheduling a "game night" with your family or with friends and neighbors is a great way to bring joy and laughter into your home and it's a great way to create intentional community!
5. **Choose consciously for a healthy home.** Simple things like turning off the lights when you're not in a room, recycling as much as you can, using natural cleaning products or planting a garden are easy ways to improve the overall health of your home. You can choose to buy energy saving lighting and appliances, put extra insulation in your home or start a compost pile in your back yard. If you have children, it's never too early to educate them about earth's precious resources and how we can be the best possible stewards of what we have. Involving them in seemingly small decisions about gardening or composting or recycling can make a big impression on young minds. You'll instill important values in them that will benefit later generations.

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