



Overhead lighting It's important to provide artificial lighting at height in case you work at night or you don't have the benefit of natural lighting during the day

Windows Large amounts of glazing help bring natural light into the room

Task lighting A minimalist desk lamp creates a clutter free appearance

Colour scheme Picking accent colours, such as black and green, has helped to create both a unified and organised working environment

Fitted furniture One of the benefits of fitted home office furniture is that you can maximise the use of the space available

WORKING solutions

To make your home office a success, you need to consider your design carefully - from lighting and furniture to where to locate your working space, says **Sophie Hoyland**

It's estimated that 5.5 million people in the UK use their home as their primary place of work. There are a host of reasons why the option is so popular - no commute, more time spent with the family and flexible hours, to name but a few.

To create an efficient working environment you'll need to put some space aside in the planning stages of your home, a kitchen table simply won't cut it. So what do you need to consider to get the right look?

The basics

The first phase is deciding what you need your home office for. The type of work space you choose will depend entirely on what you do for a living. "Someone who works in sales may just need a phone, computer and a quiet area shut away from the rest of the house. On the other hand, an artist or seamstress, may need plenty of space to store lots of equipment as well as requiring a vast amount of natural light," says Hugo Tugman of Architect Your Home.

Whatever the nature of your work, you're going to need various bits of equipment and furniture. So ask yourself what the essentials are. "For example, do you need lots of storage? Will you be using a computer and printer? Do you need a desk? Will you be on the phone a lot? Once you've got your kit list sorted, you can then work out how best to shape your office," says Hugo.

Location

Next, you need to decide on the best place to locate your home office to fit in with your requirements, above.

Popular office spaces include liveable lofts and basement conversions. But if you can't allocate a separate area, or don't have the budget for any structural changes, you'll need to make the most of the room you already have. A spare bedroom or under-used space in your dining room or living room could work, as could a cupboard beneath the stairs. "I once had a client who turned an alcove in the living room into her office, with a sliding door that would close

up the space at the end of the working day when her family arrived home," says Hugo.

If you have young children or work irregular hours and need to be situated away from the daily hustle and bustle of your house, a garden office may be ideal. These secluded spaces can provide peace and quiet, can be well-insulated, fitted with heating, electricity and telephone connections and often provide lots of natural light - a bonus for artists.

The ergonomics

To use the space efficiently, you do need to take some care choosing the right layout for your furniture and equipment.

"Look at how you move around during an average working day to find out where is best to put all your equipment," says Hugo. Whatever you do most often will dictate what you want to have easily on hand. "For example, if you're always looking at books and files while sitting at your desk, you'll want them stored away in a position that's easy to reach at seat level," says Hugo.



So a desk with storage underneath may work best, or alternatively shelving on the wall above.

You should also look at how you can streamline your working area. "Check to see if there is anything you can change in your daily pattern to make the space more ergonomically efficient, such as digitalising your paperwork," says Hugo.

Lighting

It's by far better to maximise natural light rather than rely on artificial lighting. If you're self building, rather than renovating, you're at an advantage as you can include lots of glazing in your house design. For corridors and basements where installation of traditional windows is not possible consider clever tricks, such as tunnel lighting. A tube fitted with reflective material to channel daylight inside your home.

However, if you're simply converting an existing space, artificial lighting may be your only option. "Make sure you're aware of over-lighting, though. You don't want a glare from your computer screen to result in eyesight problems in the future," says Hugo. Combine an overhead general lighting scheme with a task light, such as a desk lamp or standing lamp, for close-up illumination.

Planning permission

You do not necessarily need planning permission to work from home. However, the key test is whether the overall character of the dwelling will change as a result of the business. If your home is no longer mainly used as a private residence, there is a marked rise in client traffic, your business involves activities unusual in a residential area or your type of work will disturb your neighbours at unreasonable hours or create other forms of nuisance, you're likely to need consent to change the use of the dwelling.

If you are in any doubt, talk to your local council and apply for a Certificate of Lawful Use for the proposed activity, to confirm it is not a change of use. Make sure you check with your local council before erecting a garden office, too. Although outbuildings are considered to be permitted development, how often you use it and for what purpose will determine whether you need consent. Visit www.planningportal.gov.uk for more details. ●



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