

Home Sweet Home Office

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The alarm clock sounds at 6 a.m. as you awake to another day of work without having to brave New England frigid mornings or try your patience with a traffic-filled commute. You hop into the shower, throw on your most comfortable jeans, wake up the kids for school, put on the coffee, pour the cereal, make the lunches and wave good-bye to your little ones as they board the school bus. Ahh, now it's time to head to the office, home sweet home office, that is!

If you work from home, join the crowd! The numbers have grown substantially over the past ten years and according to the US Census Bureau, approximately 4.2 million people are doing it. While working from home certainly has its advantages – among them having greater flexibility and being able to arrange your schedule around family commitments – it also presents many challenges. Discipline, time management and an organized, comfortable workspace, are keys to home office success.

There are no rules of thumb when it comes to home office design, and the design process relies heavily on a person's type of work, personal taste, necessary equipment and supplies, location and available space. In setting up an office tailored to your needs, ask yourself these important questions:

- Is your office space strictly for business or does it double as a guest room?
- What space do you have to work with? Do you have a separate room or are you limited to a closet area, or a corner of the kitchen or living room?
- Will other members of your family use the office?
- Will you have appointments with clients in your office?
- How important is privacy? Will you need a separate entrance?
- What will you store? Do you need space for reference materials, office equipment, computer, machinery, etc?

Once you've assessed your needs and availability of space, it's time to have some fun! You can make your home office as personal as the rest of your home! It becomes that sacred space designed and decorated to inspire creativity and increase productivity. After all, it doesn't have to take on the look of a traditional office; it just needs to function as one. Choose a color that you love and surround yourself with items that speak to you in a calming yet inspiring manner. Whether you love the ocean or the city skyline, surround yourself with artwork and accessories that represent the things that make you happy and feel at peace. Your office is the perfect place to develop a theme that motivates and enhances creative energy.

Once you have thought about personalizing your office, you'll want to keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Create a barrier between your office and the rest of your home. It may be as simple as closing the door, using a screen for separation or designating your space in an out-of-the-way area of a particular room. This makes it less tempting to throw in that load of wash, answer the phone or take a quick television break.

- Arrange your work area in an L or U shape so that items you use most often are close at hand. You will feel most comfortable with placing your desk in a position that allows you to easily see the door.
- Bring in nature with real plants, if your office has windows, or display nature-inspired artwork.
- Provide adequate storage and shelving. Built-in cabinetry and bookcases are excellent space-saving choices; however, if cost is an issue, there are plenty of assemble-it-yourself options available.
- Maintain an organized and uncluttered office with designated areas for current files, bills, receipts, resource material, office supplies, etc. Labeling these areas serve as a reminder to maintain organization.
- Purchase a comfortable chair that provides adequate back support and moves easily within your workspace. While sitting, the back of your knees should touch the chair's seat and your feet should rest flat on the floor. Ergonomic design affects productivity as well as your health.
- Provide proper lighting so that you have adequate task and general lighting. Adjustable desk lamps will cut glare on computer screens. Avoid fluorescent lighting, which will make your space feel too much like a conventional office.
- Consider painting your closet doors with chalkboard or magnetic paint to not only keep track of your schedule, but to add a bit of whimsy and visual interest.

Wherever your office space is located within your home, make it yours. Once the bus arrives and you welcome your kids home, end your “work” day and begin the “second shift,” it’s nice to know that you’ve created a space of your own that you can look forward to going to day after day. A space that you call home sweet home office, that is!

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