

A well-stocked home provides comfort

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It takes years to accumulate the tools, appliances, accessories and furnishings that make home life convenient and enjoyable. I've observed the different levels of efficiency of my own homes from my days as a new housewife, to new mom, to business woman, to my current state of working empty nester.

Since I entertain quite a bit and host several family holidays throughout the year, I keep a lot of home related products on hand, both decorative and functional.

When you're first starting out, you obviously need a lot of basics: furniture, dinnerware, mixing bowls and measuring cups, serving platters, a blender, a toaster, towels, sheets, prep knives, cookware, coffee maker, and canisters. But as time goes on you want more specialized conveniences like a great espresso machine, a Kitchen Aid, a roasting pan and rack, a large stock pot, a bread bowl, and a Cuisinart food processor. I remember years ago receiving a Kitchen Aid for Mother's Day from my husband. I felt I'd arrived. I felt like Donna Reed or Mrs. Cleaver, although a decidedly more liberated version.

Having remarried recently after being widowed for five years, I've been pondering the things a couple accumulates over the course of their marriage, to make their house a "well-stocked home."

These are the things I've been accumulating over the course of 30 years of homemaking. I hope

you find it helpful whether you're building your own nest, or helping someone in an effort to build theirs. Aside from the obvious starter furnishings like a dining set, a bed, dressers, sofa, end tables, lamps, and a couple armchairs the well-stocked home can also utilize many other items that add beauty, function and comfort to everyday home life.

The master bedroom

Start with the best quality mattress and boxspring you can afford. Sleep is the ultimate luxury, and the better quality the mattress, the better quality sleep you will get. You won't regret it. The basics of bedding are a down comforter (down is preferable because it's light weight and has great insulation), a duvet (a protective cover for your comforter to keep it clean since down comforters are not washable), two firm polyester pillows (for support for sitting up or reading in bed), and two down pillows for sleeping. If you have allergies to down, there are synthetic alternatives available. For aesthetics you can add two down filled decorative throw pillows. I like the rectangular ones because they not only look nice, but I can also use them for extra support to my lower back. A massive amount of pillows on the bed is inconvenient and passé. I never liked that look anyway. Too frou frou.

A cashmere or ultra-soft throw is nice for throwing along the foot of the bed in case your feet get cold. I love my electric blanket. I don't keep it turned on while I sleep but it's so, so lovely crawling into a preheated bed in the win-

ter. Sheets with high thread count have the most sensual comfort. The highest thread count available is 400, and higher thread counts usually cost more. Egyptian cotton is prized for its softness. As well, natural fibers are easier to keep stain free. I keep my bed sheets extra white with a little Clorox or Borax, both of which you add to your usual detergent every wash.

Each person needs a night stand and individual lamp. I have mine set up with these great dimmers I found at IKEA. You plug the dimmer into the wall and plug the lamp into the dimmer. Since my night stands are slipcovered, there's no storage. Instead, I have a big basket next to the bed that holds my current reading materials, dental floss, extra prescription glasses, and a box of Kleenex.

I love the look of white sheets, a white duvet, a pair of white pillow shams and color coordinated custom designer bed skirt and pillows. All the white has a relaxing, spa like appeal. I also like matching my bed skirt and armchair slipcover and coordinating it with my curtains and decorative throw pillows.

The guest room

I still believe in doing single beds in the guest room. Guest rooms are pretty simple. You do need a night stand and a lamp and, if budget allows, it's nice to provide the same luxuries you do for yourself such as high quality sheets, one firm pillow and one down pillow for sleeping per bed, an electric blanket, a down comforter, and a duvet. I also provide

an individual oil heater and oscillating fan.

Shiree's Cheat Sheet

Dining and entertaining: Keep one dresser in the house open for dining and entertaining items like tablecloths, napkins, napkin rings, formal silver, place cards, and an extra supply of candles like votives, pillars and tapers.

Kitchen: Only put in your kitchen the items you can easily store. If you don't have room for a Kitchen Aid, chances are wherever you store it, it will be too inconvenient to pull it out and it will go unused.

Some superfluous appliances I've accumulated over the years that I've really enjoyed are my Cuisinart ice cream and yogurt maker, my espresso machine, and my electric can opener. If you're still struggling along with a manual can opener, it's time to "catch up" on your modern conveniences!

Library: If budget allows, seriously consider investing in your library at a young age. It takes awhile to build, but I've never regretted having my own library of fiction, biographies, business books, cookbooks and design books. Built-in bookshelves appreciate the value of your home.

Investment pieces: As time goes by, our means hopefully increase. Art, rugs and antiques are big investment pieces and it's a good plan to call upon a trusted expert who specializes in them to help you with details like aesthetics, budget and appreciation.