



How to Make a Home Office Feel Like Home:

15 tips for success

by Marney K. Makridakis

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Today, more and more homes need home offices. For someone who works from home, either full- or part-time, the home office is a true place of business. For other homes, the office is a place for a variety of activities, such as computing, studying, writing, or doing take-home work. In both cases, it is important that a home office be fully functional and also visually inspiring to those who will occupy it.

Far too often, the room designated as “home office” is the last to receive a decorative hand. But it’s never too late to let your creativity spill out a bit to look at your home office with fresh, new eyes.

After all, whether you work at home full-time or use the space occasionally to pay the bills, YOU are the boss! Therefore, it’s important that you inject some of your personality into the décor of the room.

Here are **16 tips** for easily creating the home office of your dreams:

Tip #1 - Take inventory

Take a thorough inventory of the activities you undertake in the office to make sure you have a sense of the equipment and furniture that you need to be efficient and productive.

Investing the time and money to have the proper setup is very important. Do you need easy access to books and binders? Shelves installed over your desk are a convenient solution (right). Books and binders that you use less frequently can be stored in a free-standing bookshelf elsewhere in the office.

Where does your printer need to be located, in relation to your computer? Are vertical or horizontal letter trays better for the kinds of papers you need to keep at hand? Do you need a television or radio nearby, either for work tasks or to create a comfortable mood? Ask yourself these types of questions to ensure that your current work needs are being met.

If you need easy access to files and folders? If so, be sure that your main working space has deep drawers to serve as file cabinets, and then USE them for your files. It’s an easy tendency to use desk drawers for miscellany (purses, plastic bags, catch-all “junk”), which leads to disorganization and frustration. A well-designed home office is not only attractive, but highly functional.



Shelving installed above the desk provides easy access to books and binders, and also serves as a pleasing display for photos and mementos.



Spend some time sorting your file folders to place the most frequently-used ones in your desk, and then create a separate place for free-standing cabinets (left).

Tip #2 - Be creative within your budget

If you are on a budget, don't let that keep you from putting thought and effort into decorating your home office! Visit consignment shops, garage sales, thrift stores, and surplus stores to find used furniture pieces and storage options. Trade and barter with friends and neighbors.

An ink blotter pad can cover up an tarished desktop surface, and small table cloths can be placed over side tables and low shelving units to hide imperfections.

Dents or scratches in a metal filing cabinet can be disguised by painting it in a fun faux finish to match your decor, such as the cozy file cabinet shown here (left).

Get creative with the items you already have on hand...for example, a hollow core door supported on two short file cabinets works as a fine desk.

This freestanding file cabinet has been painted in a fun sponge finish of two colors.

Tip #3 - Unify the color of your furniture

If you make use of used furniture, you will find the atmosphere far more inspiring if you paint the furniture in the same color or finish to unify it.

This will give a more professional feel to the office, which is bound to increase confidence and productivity.

Varnishes and paints are available to cover all surfaces, including Formica, acetate, plastic, and metal.



Furniture that has been painted the same color unifies an office for a more professional atmosphere.

Tip #4 - Consider a theme

Consider if you would like to decorate your office around a theme that is significant to you and your work.

For example, someone who works from home running a Web-based travel agency might want to create a travel-themed office, depicting her favorite destinations, or perhaps travel ephemera from days gone by. A freelance writer who wanted to re-ignite her sense of creativity decorated her office to look like a child's playhouse (right).

You can have a lot of fun conjuring up themes for your office. Think out of the box, and let yourself brainstorm in new directions. When you come across the "just right" theme, you'll know it!



A whimsical office space stirs up creativity!

Tip #5 - Select a color scheme you adore

If you don't want to decorate your office around a particular theme, I encourage you to select a color scheme that you really love. Reserving a weekend to paint your office in your new scheme will do wonders for your outlook when you are working!

Whether you spend all day in the office or just an hour here and there, you want the office to be a place that feels comfortable and inspiring to you. Feel free to venture away from the basic color scheme of the rest of the house...this is your space, so enjoy it!

Tip #6- Use colors to enhance your work habits

Also consider the emotional impact of certain colors on mood and productivity. For example, orange sharpens focus and promotes stamina and energy (right); blue provides a calming, peaceful environment; yellow enhances optimism and promotes cheerfulness; shades of green instill a sense of trust and security; violet signifies spirituality and strength; red stirs up passion and deep emotion.



A vibrant office painted in vivid orange promotes focus and energy.

Tip #7- Make it cozy

Once you have your equipment and basic furniture needs taken care of, don't forget to add some elements of comfort. An overstuffed chair and ottoman add an inviting look to the room and provide a place to read or review work (below left). Even a small office space can greatly benefit from a chair and footstool in a corner (below right).

This element is especially important if you work at home full-time. Research has shown that working in a single position (i.e., sitting at the computer) for too long can cause physical and emotional problems, alike. Giving yourself a comfortable place to sit encourages you to move around more often during your work day.



A comfy chair...

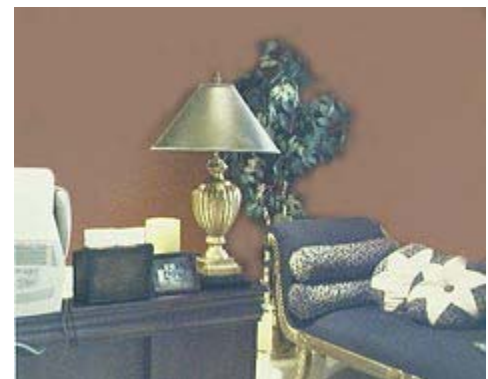


...makes a home office inviting and relaxing.

Tip #8- Go for a style

If you add a chair or other "living room furniture" to your office, don't be afraid to make a stylish statement.

For example, if you love ultra-modern, go for a contemporary loveseat. Is eclectic elegance your thing? A sleek chaise combines comfort with the ultimate in style and luxury (right). If you love the casual romantic, "Shabby Chic" look, throw a rosebud quilt over a chair and pile it with pillows.



The earthy colors and stylish chaise create sublime sophistication in this office.



A sofa and coffee table in this office (also shown on page 2) ensure that visitors have a place to sit and and work.

Tip #9- Sharing your space

In addition to a cozy chair for you, consider who will use or visit your home office and make sure that the needs of all concerned are met.

If you share the office with another household member, brainstorm about your various needs to find compatible solutions. Determine whether your home office has visitors and, if so, determine places for them to sit and/or work. How many people visit your office at once, and do you have adequate seating for them? Do you need a coffee table to act as a “conference table” when others come to sit and work with you (left), or will a simple chair on the other side of your desk suffice? Do you need a space for your children to be able to play while you are working? Think through all the scenarios to find the most comfortable solution for everyone.

Tip #10- Double-duty still deserves decor!

If your home office does double-duty serving another purpose (such as being your bedroom or a guest room), don't sacrifice style! Computer centers that close up inside armoires or secretary desks (right) are the perfect solution for a stylish bedroom that can open up into an office in a moment.

A frugal option is to install doors or plantation shutters on a second-hand entertainment center or large shelving unit, to hide computer equipment and work-related books and files.

Also, if the room has a closet, you can create a computer space right inside the closet, and hide it by closing the closet door. You also can use folding screens to hide office equipment when the room is serving as a bedroom for guests.



A secretary desk in the corner of a bedroom beautifully hides computer equipment.

Be flexible and creative when dreaming up “double-duty” office spaces. Can you convert part of a garage? Can you place an computer center armoire in the corner of the dining room? Is there a hallway that could get a makeover with a desk and attractive storage options?

Tip #11- Create stylish storage

Having adequate storage is very important so that your office remains uncluttered. By selecting storage options that look more like furniture or decorative accessories, rather than looking like stark office equipment, you can successfully marry office technology with the style of your home.

For example, consider fabric-lined wicker file baskets placed in shelves instead of a metal filing cabinet (right) or store your office supplies in a matched set of attractive photo boxes, or cover letter trays with beautiful wallpaper.

Tip #12- Let there be light!

Light is very important in a home office. Not only will proper lighting enhance your productivity, it also can add warmth and style to the room. For example, an adjustable desktop lamp looks attractive and inviting and also reduces glare on a computer screen. If you have a separate sitting area in the room, be sure that area has a reading lamp available. Strive to have different lighting options that reduce eye-strain.



A skylight is a very effective lighting option for a home office.

If the room has windows, be sure that you allow for some natural light to come through. Choose window treatments that allow you to control the amount of light into your workspace so that you can change it according to the time of day and time of year. Skylights are ideal for providing great lighting coverage without bothersome glare (left).



Fabric-lined boxes on shelves provide a cozy alternative to a filing cabinet.



Plants add a tangible breath of life to a home office!

Tip #13- Add plants

Adding plants, flowers, and greenery to an office is a great way to keep it from looking cold and utilitarian. Living or artificial, plants add a homey element to any office (left).

Tip #14- Create inner rooms

Create order and clarity in your office by dividing it into “inner rooms”, where each part of the room serves a different purpose. For example, you could divide the room into a reading, sitting, and computing areas.

While this is an effective method for arranging an office of any size, it is particularly helpful in keeping large offices from feeling too cavernous and impersonal.



This office area is divided into several “inner rooms” to create an open feeling and logical flow in the space.

Tip #15- Personalize your space

As stated previously, the bonus of a home office is that YOU are the designer. You aren't limited to a cubicle or four blank walls.

Take advantage of this unique opportunity to truly personalize your home office by displaying items that have special meaning to you.

For example, photographs, special collections, mementos, and souvenirs can work to create an atmosphere that is one-of-a-kind, and truly yours.



Cherished items are placed on bookshelves to create a personalized, inspiring environment in this home office.

Adding such elements infuses your office with the essence of YOU...which is sure to make your home office feel much more like home!

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