

Be it a dedicated room or a just a small space, an area that functions as a home office is one of life's essentials. Maybe you run a business from home, or are among the happy band of employees permitted to work at home at least one day a week (according to the Sunday times, nearly a third of the work force does). Even if you are not a home-worker, you probably need a safe place where you can store bills and household filing, keep up with emails and shop online.

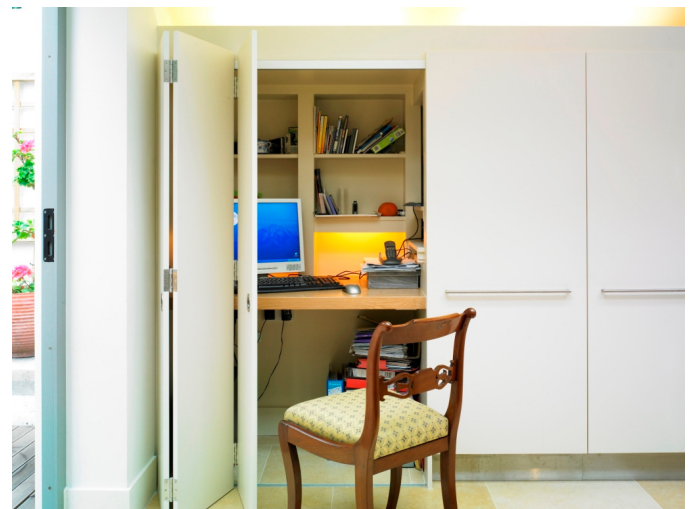
"Home offices spaces can be made using alcoves or corners of rooms in a creative way" says Hugo Tugman, founder of domestic architecture consultants Architect Your Home. The decorating challenge is unique. You want you office space to look effortlessly beautiful, but how do you accommodate less than beautiful computers and printers? Where space is tight or awkwardly shaped, the best option may be bespoke fitted furniture. Colour will also have an impact on the success of the room. Fresh or muted shades of yellow, blue or green, as well as beiges and creams, are easy on the eye and can prove both uplifting and conducive to work, while bold inky colours tend to be more oppressive and less inspirational. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to creating the ideal space. Your choice will depend on how you plan to use the area, how much room is available, what your budget is and, ultimately, how flexible you can make your design.

## THE PERFECT PLACE

Finding the right spot for your office should be a straightforward task if you have a room that's an obvious candidate. If not, there are plenty of instances where a home office can be seamlessly integrated into other rooms.

Infrequently used dining rooms or spare bedrooms are an excellent choice; also consider the space under the stairs, if it's large enough, or a corner of your living room or kitchen. For the latter you would need to invest in a desk cabinet or cupboard that has doors you can close to hide the chaos or private papers within.

Wherever your best location is, there are a number of key things to consider. Your starting point should be to decide on the function of the room or space – a room that is primarily a workspace is very different to one that is used for only short periods at a time.



The ergonomics of your design are important too. You need to find a position for yourself that doesn't involve you stretching at awkward angles for what you need. Think about what you will be able to reach from a sitting position and what will require you to get up from your seat.

The placement of the desk and the rest of your furniture will be influenced largely by the natural light. Where is it coming from? Is there enough, or too much? Your screen will need to be positioned away from the window to

prevent glare. Finally, consider the desk's position in relation to power points and phone sockets (see powering your workstation opposite).

## DREAM DESKS

According to the bespoke furniture manufacturer Neville Johnson, one of the biggest mistakes people make when designing their own home offices is underestimating how much desk space they need.

"People who come to us often find that the desks they had before simply were not big enough – and that usually means not deep enough – or that they hadn't been using the space available to them to its best advantage. This, in turn, makes the room look cluttered" explains Alan Borra, design team manager at Neville Johnson. "You should always go as big as you can with the size of the desk".

A gorgeous statement desk can form the focus of your scheme. While glass and chrome look particularly striking, design pieces such as these are best for infrequent use. Some glass surfaces even those in toughened glass, can become damaged easily and are, therefore, not ideal options if you work from home. Nor are soft woods or high gloss finishes, both of which can become scratched or damaged through everyday use.

If there is no room for a large desk, consider a solution that takes away the clutter. One idea is the PowerDesk by Intelligent Furniture, which hides your PC and all its trailing wires inside the desk. No PC functionality is compromised as the Freemote sits on the work surface, duplicating all

the controls that you need on a daily basis (on/off switch, USB ports, optical drive, headphone and mic jacks).

It is also worth noting that many desks are about 72cm or 73cm high and designed to be used with a static flat chair rather than an ergonomic, work-posture chair (see Are you sitting comfortably? Overleaf) Some desks are available at different heights, and others are height-adjustable. The height will depend on the chair you use and the kind of work you are doing.

## NO SPACE? NO PROBLEM

If you don't have a room that can be used as a permanent or even part-time home office, think more inventively about where you can squeeze in a desk. Ideal candidates include alcoves or the space beneath the stairs, or if you have enough room to introduce a built-in cupboard, that could be the basis of a home workstation too.

"In one project, we created what looked like a flat-faced timber sideboard adjacent to a dining area" says Hugo Tugman of Architect Your Home. "When needed as a home office, its front face swung open like a fate to reveal storage, filing, computer and phone, creative a great L shaped workstation. When not in use, all the work was safely concealed from view and the dining area had an attractive walnut-veneered sideboard".

Where space is really tight and you are happy to write letters or emails from the comfort of your armchair, look out for all purpose tables, such as the Prague laptop box, £175, from John Lewis.

## CLEVER STORAGE

“A place for everything” might be a cliché but home offices need to be well organised, so you can never have enough box files, magazines files and CD storage boxes. Shelves and bookshelves offer very versatile storage, especially if the shelving is height-adjustable. Not only will you increase the amount you can store by as much as 40 per cent, says Alan Borra at Neville Johnson, but you will also go some way to future-proofing your investment should your storage requirements change before you re-do the room.

The items you store don't need to be on display and, in many cases, look much neater if they are not. The beauty of good storage is that paperwork is hidden from view. “When creating a home office, keep storage concealed”, advises Sandra Drechsler, creative director of the interior design practice Taylor Howes Designs. “Try to integrate computer components as well as audio/visual equipment behind painted cupboard doors.”

## GO BESPOKE

Tailor-made cabinetry costs more than free-standing but the selling point is that you can make the most of every bit of space. Bespoke furniture can also accommodate architectural features. “Everybody finds that we are unable to unlock previously dead or impractical space,” says Alan Borra at Neville Johnson. “Fitted furniture has the advantage of being low-maintenance as well. Cupboards that reach the ceiling need far less dusting.”

## ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

If you use an office chair for more than two hours a day, you are twice as likely to suffer from back pain, according

to Back2, which provides back care solutions. Finding the right chair is therefore essential. The perfect ergonomically designed chair or stool should be adjustable for height, seat depth and have adjustable backrest and arms (where appropriate); the seat should tilt and you should be able to recline it too. If all you're doing at your desk is checking emails, you can get with a chair that does a lot less.