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OFFICE SPACE

There are almost five million of us now working from home (onesies optional) and it's on the rise. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't create a professional office environment or scrimp on style, writes serial homeworker CAROL BURNS

The ideal working space in your home should be comfortable and inspiring, but it doesn't have to be huge - and neither does your desk. Danetti Trestle Matt White Desk £249 from danetti.com

I read a story recently about a homeworker working on Skype who had dressed for the part above the waist, but who gave her e-meeting attendees a fetching view of her pyjama bottoms when she got up.

Perhaps alongside the lack of the commute, flexible working hours and some quality time with your slippers, working from home has many advantages – but it has its downsides. There's the occasional office-bound colleague who is convinced you are watching *Loose Women* when you should be tied to your desk 9-5. On the contrary, I often find office hours are extended beyond the classic work day, as the temptation to just pop on the computer for a minute on a Sunday afternoon, Thursday night or while you are making coffee at 7am is more likely.

Not that I'm complaining (did I mention the nine metre commute from my kitchen?) but it's vital that your home working space is as fit for purpose as your employer is required to make. Once that's done, you can pander to your own aesthetic tastes, beyond bringing in your own office mug.

Karen Chugg from Exeter's Intelligent Abodes (intelligentabodes.co.uk) knows more than most how to create the perfect environment for working from home. "One of the most important aspects for me when I work at home is connectivity so all my devices are linked: computer, phone, tablet and printers, but I am also connected to cloud services, clients, colleagues and business partners. A robust, reliable network is a must for the success of any business, so when designing your work space give consideration to the network topology." She recommends Ruckus wireless networking equipment. "It offers best in class performance, creating a mesh which allows signal steering to give better connectivity where it is needed."

MAKING SPACE

Starting a new job in an office, you would probably be slightly disconcerted if they led you to a small dark cramped space or shed out in the car park, so why accept these conditions when working from home?

For many homeworkers the office is combined with other uses: guest room, dining room or even the hallway are pretty common. Consider what space you need – and ensure there is plenty of storage to hide things away and return the room to relative normality when you are not working. Shelving and desks with drawers will also help you maintain that Friday feeling.

HEY GOOD-LOOKING

You might think that your office space is for work rather than pleasure, but it is still part of your home, so decorate and accessorise accordingly.

Karen Chugg at Intelligent Abodes advises starting with lighting. "Lighting is an essential ingredient, partially to allow us to carry out the work more effectively but perhaps more importantly because of the impact it has on how we feel," she says. "A simple concept with a smart solution - the lighting control is intuitive responding to your needs and controlling natural and generated lighting to complement your space whatever the season."

What about heating? A common complaint is why heat the whole house all day when you are confined to one room? A three-bar heater under the desk might keep your toes warm, but it's not going to improve your working environment. Karen recommends a smart system. "Heating controls have also become very intuitive, with the introduction of Heatmiser and Nest, as they respond automatically to changing needs - very useful if your working hours are varied. When you go out they automatically reduce the temperature and increase it again on your return."

SAFETY FIRST

Companies spend millions making sure they protect the health and safety of their workforce – but working from home, we can tend to forget some of the basics and treat the sofa as a suitable substitute. You should ensure chairs, desks and laptops are supporting your health. ■

acas.org.uk/homeworking and hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm

You don't need to take up a whole room - just find a quite space for your office like this one by The Jam Tart.

If you are sitting at a desk for any anmount of time, you need a suitable chair. This is a case of balancing style with health and safety. Always try out a chair before you buy. Cult Living Ellington Office.

It's not all about sitting a desk - the perfect office space should have somewhere to curl up in and read those reports with a cup of tea. Natuzzi Cammeo Armchair.

Plants are meant to improve your working environment - and at least at home you won't forget to water them while you are away from your desk.