

Make 2016 your best year yet!

If I ever need an interior designer, I'll want one like Jane Cappleman. She might talk with authority about stylish paint hues like Rolling Fog and Mouse's Back, but doesn't pretend to be omnipotent. And she rolls up her sleeves when action's required.

"My hallway, about two weeks ago, looked really shabby and horrible," she confesses. "I just painted it, really simply. It's a grey – what it was before – but I changed the paint, so it's wipeable. With a hallway, people keep coming through, and mark it, and it immediately makes it look shabby."

Then there were the light-fittings in the living area adjoining the kitchen, given by her mother as a wedding gift 20 or so years ago.

Because of the proximity to the kitchen, the cords were yellowing and greasy and the paper lanterns falling apart. What was the remedy there?

"I gave them a wash." As simple as that? "It immediately lifts a room." So, a really good brush-up and the paper lanterns renewed. Total cost: about £5. "Sometimes you have to think 'Why change it?' It's not old; it's not horrible; it just needs a good clean!"

The lesson here is that making

Happy New Year! Buoyed by optimism, we look at ways of making the next 12 months great ones. Experts share their tips for the home, health, happiness and holidays... and how to make sure those new year resolutions help rather than hinder.

First, interior designer Jane Cappleman tells **Steven Russell** how to revitalise our abodes without necessarily spending a fortune

our homes look better and brighter shouldn't fill us with dread. While it's worth employing professionals to stop us making costly mistakes, there are many simple things we can do that don't cost a fortune.

The Cappleman formula begins with the D-word: decluttering.

"Cluttering is a common problem. Somebody will put something down and it will stay there for a year." Hmmh. Sounds like my house...

I blame the demands of life, which almost force us to put things down and accumulate them, and leave precious little time for dealing with them.

I'm not let off the hook. "On a Sunday, in the afternoon, grab that top drawer, with all the rubbish in it, and just go through it! The feeling afterwards, when you've

actually got space to put something..."

Much of the time, Jane says, storage is a problem. "I would say 'Get everything into a pile in the middle of the floor, put to one side what you don't want, and then think 'Right, where am I going to put the rest of it?'" Then go out and buy a unit for it."

The new kitchen at Jane's Bury St Edmunds Victorian home – where she lives with her husband and school-age son and daughter – is a good example. She needed proper places to put everything, from food to the ironing board, and she's now got them.

One wall is virtually a series of cupboards, behind whose doors everything now has its place. One door even reveals a pullout desk,

where she works and, later, her teenage son does his homework.

"I've had to save up to do it. But I made a list of everything in here I wanted to store away and then made a plan of where I was going to store it."

There's more of this ilk. Jane bakes bread every two days, so has a drawer dedicated to flour and yeast, under her worktop. "And my life's transformed! I don't have to rummage in a corner cupboard, at the back, to find flour – to drag it through and knock the sugar over."

She shows me flour in a big jar bought from a junk shop. Because she uses it so often, it doesn't even need a lid or stopper. Sure beats fiddling with a folded-over paper bag and scattering snow-like grains.

"If we took the time to reorganise

things, we would gain the time back, every day. If you're going to have a new year resolution, that would be it. And do look at your kitchen, because you spend a lot of your time there, and if it's well-organised it's fantastic."

So when we're talking interior design, we're not necessarily talking about lovely colours but life management, really?

"To be honest with you, it is a big part of it. But people don't see it like that. I go in to make things work and to make things better. It's not just about making it look pretty; it's got to be functional and practical as well. It's got to give you back time in the day."

"If you get a sofa for a customer and they want it soft, and you supply them with feather cushions, they spend the rest of the day trying to plump them up. You've not given them a service; you've given them a chain round their neck!"

More tips: "I also go into somebody's house and it might be cluttered, but, also, it won't be arranged properly. You can group things together to make them interesting to look at – not just 'placed'. You'll get a sidetable and it will have a photograph on it and a box and a lamp. They're not there for any reason, and it's not



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■ Jane Cappleman in her kitchen, completed in the summer. The house, built in 1850, 'was in a disgusting state' when Jane and her husband set eyes on it a couple of decades ago. But it had the right floor-print. 'We got married on the Saturday and bought the house on the Monday,' she laughs. 'I had to sell my car to put the roof on it. You couldn't see the end of the garden because of brambles, but I just walked through the front door and went "This is it".'

Photos: GREGG BROWN

even attractive." Jane's collected many, many candleholders of her own and didn't know what to do with them. They're now gathered together in a fireplace, where their massed ranks are a virtue and they look good. "Some of the nicest interiors for me are those that do have clutter, but it's organised chaos! If you look at the homes and gardens magazines, there are very few minimalist rooms. You'll see they've grouped things by colour, or texture, or the fact they're all elephants or jugs. And it looks great."

But what if we don't have an artistic eye?

"Well, I would clear the room out, give it a good clean, paint the walls, and then start to move things back in. Have a good look at that space, because a lot of people won't have seen that room empty for sometimes 20 years."

"Build it up gradually. Take a fresh look and think 'I really love that. Wouldn't it be nice over there?' Move the furniture around a little bit."

"It doesn't cost you any money to just move furniture from one room to another and have a little change-around. But you do need to take everything out of the room to begin with, so you have a blank canvas."

It doesn't cost you any money to just move furniture from one room to another and have a little change-around

If we are investing hard cash, and revamping the sitting room, we'll likely spend a fair bit on a new sofa. We ought to tread carefully.

"Make sure that's as neutral and plain as possible, as you can then have curtains and cushions to match and can change the cushions over time. It's a much more cost-effective way of updating things."

Choose a sofa first and then find fabric to go with it for the curtains. It's far easier than doing it the other way round.

Another sofa tip: "You look at them in fantastic showrooms bigger than your house. Get some dimensions and get newspaper out to lay on the floor at home to show what space it's going to take up." Patterns will also make the room look smaller.

More wisdom: ■ If you want a majorish revamp by Christmas, start thinking about it properly in the summer. Decorators get booked up, hand-made sofas take time to come, fabric might be out of stock, and so on.

■ If you're hoping to sparkle by Easter, get things moving now! ■ It's worth paying for professional advice if you're buying or doing something expensive. Flooring specialists, for instance, are experts

in their trade, says Jane.

She was 12 when the design bug bit. Jane was born in Zimbabwe. Her parents bought a tiny house at Norton, near Bury St Edmunds. After her father died in a car accident, she and her mum moved to Fornham All Saints.

"She let me choose the wallpaper and the curtains for my room. I really enjoyed the process of doing that." Jane trained as a textile designer, studying in Norwich, and later studied commercial interior design in London.

She spent 14 years with the Bury St Edmunds family-run firm Clement Joscelyne before launching her own interior design and decoration business in 2012.

Is there a key piece of advice to get us started?

"The first thing is to spend 10 quid on magazines, sit there with a cup of coffee and just get an idea of what's in fashion and available, or you won't know what the possibilities are."

Speaking of which, grey seems to be the popular base colour, and has been for a long time. "But I'm not knocking it. With the light in this country, grey is brilliant. We have quite a lot of dull days and grey isn't a cold colour. Grey sets off colour."

"Our landing is grey, but my niece has done this massive painting in bright reds and oranges, and it looks amazing."

■ www.janecappleman.co.uk



Shed a stone in a week? That's daft!

Small steps. They're the key to making our New Year resolutions stick, reckons Dan Ford. He gives **Steven Russell** some advice for a healthier 2016

Does this sound familiar? The working day becomes ever more elastic and the traffic hold-ups more frequent. It's too easy to buy convenience food on the run or pop a ready meal in the microwave. That's fine if they're healthy, but some are high on fat and salt.

So, what to do? Health coach Dan Ford offers a couple of ideas. "One is freezing homemade foods – things like lasagne and spaghetti Bolognese. Make a large amount and freeze portions of it. You know what you've put in it and, more importantly, not put in. You could maybe have it three or four times over a fortnight. It saves time later and means you avoid going for the ready meal."

"Also – and I know it's really clichéd – try to plan ahead as much as possible. Perhaps every Sunday, draw up a list: 'Monday's going to be this in the evening; Tuesday's going to be that...'

"Planning a week ahead really does make a difference; not only from the food side but also shopping. You know exactly what you've got to buy – get it, and you're out. If you go without a list, you can be putting things in the trolley and running up hundreds of pounds!"

Dan works for Live Well Suffolk. It's commissioned by Suffolk County Council, in partnership with the NHS, to offer free information and support in creating a healthier life. There's a range of help, including one-to-one meetings with an adviser and group sessions.

In the UK, about two in three adults are overweight or obese. Smoking rates are now plateau-ed a little at just under 20% of those aged over 16. Suffolk, says Dan, fares a little better than the national average. So: how can we maximise our chances of success? "The biggest thing I can say is:

small, manageable chunks. "People may say 'I want to lose X amount of pounds in a period of time.' But 11lb to 21lb a week is absolutely fantastic, because hopefully it becomes sustainable. That's really important; rather than losing half a stone this week... then putting on 21lb... losing another 41lb..."

"The same with smoking. We do offer a 'cut down to quit' service. So for smokers who think stopping straightaway is too hard, we can put in place a cut down to quit method in manageable chunks."

Dan, a senior community health coach, adds: "I've been here five years and every person I've seen has had a bad week at some point. What we need to do is think 'Right. Draw a line under it. Let's get going again.' But human nature is to go 'Uhhh... I've had a bad week, so I'm going to forget it all.'

"We need to try to think 'It's a positive thing I'm doing – a good thing. Even though it's been a bad week, let's get back on that horse and get going again.'"

Exercise? "Again, small, manageable chunks. One of the easiest things is jogging or running. If you're not doing anything at the moment, never say 'I'm going to do a marathon' straightaway! Say 'I'm going to try to do half a mile this week and see how it goes.' Then you'll either have achieved or not achieved that, so you say 'Can we up it a bit, or do we need to decrease it?'"

The message is to plug away and be realistic, even though many of the messages pumped out encourage us to think there are easy answers. "You can see it on any magazine, particularly the 'women's-based' magazines: 'Lose a stone in a week.' It's never 'Lose a stone in five months!'" www.livewellsuffolk.org.uk