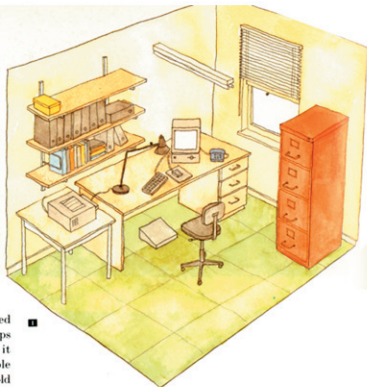


Planning the layout

One of the joys of working from home is that you can plan your office to suit your particular way of working as well as your personal foibles and preferences. There is no office manager to dictate that your filing cabinet must be gray to match the carpet squares. In fact there is no reason why your work space should resemble an office at all, unless you need the status-support of an important-looking desk. Provided it is a comfortable height and stable – particularly important with computers – any work surface will do. But you cannot allow yourself so much freedom with the chair; a dining room chair is fine for the limited amount of time you are at the table, but when you are seated at a desk for hours everyday you are placing considerable stress on your spine. So buy the best office chair you can afford: there are a few designs available which have a more ‘domestic’ feel than the bureaucratic gray swivel chairs.

If the work area can be partitioned off, even if only by suggestion – perhaps by the arrangement of furniture – it may restore equilibrium to the whole space. In converted warehouses and old factories with high ceilings, it does not make sense to divide the space with full-height walls. Often moveable partitions and storage systems work best, creating a wall on one side so that you still keep the flow of space, but with some sense of division. Different floor levels may help to orchestrate the space, and a sleeping platform is worth considering; psychologically it might be helpful to sleep at a distance from your work. If possible consult an architect or interior designer – a professional evaluation of the space and its potential will probably produce results you had not dreamed possible.

You don't have to endure utilitarian metal storage systems and filing cabinets either. You could use baskets to file papers in, while office supply stores



1 The minimum requirements for an efficient work space are a desk, easily accessible shelves, a filing cabinet, ergonomically designed chair and good light. Ideally, natural light should come from the side, particularly if you work with a VDU.

2 Good planning makes the best use of even the smallest corner. In a tight space like this, a raised side to the desk encloses the work space as well as providing extra work surface.

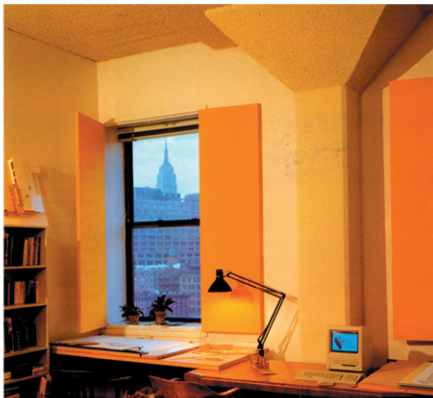


make good hunting grounds for containers to house stationery and papers. If there is no alternative to living on top of your work then good organization is vital. Make storage for your work apparatus a priority, so that you are able to put things away neatly at the end of the day. If a table has to function as work surface and dining table, make sure you have large tablecloths to transform it from workhorse to centerpiece.

Take advantage of the comforts that working at home can offer but also try to insulate yourself against the temptations and diversions. For instance, if you have to go into the kitchen to make yourself a cup of coffee you may find it difficult to ignore the unwashed breakfast dishes or the mountain of laundry. You could buy a coffeemaker or you could go even further and install a mini-kitchen – a sink, small refrigerator, microwave and pantry – preferably one that can be neatly closed away behind cabinet doors.

3 Industrial work space often has its own raw aesthetic which it is best not to tamper with: trying to tame the space with domestic imagery will be doomed to failure. Less than perfect walls give you the advantage of being able to knock in nails or extra shelves as the need arises.

4 Only a totally self-denying workaholic would turn their back on a view like this. The computer, however, is positioned away from the light source, and the shutters and venetian blinds are essential to cut down the glare and heat of a hot summer's day.



1



2



1 If working from home deprives you of a spare bedroom, it makes obvious sense to invest in a sofa-bed. As a bed it will enable you to accommodate guests, while it can be used as a sofa for periods of relaxation during the day. If the idea seems too dangerously domestic, stick to plain-colored upholstery while it is in office use – you can always add an exotic throw to brighten it up for guests.



3

It is impossible for any human being to work at a consistently high level of concentration without taking a break. Most people go through a natural 'low' in the early afternoon. If we obeyed our body clocks and took a 10-minute nap at this time, we would probably be more productive. Anyone who has nodded off, chin in hands, while pretending to read a report will know that it is simply not permissible in a commercial office. But in your home office a comfortable sofa or armchair can provide a haven for a rest or a change of pace – not all work needs to be done sitting at a desk.

There is no reason why your office should not be a joyful and pleasant place, where you enjoy spending time. Give shelf space to objects which you enjoy looking at, enliven the walls with favorite photographs and paintings. Capitalize on the visual quality of the things you work with: tools, brushes, fabrics can be both functional and a decorative display when not in use.

Lighting can be your most valuable ally in delineating work and leisure time, though one advantage of working from home is that you can juggle your hours to include nighttime work. For work you need maximum voltage. But when you want to relax, it is important to switch to a gentler, mood lighting.

3 Even the most utilitarian furniture can be given executive status with a little imagination.

Painting the trestles to match the filing cabinet transforms a cheap option into an elegant solution. The printer is raised on a small color-coordinated shelf while the paper tray is an ordinary box given glamor with a simple coat of paint.

4 For some people – notably writers and young fogys who hanker after the days of Dickensian clerks – the appeal of high-tech is entirely resistible. An uncluttered table, good light and a sharp pencil may be all you need to write that masterpiece.

