

How To Design an Office in Your Home

By Curt Hagedorn

Who knew twenty years ago that one of the most requested spaces when people are searching for homes would be a home office? With the job of running a household more complicated than ever, and with more and more people working at home, home offices are becoming more common every day. If you find that you need to carve out some space for a home office, here are a few suggestions.

- 1) **Make it as private as possible.** A home office is different than, for example, a kitchen desk. While a desk in your kitchen may be all you need to set up a computer station to pay bills and keep track of family schedules, food and recipes, a home office has the space and the organization for you to bring your work home, for you to keep track of your finances, investments and banking, or to operate a home business: it's the "serious" part of the home.
- 2) **Customize your office to your needs.** One of the best things about a home office is you're not trapped in someone else's idea of how you should work. Maybe you don't want a desk with a lot of drawers and cubbies but a huge table where you can spread everything out. Maybe you want file cabinets for organization or maybe you like having everything in a bunch of baskets, always within reach. You might want a desktop computer and monitor or you might want a laptop you can take on business trips. You may want to invest in a copying machine or you might prefer going to your local Kinko's for copying and printing support. Whatever helps make you the most efficient from a jumbo shredder to a pinball machine, you can put it in your home office.
- 3) **Create an environment.** While you can just take a spare room and set up a folding table with a computer and printer and get to work, you're going to be a lot more productive if you actually create a pleasant and performance-inducing environment. Think about things like lighting and décor. Do you want or need a comfortable chair or sofa where you can sit and think or read? Do you want one overly bright halogen floor lamp or more discrete incandescent and florescent task lighting? Do you want pictures on the wall or a big dry erase board for ideas? Do you want a coffee or tea setup, separate from the kitchen, so you don't have to go back and forth during a work day? Remember, no

matter what you do, a great deal of work time is actually taken up with thinking and planning. Do you want to do this staring at the wall or looking out a window? A pleasant, uncluttered working environment can contribute a great deal to your productivity.

- 4) **Try an addition.** If you don't have space in your home for an office, many people are finding that a home office addition, either connected to the home or freestanding, can meet their needs. This can vary in expense, from carving a room out of your garage or unfinished basement, to building a freestanding structure in your backyard. Remember any construction project may involve both dealing with local regulations and inspections so before you plan your project, find out from your local building department what requirements they have for renovations, additions and freestanding structures. If the project seems complicated you might want to find an architect or contractor. Of course, then all of the rules of being a savvy consumer apply. Get references and recommendations. Contact your local better business bureau and get a number of bids before making any decision.

- 5) **Plan for the future.** Particularly if you're starting a home business make sure you have enough space to meet your needs now and in the future. While eventually you may want to move your home business out of your home, you might want to create a home office as well as perhaps a separate storage space for supplies, inventory and records in an unused part of your basement, garage or attic as well.