



What you can get away
with if you understand decoys,
camouflage and
other tricks of the trade

I grew up among women who really cleaned their houses. My mother, my aunts and the mothers of all my friends kept homes in which one could eat off the floor. I remember living rooms so spotless you could perform an emergency appendectomy in them if you had to, and dining-room tables that were cleared faster than those at McDonald's. Dishes might be washed and put away before you had a chance to finish your food, beds might be made before you could get out of them. In these homes, dust was as much the enemy as Communism.

Nowadays, few of us have the time—not to mention the inclination—to keep our kitchens looking as if we never eat in them. We've got better things to do in our lives than clean—like earn livings and work on relationships. (Our mothers' relationships got worked out at the altar.) This means that sometimes we have to substitute cleaning *tricks* for elbow grease.

One such occasion is this: You're having people for drinks at 6:30 and arrive home from work at 6:20. The choice is whether to wipe the grime off the furniture or your face. Under the circumstances, who among woman-kind would not opt for a change of clothes and some quick work at the bathroom mirror? The challenge becomes how to make your guests think your premises have been vacuumed as thoroughly as your pores.

How to **fake** housecleaning

Careful decorating is the first and foremost way to ease your cleaning burdens. My friend Linda, for example, advises painting all walls beige, because when you paint them white they eventually turn gray from grime and look dirty. When beige walls turn gray they are known as "greige," which is a very chic color. Why couldn't one just paint walls gray to begin with? That wouldn't work, says Linda, because then "they'd have no place to go."

When it comes to additional decorating, I rely on the Trompe L'Oeil School of Housekeeping. You don't want people to see the crumbs on your floors? Cover your floors with large, tweedy rugs, preferably in a deep shag. In the kitchen, opt for busily patterned tile. That way you'll only have to wash the floor occasionally, when, for instance, you begin to hear crunching noises as you walk. (To be sure you buy the right kind of floor covering, drop a penny on it; it's the right one for you only if you can't find the coin for at least half an hour.)

(Continued)
by **Bette-Jane Raphael**

WALTER JACKSON

HOUSECLEANING

Continued

Abstract-patterned fabrics on upholstered furniture throughout the house can also be helpful. Guests will be forced to ask themselves: Is that a brown pattern on the club chair or a spattering of chili con carne? Is that a sunburst on the sofa seat, or did somebody sit on some enoki mushrooms?

In the bathroom, use a dark-colored opaque shower curtain to protect your tub from prying eyes. Whose business is it, anyway, if the ring around your tub has the shape and color of an inner tube? Tape your bathroom rugs to the tile: Neatly aligned rugs always make a good impression; they give a well-maintained look to any room in the house.

All furniture, especially in the bedroom, should have huge drawers that can catch the contents of a pocketbook with one sweep of the arm. And in the bedroom, remember that a platform bed is probably the biggest mistake a non-cleaner can make. It may be attractive to look at, but you can't put anything under it. A mattress and box springs on a frame, with a dust ruffle around it, makes a wonderful horizontal closet: Shoes, magazines and lingerie can be "stored" with a quick flick of your ankle.

Designing your house with these things in mind will put you ahead of the game, but you can also rely on several emergency measures in a pinch. Some of these come under the heading of Decoy Housekeeping, some under the heading of Camouflage. Those who subscribe to the Decoy School advise that you befuddle your guests: Point their attention in the direction you want it. You might, for instance, move all of your furniture before guests arrive, so they'll focus on the new arrangement rather than old dirt. It stands to reason that if your friends are busy looking with interest at the unfamiliar setting, they'll be less likely to turn around and notice their footprints in the dust.

Another good ploy, according to the Decoyists, involves putting something new in your living room to grab your guests' attention. If everybody is busy examining and exclaiming over your new lamp in the shape of a duck, for instance, they probably won't notice that it's the only thing in the living room not coated with a thin layer of dust and grime.

Under the heading of Camouflage, keep in mind that switching all your 100-watt bulbs to 25's is an excellent way to keep people in the dark about your cleaning habits. (This trick has the added advantage of being economical.) Spray Lysol in your bathrooms, and furniture polish in your living and dining rooms. Dazed by the low lights and the fumes associated with heavy-duty cleaning, guests will be prepared to swear that your home is as antiseptic as a hospital delivery room. A final touch: Put out a vase of fresh flowers. My friend Janet believes that a well-placed bunch of flowers can make even the most unappetizing room seem springlike. She convinced me by pointing out how often bouquets are used in hospital rooms and funeral parlors.

If you still feel guilty about not being a thorough housekeeper, remember that having a spotless home doesn't mean you'll never get sick in it or will have a better time in it—which is what generations of women with rags and mops in their hands seemed to imply. Keep in mind, too, that the chances are your friends are as unable to keep up with their dust balls as you are with yours. Your house may not be a home in which it's possible to eat off the floors, but then you probably don't serve breakfast, lunch or dinner on them anyway, so who cares?

Finally, having a spotless home is less important than having a warm and inviting one. I remember the homes of two friends in grade school. One was so immaculate I suspected her family didn't really live there. The other was always messy and covered with hair from the family dog. But it was at the second house where I wanted to play all the time, because it, and my friend's mother, were always friendly and welcoming.

Today, I have a friend with so little time to clean that she often greets her guests for the evening with the words, "Welcome to the Dust Bowl." Yet I know for a fact that people treasure an invitation to her house, because they always have a great time while visiting. I know I do. In fact, I'd often rather be at her house than at my own—and mine's cleaner!



Glamour's "Can This Be Love?" columnist Bette-Jane Raphael's present whereabouts are unknown because she moves every time her apartment gets dirty.