

Spring cleaning

Cleanliness is next to Godliness, or so the saying (that is undoubtedly of Swiss origin) goes. For *Swiss News'* correspondent of clutter, Chantal Panozzo, cleanliness is next-to-impossible, next on her list of jobs to do ... and next door's problem.

By Chantal Panozzo | I have never been neat. I don't mean neat as in interesting, but neat as in tidy. Clean. To the extent that it is possible, I enjoy clutter. I can find things in piles that I'd never be able to locate if they were actually organised and put into a filing cabinet. This was never a problem until 1) I got married, and 2) I moved to Switzerland.

Tidiness is overrated

The first problem is that my husband is neater than I am. He likes to remind me that I sometimes leave closet doors open; that I don't put away my suitcase until it's almost time to leave for the next trip, and that I always kill houseplants. I've haven't made much headway with the closet doors, so as a compromise, I've experimented with several different plant species instead. I've now found the one that can tolerate my creative watering habits, and that is the cactus. My apartment now has seven cacti. They are doing fine.

The second problem is my Swiss neighbour. Sometimes – as neighbours occasionally do – she knocks on my door. And as I prefer to be a semi-decent neighbour, I can't ignore her all the time, even when I know my apartment is not up to her standards of shininess. To an American, my apartment might be considered cluttered. To the Swiss, my apartment might be thought of as unbelievable. And not a good way.

My neighbour is often so offended by my untidiness, she's been known to personally take matters into her own hands: she's shined my gutter, power-washed my concrete balcony, trimmed my plants, and demonstrated how to soak our shared washing machine's soap dispenser in vinegar to teach me how clean to something I would never have even considered dirty.

Right now, as I write this, she is buffing the leaves of her orchids with face oil. How can I compete with that? The leaves really do shine – at least the ones she has in the hallway – but it really doesn't make me feel good about the dust on my bookshelves, nor my balcony being home both to green moss and a brown Christmas tree.

A toothy problem

My neighbour's shiny gutter and vinegar-soaked sink spouts would be bad enough. But then there's the dentist. His office is below my apartment. I peeked in there once and it was the whitest, brightest place I had ever seen; it was so white, it made me dizzy. I wouldn't need anaesthesia if I went to him for a root canal. I'd pass out from utter shininess.

Swiss people seem to prefer everything white. That way, it's easier to see all the exciting possibilities for sweeping, swiffing and scrubbing. Me, I prefer to camouflage as much dirt as possible. It's just another reason I have a brown carpet, a brown

couch and a black and white opinion on the whole thing: I know I will never be Swiss. Keeping up with the Joneses is one thing. Keeping up with the Swissies, is quite another.

Some expats try. They get maids. This could be a solution for me, but I wouldn't want the maid to see my dust bunnies either. Or my unmade bed. Or the unwashed dishes. And then there are my antique garden gnomes from Paris. What if one of them got broken while being dusted? No. A maid would just stress me out.

Another solution could be to vacuum more. But once, in a wave of inspiration (all right, desperation, since my neighbour was coming for dinner), I vacuumed so much that I broke the vacuum. The plastic actually melted. Then I had to buy another one. And that was expensive. So I try to use the vacuum sparingly – for special occasions, like out-of-town guests and our annual August 1st party.

Driving the neighbour crazy

It wasn't until my building also became home to a driving school, that things started getting better. When I heard the news, I didn't think much about it; unlike my neighbour, who practically had a heart attack. From her point of view, the driving school would bring teenagers to our building and teenagers were trashy. Her



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All things Swiss

Switzerland through the ages

1812: The Battle of Berezina – During the Napoleonic Wars, Switzerland is obliged to provide troops for the French army (a very unpopular proviso, by the way). As Napoleon's army retreated from their ill-conceived Russian campaign, 1,300 Swiss troops held 40,000 Russian troops at bay while what was left of the French army escaped across the Berezina River. Switzerland suffered terrible losses, with only around 300 survivors, but they did save the French army from total destruction.

May 21, 1904: The national football associations of Belgium, Denmark, France, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland get together in Paris to form the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA). The purpose of the newly formed federation was to better coordinate international fixtures, as football/fútbol/fussball/soccer's popularity had begun to soar. FIFA staged the first official football tournament during the 1908 Summer Olympics in London; the inaugural World Cup was held in 1930.

Expat encyclopaedia

Concrete planters: Something I never considered cleaning before I moved to Switzerland.

Gutters: Something I never considered cleaning before I moved to Switzerland.

Orchid leaves: Something I never considered cleaning before I moved to Switzerland.

Sink spouts: Something I never considered cleaning before I moved to Switzerland.

Washing machine soap dispensers: Something I never considered cleaning before I moved to Switzerland.

fears weren't wrong. The teenage driving students do sit on the front steps of our building, like it's some kind of lounge bar. They do leave their cigarette butts in our stairwell and their McDonald's wrappers on top of our mailboxes.

But these developments have made me feel much more comfortable. I mean, my apartment almost looks clean in comparison. So now, when my doorbell rings, I fling the door open and let my neighbour in because I know she'll want to vent about the mess the teenagers are creating. And I'll stand there, smiling and nodding, agreeing how *Schade* (what a shame) it all is, while secretly thanking the students for making my apartment look that much better in comparison.