

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Planning Your Home Office

According to one recent statistic, 20 million Americans are now working from home at least part of the time. Often it is a forced option, due to reductions in the workforce throughout corporate America. Other times it is a freely chosen option for those who either want to start their own small businesses or have a place at home to finish up whatever work they didn't get to during the day.

Working at home is also a welcome option for many who wish to stick around the house more to share in domestic chores, to save wear and tear on the car (and save money on gas), or even to catch up on a little sleep every once in a while.

Some people already have the space for a home office, the time to plan for its creation, and a few ideas to go along with it. Others do not. So, for our first **Practical Matters**, a new and regularly-scheduled department in *Suburban Essex Magazine*, we've asked several local experts for advice on planning home offices, particularly when the need arises quickly and unexpectedly.

Gina Stigi,

By Design Interiors, Upper Montclair

One of the first things you should do when considering a home office is what type of work you will be doing there. Are you just paying bills and doing correspondence, or are you working full time to support yourself? Also, how much time will you be spending there, and at what time of day? Answering these questions will likely lead you to your best location for the home office.

Don't pick the location based solely on where you think you may have the most room to work with, but on where you will be the most productive. If you're a stay-at-home parent and need to keep an eye on the kids, the family room or kitchen may be an ideal spot. If you plan to be on a lot of conference calls, a third floor office or attic space could be ideal.

Good home offices are created by those who have an eye for space planning, keen organizational skills, and a true sense of what your needs are from the standpoint of both design and functionality.

Robert Zebaida,

Majestic Interiors, Millburn

A home office really cannot be created with absolutely no money at all, because even if you already have the available space, carpeting, furniture and computer equipment, you still need to spend for extra phone or fax lines.

You don't need to be skilled or experienced in design, but you do need to think things through. Things to consider are which space in the house would be most suitable for your needs, how often will the office be used, where do you want to place the furniture, and how can you make it comfortable.

I'm creating an office in my house now, and the first thing I did was paint the room a warm color, then I ordered new carpeting, also in a warm tone, and then I purchased a dark, mahogany desk. If you can spend a little money, it is well worth the effort, because you want the home office to be inviting and comfortable. That, in turn, will keep your sanity in check, and most likely it will help you succeed.



Jacque Germany,

Nina's Nuances, West Orange

There are two approaches in choosing a room for a home office. First, identify the room you want to use. Start at the most unused room in the house and go from there. Sometimes it's just unused space in a room that's being used for something else.

The second thing to do is to look for furniture in your house that you're not using, such as desks, chairs and sofas. Maybe you have a room that's already too crowded, or you have old furniture stored in the attic, or you have friends or family who are looking to get rid of some old furniture.

Finally, sit down with a pencil and a piece of paper. Play around with ideas. Plan the room the way you want it. Draw squares and circles representing the room and the furniture. You don't need to be an architect to do this. Look for the area in the room where there is the most light, and arrange your desk around that. Also be aware that electronic equipment, such as computers and printers, should be close to outlets. ▲