

CLOSET

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“When we go into someone’s closet it could be designed 1,000 different ways,” Woods said.

And the design is connected to your lifestyle.

“Some people only wear dresses and some wear separate pieces,” Woods said.

Changes in the times also affect design. In 1988, women had an average of 20 pairs of shoes each, Woods said. Now they have 70. Growing wardrobes and how long you stay in Florida during the year all come into play. Are you a golfer? A businessman? How do you fold your pants? Do you empty the contents of your pockets on a bed-side table at the end of the day? These are all questions California Closets’ consultants considers.

“We do wardrobe analysis for every customer,” Woods said. “Then we look at the space and design it accordingly. And if they run out of room in their closet, we build outside their bedroom.”

That’s what Woods did for herself. She lives in a 1940s home in Fort Myers, which came with small closets.

“It’s not just designing the closets; it’s designing the whole space,” she said. “If someone’s just dropped off 20 shirts at the dry cleaners, that’s going to affect their design. Even to the point of, ‘Do you have your shirts folded, or hang them?’”

They work with all kinds of clients. College students, families and dentists are among the spatially challenged.

Some customers might need a brief design consultation for a small storage space in the kitchen. Other larger

projects require that the designer work directly with architects to design spaces, and choose colors and textures that flow throughout the home. Prices can range from a few hundred dollars into the thousands.

Woods recommends people purge while creating their living spaces—get rid of those superfluous suits and dresses you never wear.

“You don’t need 15 white shirts,” she said. “Decide what you really want to keep.”

In 1999, Woods started Closets for a Cause. If customers want to get rid of their old clothes, California Closets gives them to a variety of charities. Besides serving a greater purpose, it helps people keep their spaces efficient.

Woods and her company in Fort Myers have worked with more than 21,000 individual clients over the years, she said. One was a college student who shared a closet with her sister. She had about 300 pairs of shoes and refused to get rid of any. For her, nothing could be done. But many customers keep coming back.

“Some of our designers have established a large clientele base, because we’re expanding into so many areas of the home,” showroom manager Michael Rabalais said.

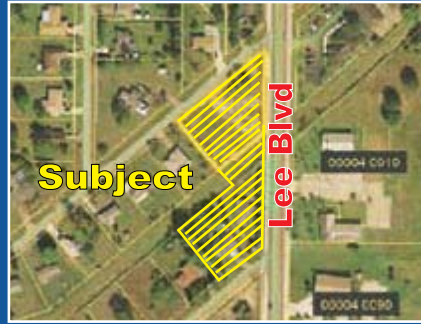
And California Closets has expanded into many areas of the world: New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, and Puerto Rico.

“Canada is huge,” Rabalais said.

Although the company has grown, some things haven’t changed.

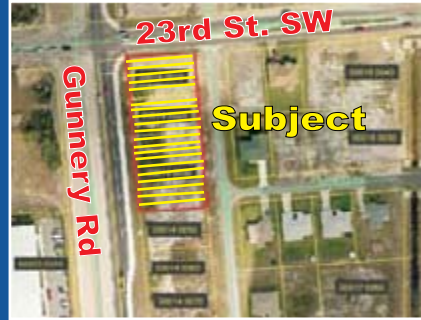
“The theory of space planning is exactly the same,” Woods said. “We just have a whole lot more bells and whistles and accessories to meet individual needs and styles.” ■

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