

ORANGE COUNTY

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SERIOUS BUSINESS

TOP TIPS FOR HOME OFFICES

INSIDE: WINNING LOOKS FROM THE 2004 DESIGN AWARDS

INSIDE DESIGN

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PHOTO BY MARTIN KING

Style





SERIOUS BUSINESS

A WELL-DESIGNED OFFICE CAN
HELP YOU WORK MORE
EFFECTIVELY AT HOME

For many who work at home, the office is often a makeshift space, a stark, utilitarian room that looks less than inviting.

Experts on working efficiently have long advised that work space should be comfortable, and these days the trend in home office design is to make them stylish as well. Because the office is an extension of the home, it deserves the same attention as other rooms when it comes to the décor.

That attention to detail begins by creating a space plan that will accommodate the key elements of a pleasing, yet functional design, said designer Beth Whitlinger.

Important design considerations are:

- Furniture placement
- Lighting
- Storage
- Color
- Overall décor

Whitlinger weighed those factors when she was creating a gentleman's home office/library for the Philharmonic House of Design last year.

For example, when she considered furniture placement, she arranged the desk so that it faced the door. This allowed the homeowner to see out into the hallway when seated at the desk.

"It's easier on the eyes and less stressful," she said. This placement gives you a different perspective than when you're forced to look at a wall.

"It's hard to be in an enclosed area," she said.

Facing the entrance to the room also follows the principles of feng shui. The ancient art of object placement holds that having your back to the door

DESIGNER BETH WHITLINGER created a gentleman's retreat using dark woods and masculine accessories.

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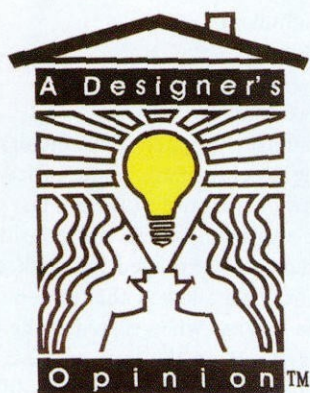
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while working creates tension and allows for events to happen behind the person's back.

Having enough room to work is also important, Whitlinger said. The work surface should be at least 24 inches deep with an auxiliary surface that is connected or able to be pulled up and docked, she said. (For expert tips on choosing a desk and other office furniture, check out our Homefile column this month.)

Having adequate light for work is one of the most important considerations when designing an office, Whitlinger said. The best lighting combines adequate task lighting for working at the desk as well as ambient lighting to brighten the room. The designer also suggests installing decorative lighting, such as halogen strips, underneath cabinets.

Too much natural light can sometimes cause problems. Adjusting the light coming in from the windows is necessary to prevent glare, she said. When a window is behind a person working at a computer, it can create glare on the screen. When it's in front of the desk, it can also be hard on the eyes, she said. That eye strain can make you tired or even cause you to have eye problems.

Creating an efficient office also requires accessible storage. A closet can be converted to built-in bookshelves by removing the doors, jams and overhang, she said.

And then there's the clutter to think about.

"Most people don't think about paper management," she said. To control the clutter, she suggests buying decorative bins from places like the Container Store or Hold Everything. Small touches can also make a difference in the look and feel of your work space, without adding a lot of extra expense. An in-basket made of leather or wire mesh has more character than a traditional plastic one.

"The goal is to avoid making it look like a commercial office space," she said.

For the House of Design library, she chose colors that were restful. But not all offices have to be subdued. "The color choice should depend upon the goal of the room," she said. If you do a lot of paperwork, warm colors will make your workspace more peaceful. That can aid concentration. If the office is a place to work on children's projects, however, bold colors will be more energetic.

In the design house, a dark mahogany antique desk and a leather chair gave the library a masculine feel. She filled the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves with antique leatherbound books with gold inlay. That gave the room an impressive appearance. The books, written in Danish, were purchased by the foot strictly for their covers and not their literary value from Book Decor in Fallbrook.

You can achieve a similar "library" look for less expense by buying hardback books at thrift shops or garage sales and removing the dust jackets.

For offices that must double as a guestroom, she suggests purchasing a day bed or a pullout sofa, which take up less space. A coffee table, preferably with storage, should be mobile when homeowners have to make the switch.

Art is often neglected when designing an office, she said, but can add an important element. Choose art with similar themes, such as architectural prints or a series of black and white photographs, to give your office a polished look.

RESOURCE

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