

DESIGN YOUR IDEAL WORKSPACE

Working from home has many advantages, but how do you create a space that will maximise your full potential? Get your house up to speed with these clever ideas *Words Luke Tebbutt*



Some of the biggest brands started at home – Apple in a bedroom, eBay in a living room and Mattel in a garage – with many new companies following suit. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (statistics.gov.uk) for 2011 show that 3.4 million people worked from home, or used their home as a base, compared with 2.6 million a decade earlier. It's easy to see why. A home office involves low overheads, no commute, fewer distractions and greater flexibility – but distinguishing it from your personal life is key to creating a thriving environment. Whether you're scrambling together space in your existing house, building a new home, or putting a studio in your garden, these innovative ideas and tips will help you on your way. →

Australian blogger and interior designer Dana Tomic Hughes (yellowtrace.com.au) uses her white walls as a blank canvas to show off her creativity. 'It's important that you're happy with the space. Surround yourself with personal and fun items to help keep you visually stimulated, inspired and motivated'

Nick Hughes/Yellowtrace

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

'My office is one of the most important rooms in my home,' says Dana Tomic Hughes, founder of blog and interior-design practice Yellowtrace. It has big operable windows, ample shelving and doors (shown on previous page) to shut it off from the rest of her Sydney home, ticking all the must-have boxes for a functional workspace: good light and ventilation, plenty of storage and separation from other rooms.

In existing homes, lofts and rooms at the back are best for achieving this, but if you're working with colleagues or hosting meetings, somewhere near the entrance might be better – or somewhere with a separate front door if you are extending or building a new house. 'You don't want people going through your home. You need a balance between your private and semi-public space,' says Maya Carni, who runs Scenario Architecture (020 7503 8153; scenarioarchitecture.com) from her house with her husband and another colleague.

If you have extra space in your home, look beyond the office for other work-friendly spaces, such as a large kitchen table for spreading out, or a separate room for research. 'I like to work

in other areas around the house,' says architect

Andrew Budgen from Spacelab (020 7033 3450; spacelab.co.uk), who

specialises in creating dynamic,

flexible workspaces. 'The

idea of sitting at a desk

all day is a bit irrelevant

these days. You need

a variety of spaces

to work in.' →



▶▶ Ashworth Parkes Architects (01223 322 331; ashworthparkes.co.uk) incorporated an office into a family home with limited space, creating a semi-enclosed spot for a desk that overlooks a double-height void. Yellow walls separate the area from the rest of the house



▶ Coffey Architects (020 7549 2141; coffeyarchitects.com) created an office space in this corridor that links the living room and bedrooms of a penthouse apartment. A roof window diffuses light and there's plenty of space to work with lots of hidden storage



Jake Curtis; Ryohei Hamada; Mei Yates



◀▶ Sliding and hinged walls are a great design tool for dividing up the space. The owner of this apartment created an office changing the layout of the floorplan. The design took just two months, with construction work taking another two

Creating an office in a small space

If you believe your home is too tiny to incorporate an office or workspace, then think again. This bijou Tokyo apartment proves that with a bit of ingenuity (and some strong hinges) you can transform any space to suit your lifestyle.

The owner, who works at home with a colleague, wanted to reconfigure the walls of his apartment to create a separate office, but couldn't as they are all structural. The solution was to employ designer Yuko Shibata (+81 3 6450 9957; yukoshibata.com) to insert a couple of movable ones that carve up the space.

In the dining room, a wall slides down the middle of the room, so one

person can browse books on one side, while another has a meeting or eats at the table on the other. And in the bedroom, a big wall on hinges opens up to reveal a row of bookshelves. The zingy green of this expanding library also adds interest to the plain white room. 'This was done consciously, so that opening the door gives a definite feeling of expanding the office,' explains Shibata.

It's quite a feat. In an apartment where most would struggle to find one space to work, this has four separate spots – a meeting room, computer room and two libraries.



◀◀ London architect Hayhurst and Co (020 7247 7028; hayhurstand.co.uk) remodelled this one-bedroom flat, designing a desk that swivels to double as a meeting and dining table

▶ Andrew Budgen from Spacelab (020 7033 3450; spacelab.co.uk) extended his home by adding a new office on the second floor. With direct access to a roof garden, it is clad in plywood and has a practical rubber floor, so it feels distinct from the rest of the house



SORT OUT THE PRACTICALITIES

Make sure you have enough power sockets, especially if there are a few of you working from the space (criss-crossed cables are unsightly and a potential trip hazard) and think about a separate phone line if you share your house with others. Also, check whether your home and contents insurance covers your work equipment (you will need dedicated cover if you employ people from outside your home, or use it for meetings) and consider off-site back-up of your computer files. Maya Carni from Scenario Architecture backs-up her files on an external server every night for £250 a year. Enterprise Nation (enterprisenation.com) offers a good online source of invaluable advice for people working from home.

DESIGN WORKS

Office interiors are a subjective science. High-stimulus colours such as yellow work for some; calming blue or green suit others. But one rule across the spectrum is to make it feel different from the rest of your house – whether it's more serious, with proper office chairs and few soft furnishings, or something cosier, with tactile materials and warmer colours. The aim is to create a world that enables you to do your best work. Plants can also lower stress, and a blank wall to display your work helps define the room's purpose. Think about blinds – you will need them to stop glare if your screen is in direct sunlight – and consider an area for breaks if your space/budget allows, such as a kitchenette, or an armchair with a view. →



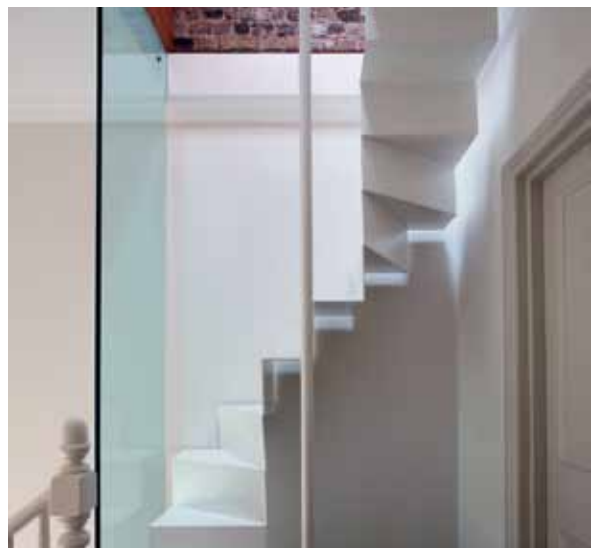
Tamir Addadi, Valerie Bennett, David Grandorge, Jefferson Smith



▼ Tamir Addadi (020 7697 0386; tamiraddadi.com) converted an unused loft space into a functional office. He later designed a self-supporting steel staircase to fit into the tiny space, so the owner didn't have to climb up a ladder every day. The conversion cost around £12,000 and the stairs £8,000



◀ To make room to house an extra colleague in a home office with limited space, Scenario Architecture (020 7503 8153; scenarioarchitecture.com) came up with this innovative desk that has an arm which zigzags out into the middle of the room



THE EASIEST COMMUTE

A stroll out to the garden can make a big difference if you're working from home. 'Psychologically it's good, because you're separating home and work life,' says Alex Johnson, author of *Shedworking: The Alternative Workplace Revolution* (£16.99, Frances Lincoln), as well as the blog shedworking.co.uk. It also means your office isn't taking up room in your home, with papers spread out and kids around knocking drinks over. And it's cheaper than an extension or a loft conversion.'

You can get a basic garden office for about £10,000, and there's a growing number of companies selling them, offering myriad modular designs tailored to your needs – try 3rdSpace (07861 247 910; 3rdspace.co.uk). Orders generally take about two months to build and can be put together on-site in a few days. Alternatively, you could ask an architect to design a studio for you, although it might take a while longer (see below).

After storage and space, the big requirements are to have something which is as well-insulated and secure as your home. You will also need to extend your electricity supply outside, and your phone/internet (unless you don't use a phone line and have a good wi-fi connection). Costs depend on the distance.

Garden studios often fall within Permitted Development Rights (planningportal.gov.uk), which means there's no need for planning permission, but always check with your local authority first. You may also be able to take it with you if you move, depending on how it's built, and if you can't, it could still add value to your home. 'A garden studio is never going to be a deal-maker,' says Alex Johnson. 'But it can be an incentive if you have buyers who are hesitating.'



Create a bespoke outdoor office on a budget

This enticing garden office with wall-to-wall shelves and doors that peel back cost just £12,500 – a steal for a bespoke 13sqm garden studio.

Its owners had limited space inside their ground-floor home, but a surplus outside, so they hired architect Gurmeet Sian (07974 978 638; officesian.com) to design a self-contained studio, big enough for two,

but small enough not to require planning permission. The walls, floor and ceiling are insulated to make it as warm as their home, and a mortise lock on the door means it's also as secure. Cables were extended from the home for electricity, costing about £300, and internet comes from their existing wi-fi inside.

Sian saved lots of money by using high-street materials, so the office could

be built without a specialist joiner. Off-the-shelf decking is used for the floor, standard-size ply panels for the walls and basic strips of timber for shelving. The crowning glory is the inexpensive polycarbonate rooflight, which is barely noticeable until you're standing beneath it. 'The aim was to build quickly and cheaply,' says Sian. 'But with a few surprises, too.' **GD**

▲ This studio by Ecospace (020 7703 4004; ecospacestudios.com) starts from £26,340, excluding delivery. Studios are ready in eight to 12 weeks, and as long as your site is level it won't need a concrete base, so you won't need to dig up your garden

◀▶ To enable the studio to sit level, the ground only had to be excavated 75cm. No foundations had to be put in place – just a couple of paving stones stacked beneath each corner to support the lightweight structure



James Piff

