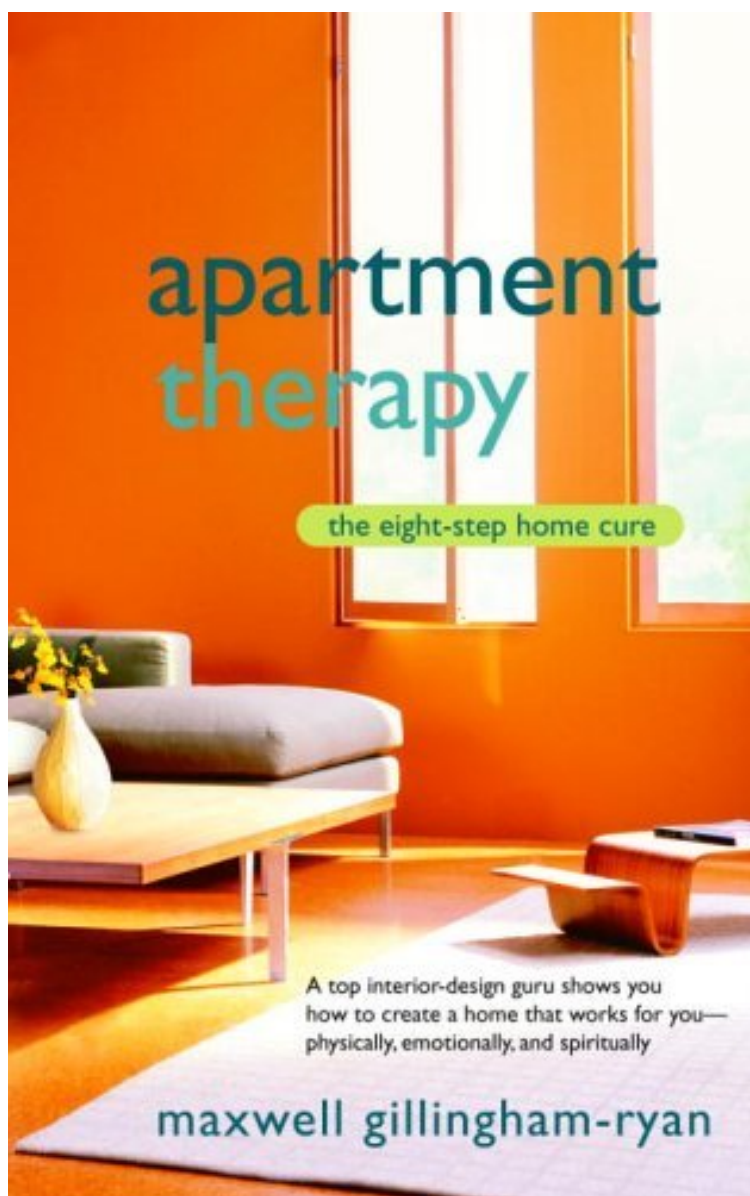


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# Apartment Therapy: The Eight-Step Home Cure



*Par Maxwell Ryan*

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom not enough space and too many things to not knowing what color to paint the living room walls, many of us struggle with our homes. Now Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan, frequent makeover expert on HGTVs Mission: Organization and Small Spaces, Big Style, shares the do-it-yourself strategies that have enabled his clients and fans to transform their apartments into well-organized, beautiful places that suit their style and budget. Week by week, Apartment Therapy will guide you to treat common problems,

eliminate clutter, and revamp even the tiniest space. Here is an eight-step process that includes: A therapeutic questionnaire to help you get in touch with your personal taste and diagnose your homes physical, emotional, and energy flow issues A prescription with recommendations for each room based on your needs and lifestyle including tips on how to use color, lighting, and accessories A treatment plan, including regular maintenance schedules to ensure the ongoing health of your space Illustrations of floor plans and decorative examples that allow you to visualize concepts before you begin With surprising ease and without elaborate professional help, Apartment Therapy will help you clear a path through disorder and indecision to reveal a home you'll love. From the Trade Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One Is Your Home Healthy? In the first few years that I took on clients, I was surprised by the number of people who were miserable in their homes.

I wondered what was going on to cause so much distress. As I visited more houses and apartments, and began to read books on shelter style and home improvement, I soon realized that most American home dwellers tuning in to home improvement are not simply lacking in style or needing to declutter; they are dealing with sick homes. Despite good intentions, Americans have not only lost touch with how to create and maintain a healthy home, they have created new diseases such as clutter, disposophobia (the fear of letting go of things), and what I call movie theater syndrome and bowling alley syndrome. Like another national health issue, obesity, most of our household issues stem from the fact that we consume too much and work off too little. As you read this book, I want you to broaden the concept of home and apply to it the same principles we apply to our own bodies. Like the body, the home should be thought of as a living organism. For starters, healthy homes are homes that consume carefully and get regular exercise. After health is established, style and decoration come much more easily and can be seen as natural finishing touches. In fact, style and decoration are extensions of a healthy home. You can't have one without the other. Hypernesting Today, Americans spend more money on home improvement than ever before. A whopping twenty-five million Americans took on a home improvement project in 2005, spending \$150 billion (2 percent of our GNP). Judging from television shows such as Trading Spaces, Design on a Dime, and This Old House, Americans can't seem to get enough. And the demand crosses gender lines: shows such as the tremendously popular Queer Eye for the Straight Guy attract male and female viewers alike, while Debbie Travis's Facelift on both Oxygen and HGTV attracts a growing number of female homeowners wanting to DIY (do it yourself). Each year brings new magazines as well. The old-school Architectural Digest has been pushed aside by flashier offerings such as Metropolitan Home and Elle Dcor, and they are now being challenged by newcomers with a focus on shopping and affordability, such as Domino, Budget Living, and Bargain Style. All in all, more Americans than ever are fixing up their homes and doing the work themselves. In all of this they are trying to retrieve the feeling of home they have lost. But despite the amount of activity and money spent, most of these efforts end in dissatisfaction, because they only treat the symptoms they don't provide a cure. In place of creating a healthy home, we are trying to buy solutions and cram too much into our homes. What was modestly termed cocooning in the 1970s by trend-spotters who saw us spending more recreational time at home has become Hypernesting. Instead of asking ourselves what would really make our home work better, we usually jump to the conclusion that there must be something we can buy to solve our homes challenges a flatter television screen, a closet organizing system, or color-coded photo albums. But when we take something new into our home, we rarely let go of something else. This is how our home gains weight, grows unhealthy, and begins to nag at us. Not only have we created some new diseases, we've even created new doctors to treat our problem. Professional organizers and home disaster specialists have sprung up only recently, and their job is to help us sort and manage our extra weight. Most of us aren't in need of more organizing; we need to manage our consumption, let go of our stuff, and learn how to restore life to our homes. I often ask my clients what they imagine their apartment would say to them if it could speak.

Samantha, a stockbroker, told me that her home would say, Can't she see that I am dying? Why doesn't she do anything to save me? As she said this, we were sitting in a badly lit, cluttered, unfinished room.

Embarrassed, Samantha said that she didn't know where to begin. It was one of the best things I had ever heard a client say. Besides being completely honest, I told her, in using the word begin she'd hit upon the main issue. The solution was not about eliminating clutter or lightening a room; it was about beginning to work with her home. I told her that I could show her where to begin. It might feel challenging at first, but her home would love her for it. No two beginnings are the same. We have different homes and our problems are personal. Even so, I have found that there are two general starting points that correspond to two general types of people. As you think about getting started on your house project, give some thought to which of the two types cool or warm best describes your approach to your living environment. Warm and Cool People As

many cool people as there are in the world, there are just as many warm people. One is not better or worse, more desirable or less desirable. They are simply different. You typically hear about warm people. These are the ones who worry about clutter and organizing and who tend to obsess much more about their homes. They are often gregarious, friendly, and generous. Warm people are good hosts but are bad with cleaning and clutter. They are challenged by excessiveness and attachment to people and things. Is this you? Cool people use their homes less and often find them an inconvenience. They want them to be comfortable but keep them as low-maintenance as possible. Efficient by nature, cool people are often sharp, smart, and independent. Cool people are good guests, but they are not great at making things comfortable. Cool people are great at avoiding clutter. At home, they are not do-it-yourselfers, and they feel clumsy. They are challenged by not feeling attached enough to people and things. Is this you?

**Cool People: Diana** During a preliminary interview on the phone, Diana said, My apartment makes me sad. She also said her apartment felt cold and that she wished it was warm and inviting, especially after a long days work. She said that she wasnt sure whether she needed therapy or her apartment needed work, so Apartment Therapy seemed like the perfect solution to her. Two days after our conversation, I met Diana at her apartment for our first appointment. An attractive professional in her late twenties, she lived in a beautiful one-bedroom apartment in the West Village. Upon opening her door to me, Diana immediately apologized for her apartments messiness. Was it messy? Not really. Was it cold? A bit. Was she insecure about her home? Yes. She began rattling off a long list of things she thought I should know about her apartment. The furniture all came from her mothers house and had sentimental value. She knew that she needed to paint. She never cooked. Should the large print be hung in the living room? she asked, looking at me with a worried expression. I couldnt get a word in edgewise. How do we do this? she finally exclaimed, looking around her apartment with her hands up in the air. I was standing in an apartment three times the size of my own 250-square-foot apartment. It was prewar with low ceilings, original molding, and wood floors. There were large windows on two sides with views south and west. She even had a view of the Hudson River. To me, it had all the hallmarks of a stunning apartment. I told her that I usually begin with a tour. I asked her to take me through the apartment, telling me everything that she liked and disliked about it, one room at a time. Well, that wont take long. It is very small, she replied. What I saw as I walked through the apartment confirmed what I had suspected from our initial conversation. Diana was a cool person, and the hallmark of this was that she had a beautiful apartment that was barely lived in. It was sparsely furnished and badly lit, the windows were bare, and there was no food in the kitchen aside from mineral water, a gift box of champagne, and some expired vitamins.

As I walked around the room, I put my hand on the walls and was surprised to feel how cold they were. They could only get cold from the air outside. I asked her if she ever left her windows open. Oh, yes, I like to keep the windows open when I smoke and then when I am out, because I hate the smell that the cigarettes leave. With a continual chill in the walls, the apartment would always feel cold long after the air in each room heated up. Among other things, we needed to solve Dianas guilty feelings about smoking at home without freezing out her apartment. A good air purifier would get rid of the smell and would relieve her anxiety. I asked her to put her own hand on the wall to feel its chill. She too was surprised by its iciness. Were going to figure out a way to close your windows and warm these walls, I told her. This is where we are going to begin.

**Warm People: Carl and Julia** Carl and Julia used their apartment a lot. Carl was self-employed and often worked from home, a place he loved. Julia worked in an office but liked coming home in the evening. They had filled their home with beautiful books, artwork, and antiques, each with its own sentimental story. Friends and family came over often because their home was cheery and inviting. So what was the problem? Julia wanted it to feel more relaxing; Carl wanted to find a way to arrange his office. At first, the problems seemed very general. But there was a nagging feeling that they couldnt quite pinpoint. When pressed, Julia admitted that she didnt feel in control of their home and said that Carls office had taken over. He acknowledged that the apartment had gotten a little cluttered, and together they wished it were calmer and more organized. With good files, he could pack up his office each night. On the tour, I found much more. Next to the bed was a tall pile of magazines stretching back several months, and days worth of water glasses. There were objects under the couch that had been missing for months. They admitted that they should hire a cleaning person, but they just hadnt gotten around to it. Pulling up their mattress to reveal the floor under their bed, I found a fleet of dust bunnies that looked like they could crawl. Carl had never seen these before. Julia had and was embarrassed. Although we had discussed other problems, in every room I could see that cleanliness or lack of it was a key issue. While it wasnt out of control and things looked good, the growing dust and clutter of a heavily used home underlined every concern they had mentioned in the

interview. Out of sight but hardly out of mind, the disarray explained the agitation expressed in everything they had said. As we exited the bedroom, I asked them where their vacuum was. In the hall closet, I think, Carl replied. Regardless of the need for files, I told them, a deep cleaning was where we would begin.

Whichever type you identify with, the cure is balance. Whether warm or cool, you never want to change your basic temperament. It is who you are and it contains your strengths. Therefore, warm people achieve balance by weeding, since they have too much growing. Small things like cleaning out a closet, canceling a magazine subscription, or taking a load of clothes to the Salvation Army provide balance. Cool people achieve it by watering and feeding, since they don't have enough growing. Their small tasks are buying flowers each week for the kitchen table, hanging curtains, and inviting a few friends over for a drink now and then. Both types should start slowly a little bit goes a long way. I am a warm person. I learned this more than ten years ago when Marre, my next-door neighbor, walked into my first apartment in New York City's Little Italy and told me I had too much stuff. Knowing she was a furniture designer, I had invited her over to show off some new shelves I had built. Instead of being impressed with my shelves, she said, Why do you have so many things in your apartment? I was embarrassed. In my view, her apartment was minimal and Spartan. I felt that she just didn't understand me. I told her that I didn't have too much, that I had everything I needed and it was all carefully arranged. My apartment resembled a ship where everything was tucked into place. You have no empty space, she pointed out. I can tell that when you do have an empty space, you fill it. Why? This was true. I considered any open space an opportunity for inserting something useful. I had built shelves in an old doorway, created a pulley system for my computer screen that lifted it up to the ceiling, and managed to insert a large drafting table into one corner, which I used as my second desk. I was very good at finding a use for any space. Why don't you take some things out and open up the space? It would look much better if you did. What? Take something out? I thought this would be a death blow. Everything I owned was a prized possession. I had long considered my use of space an achievement and liked how everything worked perfectly. But I was forced to reconsider. Marre's apartment, despite its severity, had a calmness and openness to it that my apartment lacked. Her apartment was smaller and yet it felt bigger. It was comfortable to sit in Marre's kitchen, and people naturally gravitated to her apartment to talk. She was right. My apartment wasn't carefully arranged, it was packed. There was no breathing room. It may have seemed functional, but it was crowded and required a lot of attention. My life at the time was the same. I was struggling to write a master's thesis, feeling no momentum or excitement about it, and my relationship with my girlfriend was languishing. Working on my apartment seemed, on the surface, to be a healthy form of procrastination, but after considering Marre's comments, I started to see all of this activity as a big, warm security blanket. My home was my protection, my pacifier, and it was doing a good job. My life lacked movement and energy. With Marre's words, something clicked/ I began to experiment with removing objects from my apartment. I got rid of a chair. I took out the drafting table. I threw out a pile of old, mismatched dishes and mugs. What began as a trickle turned into a torrent, and over the next few months I emptied half of my apartment. As I did this my work habits changed, and the energy that I had previously put into creating and maintaining my home redirected itself into my work. I finished my thesis feeling good about it. Soon after, my relationship came to an amicable end, and we were both relieved. Why Therapy?

Most people who are dissatisfied with their homes don't realize where the problems really lie. As in my experience with my old apartment in Little Italy, it is very hard to get perspective on problems that are right under your nose. Homes are tremendously personal spaces that don't lend themselves easily to clear vision. This is why I refer to my work as Apartment Therapy: when you work on your home, you are working on yourself, and when you change your home, you are changing yourself. But be prepared! There is a reason why your apartment is the way it is. The home you live in contains a lot more than your belongings; it contains old energy and emotions that will be stirred up, which may surprise you if you are not prepared. One client, Amelia, delved into a drawer of photographs that had never been organized and found pictures of her old boyfriend, with whom she had had a painful breakup. With the tears and self-doubt that flooded the room for the next two hours, I was sure our project was over. Opening this box at that particular time in the project was a mistake. I have since learned not only to prepare clients for bumps like this, but also how to avoid the worst pitfalls. One way to be successful is to know what to expect. Whether you are a warm or cool person, if you are unhappy with your home it is usually because the energy inside is blocked. When you go about opening it up, there will be a period where all of this stuck energy loosens and flows, stirring up all kinds of emotions. This can be highly unpleasant. You may find yourself thinking, I can't do this/ I am making things worse, or This is going to be too expensive, and I don't deserve it. Then there is the urge for flight:

This is too much work; it would be easier just to move. Don't listen to any of it! With the right coaching, the lethargy that surrounds this type of home improvement gives way to excitement and momentum. Big change is not impossible. It just takes patience.

Story: Letting Go of the Past, Embracing the Future Fifteen years ago my aunt Eleanor, at the age of sixty-five, told us she was preparing for her death. Hold on! I thought at the time. What is this morbid plan and what is she up to? Strangely, this announcement did not have to do with the usual reasons: sickness, old age, or loneliness. It had to do with too many books. Eleanor's library was remarkable. The biggest in the family, it was a combination of my grandmother's books and her own, which easily filled a hundred boxes. However, she had moved a number of times recently and had come to look on her most prized possession, her library, as her biggest burden. It was the heaviest thing she owned and the most expensive to move. After this last move, she decided it was too much. Holding on to all these books was doing more harm than good. It was time to give away her library. Initially pained by the thought, Eleanor had come to see letting go of her books as an opportunity to come to terms with the first part of her life and prepare for the rest. She was not morbid about it; she was excited. She was eager to be free from all the weight and burden that she had created and carried around for her first sixty-five years. First, she took out her most essential books, those that formed the DNA of her library. These she would keep. She limited herself to one box. Then she gave small selections to every member of our family before inviting close friends to come over and take a book for themselves. The rest of the collection was given to her local library. Giving away the books was just the beginning. Eleanor also decided to clear away all the emotional clutter that involved friends and family. Over the next year, she had a number of intense and gratifying conversations with her children, ex-husband, and other family members. She also met with close friends and spoke truthfully with them. To finish, she straightened out her business affairs and sold off investments that had been languishing for some time. Having made these changes, Eleanor found that her life entered a new phase. She was happier and more active than ever. Her discovery and the powerful act of giving away her possessions made me look at my life differently at a much younger age. Today, I love books, but I keep my collection small and regularly work at editing my shelves. Due to my aunt, I learned that we don't need books as much as we need what is in them: their inspiration for the future.

Revue de presse "New York-based interior designer Gillingham-Ryan is out to prove that even the dreariest, no-view walk-up can be transformed into a cozy urban oasis using his "eight-step home cure.... Ebullient!"--Publishers Weekly

What a refreshing decorating book! Apartment Therapy is a must-read for creating your perfect nest. Fire your shrink and follow Maxwell's eight-step therapeutic cure!--Jonathan Adler, potter, designer, and author of My Prescription for Anti-Depressive Living

"Decorating a home is just plain stressful! Maxwell's book offers a way out; it's like hiring a pro (without the attitude or expense). He takes us by the hand and gently guides us through the entire process, from coming up with a plan to executing it without going broke. Whether you're just dipping in for a quick hit of inspiration, or committing to the whole eight week cure, your home -- and life -- will be better because of it."--Angela Matusik, Editor-in-Chief, Budget Living Magazine

"Maxwell Gillingham-Ryan's Apartment Therapy is refreshing in its point of view: your house has to work for you from the inside out. Gillingham-Ryan encourages readers to really take a good look at where they are at home and how they can improve the quality of their lives."--Wendy Goodman, interior design editor, New York Magazine