

around the HOUSE

The Home Office, Designed for All

People are working from home more than ever. Rising fuel costs as well as advances in information technology (IT) are making the home office a room of increasing importance. “Telecommuting” is a work arrangement where employees enjoy flexibility in their working location and hours; the daily commute to work is replaced by telecommunication links. This offers benefits to communities, employers, and employees.

According to TeleworkResearchNet work.com, estimates suggest that more than 50 million people (about 40% of the working population) could work from home at least part time; yet, in 2008, only 2.5 million (not including those who are self employed) consider their home their primary place of business. Through my research, I have not found how many self-employed individuals work from home; however, I am sure the figures are large.

The home office has become one of the most important and most used rooms in the house. It can benefit everyone—especially people with special needs. When working from a properly designed home office, it is not necessary to deal with physical barriers in the built public environment. And who wants to spend unnecessary money on fuel and lost time in traffic, anyway? Let’s look at features of the inclusive/universal-designed home office.

First, check with your local zoning officials. There may be limitations as to what kinds of services you can provide, and some cities may not allow you to work from home at all.

Remember, a portion of your home office may be tax deductible if used for genuine business purposes and if, for example, a second bath is remodeled to be accessible for you and your visitors, it

may qualify for tax deductions. Always consult an accountant.

Location, Location, Location!

A home office should be in a portion of the home that is free from distractions, has good lighting, and is easily accessible to everyone. It will be the environ-

with a sidelight and a package bench. I often include a through-wall mail drop, eliminating the need to go outside to get mail. All entrances are ½-inch maximum no-step thresholds. The walls between the office and the rest of the house have sound insulation with resilient clips attached to the drywall. Privacy is essential.

I like to design the home or remodel with a fully accessible half bath adjacent



A front-of-house bedroom was resized to become a home office.

ment where you will be productive and professional. For this reason I try to locate a home office in a new home at the front of the house.

to the office. This will accommodate everyone and allow use of the room without going into the private portion of the home. All my home designs that

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In many cases, the space allocated for the rarely used “living room” has been replaced with the inclusive home office. Include a separate covered entry door

have upper levels and basements have double stacked closets for a future or included elevator. The basement may then be used for storage or a conference

room. Provide an egress window in the basement for emergency access.

A 10x10-square-foot room can be large enough for a one-person office, excluding a visitors area. A 150-square-foot room may be large enough for two people. The office should be designed with a 10x12- or 14-foot-length room for maximum efficiency.

Use the Best Lighting

A reasonable amount of natural light is necessary for maximum productivity and encourages positive and energetic thinking. Consider including a courtyard garden adjacent to the office, perhaps with raised planters. Landscaping, a water fountain, or just a spot in the sunshine can be a nice stress reliever, providing a break from the telephones.

Make sure your desktop workspace faces opposite or perpendicular to the windows to avoid glare.

Ambient lighting typically comes from a ceiling fixture that evenly distributes light throughout the entire room. I prefer four foot T-8 lamps with electronic ballasts for the home office. A good color choice would be 3500K. Long life, great color qualities, and high efficiency make these a good choice. Wall washers may be a nice touch for your artwork. Sconces can add a sophisticated indirect-lighting touch.

Task lighting is located on or near your work surface and switched on to illuminate specific areas. Provide front-of-counter switches. Do not forget under cabinet and shelving lighting. You are



A full office is not always needed. Here, John has removed the rolling cart under the kitchen-sink island and uses this space for computer work and as a play station. This allows him to hang out with the rest of the family and use his computer because knee space was provided.

probably aware of compact fluorescent lamps that use $\frac{1}{4}$ of the energy of incandescent bulbs and last ten times longer. LED (light emitting diode) lighting products are constantly evolving and are a great choice.

Equipment Needs

Varying-height counters allow your office to work for everyone and provide under-counter knee space. Several countertop and cabinet mechanical systems pull down and pop up so higher shelves are accessible.

Adequate telephone and data lines are a necessity. I recommend category 5 or even category 6 wiring for your current and future needs. Provide a dedicated and separate 15–20 amp electrical service for a home office. A separate

ground is another precaution that will isolate your office equipment from other home appliances. Always employ a battery-operated full-time surge protector for the computer equipment.

Keep Safety in Mind

Always remember safety in your home office. Keep wires out of the way and make sure not too many machines are plugged into the same outlet. For this reason I design outlets 24 inches above the floor and every six feet along the wall, and at the front of the desk for easy access. An outlet plug product that pops up out of the desk is available.

If the office doesn't have a separate exterior door, make sure at least one window is an egress window. If you are a wheelchair user, verify the sill is no higher than 30 inches

above the floor for easy emergency escape. Install a smoke detector hard wired in series with the rest of the home.

Make regular backups of your computer data in a separate location outside the office. Remember to look into home office insurance. This may be included as a rider to your homeowner's insurance.

A universal-designed home office can be empowering and provide even more independence for wheelchair users.

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The book Universal Designed Smart Homes for the 21st Century by Charles Schwab, available at www.UniversalDesignOnline.com/bookintroorder.html, has a home-office UD features and benefits page, and includes many plans with home offices. PN readers receive a \$5 discount by using coupon code vethomes. ■