

HOME PAGE MY TIMES TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS

My Account Welcome, craigkay Log Out Help

The New York Times

Home & Garden

Style All NYT Search Ameriprise Financial

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE

AUTOS

FASHION & STYLE DINING & WINE HOME & GARDEN WEDDINGS/CELEBRATIONS T MAGAZINE

What to do in Barcelona? See what travelers like you recommend. "Don't skip the Picasso Museum—the building alone would make the visit worthwhile." — John

The New York Times
NYTimes.com/Travel

The Office, Housebroken

Designed by InHouse Design Studio

Next Article in Home & Garden (1 of 9) »



Peter DaSilva for The New York Times

Lee Unkrich, a Pixar Animation Studios director, has a streamlined space designed to conceal his high-tech devices.

By JULIE SCELFO

Published: January 3, 2008

IT was not so long ago, Neal Zimmerman recalls, that the term home office meant something very different from what it does today. In the early '90s, when Mr. Zimmerman, a prominent workplace architect with offices in West Hartford, Conn., started designing residential work spaces, most people thought "home office" meant the headquarters of a company. Back then, the very idea of working at home had a certain stigma, except in a few vocations like freelance writing. In the popular imagination, he said, "people who worked from home were usually laid off or couldn't hold down a job, or were peripheral to the work force."

Related

[Home-Office Life and Its Discontents](#) (January 3, 2008)

[Personal Shopper: When It's Time to Get to Work](#) (January 3, 2008)

But by 2006, according to data collected by the Dieringer Research Group, a marketing research company in Brookfield, Wis., more than 28 million Americans were working from home at least part time — an increase of 10 percent from just the year before, and 40 percent from 2002. The American Home Furnishings Alliance reports that 7 in 10 Americans now have offices or designated workstations in their homes, a 112 percent increase since 2000. And a recent survey by the National Association of Home Builders found that home offices ranked as the fourth most important feature in a new upscale

- E-MAIL
- PRINT
- REPRINTS
- SAVE
- SHARE

MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. [Giving Disorganized Boys the Tools for Success](#)
 2. [The Curious Cook: The Invisible Ingredient in Every Kitchen](#)
 3. [Well: A Clutter Too Deep for Mere Bins and Shelves](#)
 4. [Op-Ed Contributor: What's Your Consumption Factor?](#)
 5. [Losing an Edge, Japanese Envy India's Schools](#)
 6. [With Builder in Bankruptcy, Buyers Are Left Out](#)
 7. [Still Skinny, but Now They Can Cook](#)
 8. [Outposts: Two-Buck Huck](#)
 9. [Practical Traveler | Round-the-World Trips: Traveling the Globe on a Single Ticket](#)
 10. [Hospitals Slow in Heart Cases, Research Finds](#)
- [Go to Complete List »](#)



Ethan Pines for The New York Times

A MAN'S CASTLE Alexander Cappello, a merchant banker, above, poses with his daughter, Francesca, and one of his vintage guns in the traditionally masculine space that a friend's wife calls his testosterone room.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Ethan Pines for The New York Times

CUSTOMIZED Alexander Cappello's office, top, is a showcase for globes, swords and animal heads.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Peter DaSilva for The New York Times

Lee Unkrich has a space designed around technology.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



home, just ahead of security.

In addition to new technologies that have enabled the telecommuting revolution, Marilyn Zelinsky-Syarto, a writer specializing in workplace design, pointed to an increase in design options as part of the reason for the change. "Years ago," said Ms. Zelinsky-Syarto, who has her own home office in Fairfield, Conn., "it was Staples or a high-end furniture store with ridiculously large or tiny writing desks that did not fit technology. Nothing in between."

"But now," she added, "we have carpenters creating custom built-ins in home office spaces and filling them with furniture from a variety of sources. Plus, there are a whole heck of a lot more affordable interior designers willing to take on one room at a time."

There are also several distinct needs and desires being expressed by their clients. As more Americans come to see home offices as central to their lives, those offices say more about them as individuals, and each of the four examples discussed here certainly reflects its owner. But each also speaks to what decorators, architects and furniture manufacturers describe as a major aspect of the growing market for home offices, and of the ways millions of Americans are living and working at home.

A Room of His Very, Very Own

The American fascination with luxury in recent years has given rise to what Ms. Zelinsky-Syarto called the "status symbol office," one "that shows everyone how hard you worked to pay for that million-dollar-plus house." Among men in particular, the demand has increased for touches of grandeur from the turn of the last century, like intricate wood paneling and antique partners' desks. Few men, though, could hope to compete with the walnut-paneled office that Alexander L. Cappello, the founder, chairman and chief executive of the Cappello Capital Corporation, a merchant bank, has filled with guns, swords, animal heads and other accouterments of masculinity.

"My friend's wife calls it the testosterone room," said Mr. Cappello, who decorated the two-story 40-by-60-foot room in his Brentwood, Calif., house himself. "It's got all the things I'm passionate about."

The office, which Mr. Cappello said cost \$300,000 to \$350,000, holds three dozen antique chess sets, several hundred globes, 1,800 handmade canes from around the world and thousands of antique books. The paneling came from a castle in the south of France, and the Empire-period fireplace, he said, was built for one of [Napoleon's](#) residences. A billiard table from 1849 and a large partners' desk anchor opposite ends of the room, and 19th-century military and animal paintings adorn the walls, along with two big plasma screens, "for watching football games with my buddies," he said.



The New York Times
nytimes.com/health
ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO CLICK

ADVERTISEMENTS

In a world of second opinions, get the facts first. Go to [NYTimes.com/Health](#)



The New York Times STORE



RETIRE ON LESS THAN YOU THINK, REVISED EDITION
Buy Now



Jennifer S. Altman for The New York Times

Christine Jowers uses her office to escape from the tumult of family life.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

Alessandra Gouldner turned storage space into a loft office.

The desire for such masculine space isn't limited to multimillionaires, said Eric Heim, a senior designer and the store manager at Manhattan Cabinetry. "It's every man's dream," he said. "They can hang out there, and no one bothers them."

Several manufacturers have introduced office furniture that responds to this seemingly universal desire. Clarendon, a line of 17th-century English-style wall units from Hooker Furniture, wraps around a room, creating a built-in look with elaborate moldings and traditional hardware. The set retails for \$20,000, with options including a matching desk and chair, a computer hutch, a bookcase, a credenza, an entertainment center large enough for a 60-inch flat-screen television, and a bar cabinet.

More affordable options include Maitland-Smith's enormous Black Angus and cowhide partners' desk (about \$9,000), which is so big that two people can use it facing each other, with their own knee-holes, and Pottery Barn's new Montego roll-top desk (\$1,999).

In a working environment, though, grandeur has one drawback, at least on the scale of Mr. Cappello's office. It's "a little bit cluttered," he said. "It basically looks like an antique store inside. Whenever I have meetings at home, they're always in the wine cellar."

Women Have Stuff, Too

"For many years the only space a woman had to work in was shared with the rest of the family, at the end of the kitchen counter or in a guest bedroom," said Christopher Lowell, an interior designer with a nationally syndicated radio show and a

television show that he said is to start this year on the Fine Living network. "She never had a place where she could put her stuff out and leave her stuff out."

It is a mentality that persists even when women have space to spare, said Alexa Hampton, a New York designer. "They have huge houses but somehow feel guilty owning the fact that they run the house and their kids' lives, and have jobs and do 50 other things that normal human beings shouldn't be able to do."

Only recently have designers begun recognizing that women need work spaces on a par with their husbands' and taken steps to create them, Ms. Hampton said. Even so, she added, "we almost need to force women to do it."

That was the case for Christine Jowers, the founder of Christine Jowers/Moving Arts Projects, a dance production company in Manhattan, who was accustomed to holding meetings in her bedroom or kitchen. "The dance field is really laid back, and people are always friendly and casual," she said. "But still, it was just weird."

So when Ms. Jowers and her husband, Robert Friedman, moved to an apartment near the Bowery in June, she hired Bill Suk, an architect at the Truise Suk Design Group in Manhattan, to add a room on the rooftop that she could devote entirely to work, away from the high-traffic areas used by her sons, age 5 and 9.

The other key to making the space suitable for work — and not just an extra room that would become a catchall for domestic overflow — was adequate storage: she has a custom filing cabinet, where she can keep her writings, and bookshelves for her large library of dance books. She added

a desk bought at an antiques store 10 years ago and plastic drawers from National Wholesale Liquidators. The total cost of the project, including building permits, was just over \$30,000, she said.

Some retailers are now responding to women's need for dedicated home office space by offering products specifically geared toward their requirements. Office Depot, recognizing that more than half its customers are women and that businesses owned by women were growing twice as fast in number as others, has added several new lines of furniture, including the Christopher Lowell Collection, which has sold so well that the company is now developing furniture sized and scaled for women under its own brand name, said Richard Diamond, an Office Depot vice president.

High-Tech, and Hidden

The explosion of digital technologies has led to a new set of challenges for designers trying to create comfortable, uncluttered work spaces, particularly for clients whose jobs — or predilections — involve the use of multiple devices. Lee Unkrich, who works at Pixar Animation Studios and is currently directing “Toy Story 3,” uses a Mac Pro computer with two monitors at his home office in Marin County, Calif., along with sundry digital media players, cameras and scanners, an Epson photo printer and a control panel that lets him use his Crestron home automation system to adjust the heat, air-conditioning, lighting and security system from anywhere inside or outside the house.

“I’m a gadget freak, but I don’t like to be surrounded by stuff,” Mr. Unkrich said. “When I’m working, I need to have a very clear mind. I can’t have chaos around me.”

To create a streamlined work space, Mr. Unkrich hired **Mark Dutka**, an interior designer who runs the InHouse Design Studio in San Francisco. **Mr. Dutka** came up with what he called a partial-perimeter solution: two-thirds of the room is dedicated to Mr. Unkrich’s work space, so he can reach almost everything he needs without getting up; the rest functions as a den.

The desk and cabinets are made of makoré, an exotic wood that Mr. Unkrich liked for its warmth and its interesting grain. They hide pullout shelves that hold an array of audio and visual components, and a wire management trough under the desk. Aware that Mr. Unkrich would probably update his gear frequently, **Mr. Dutka** said he made sure the storage wasn’t so component-specific that it couldn’t accommodate whatever sizes or shapes came next.

To give the space visual interest, an opposing wall and a desk extension were covered with eucalyptus, which is much lighter than makoré and has pronounced striations. The final touches included a couch where Mr. Unkrich’s wife, Laura Century, could sit and read, and shelves on the wall next to the desk with two rolling stools their three children, age 3, 8 and 10, can pull over when Mr. Unkrich is in need of a consultation.

For Mr. Unkrich, the best part of the room — which he said cost under six figures — is not what you see, but what you don’t. “You walk into the room, and you don’t see anything except the computer monitors.”

Small Spaces, Big Dreams

In New York, the increased demand for home offices has been accompanied by a pronounced rise in the cost of real estate, so city dwellers have become adept at carving places to work out of ever-smaller spaces.

When Alessandra Gouldner and her husband (who works in law enforcement and asked not to be named) moved into a two-bedroom apartment in Park Slope, Brooklyn, in 2003, Ms. Gouldner turned the second bedroom into a home office for her interior design business, AG Interiors. There were a few overflow work items, like fabric samples and a photocopier, but Ms. Gouldner stashed them on the 2 ½-by-4-foot storage platform that the previous owners had installed in the hallway just under the ceiling, along with a narrow staircase leading to it.

But after her daughter, Lulu, was born in 2005, Ms. Gouldner decided to turn her office into a nursery. And since every other part of the apartment's 1,100 square feet was already in use, she was left with nothing but the tiny platform at the top of the stairs.

Convinced she could make the space work as an office, Ms. Gouldner found a 48-inch-wide desk — a parson's table in white from West Elm — that ran the width of the alcove, maximizing work space. (Her biggest challenge, she said, was persuading her husband to carry it up the stairs, since there was no wiggle room. "There was a lot of sweat and cursing that day," she said.)

After ruthlessly paring down her work equipment and materials, she stored what remained, including her phone and fax, on two tiers of wood shelving she installed — also in white, to minimize any sense of clutter. She hired an electrician to run all the wires behind the cabinets and add under-shelf lighting for the desktop, and bought a backless wooden stool that could be tucked under the desk. The total cost was about \$2,000.

"I'm actually really proud that I turned this tiny little afterthought of a space into a fully functioning office," Ms. Gouldner said. "That the space is limited doesn't limit me." It serves all her needs, she noted, and is tall enough to stand up in. "I'm 5-foot-8, and it's probably 5-foot-10."

Even so, there isn't much room to move around. "If I lean back," she said, "I fall down the stairs."

[Next Article in Home & Garden \(1 of 9\) »](#)

[In a world of second opinions, get the facts first. Go to NYTimes.com/Health](#)

Ads by Google what's this?

Used Office Furniture
Find Suppliers of Used Office Furniture on Business.com.
www.business.com

Office Furniture.
Wide Selection of Office Furniture Online.
www.Your-Office-Furniture.com

Custom Lobby Furniture
Fun, modern and cool lobby sofas for the office, hotel and business!
www.CoolSofa.com

Tips

To find reference information about the words used in this article, double-click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

Past Coverage

- [COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE; A Highly Designed Design Complex Gets a New Life \(June 30, 2004\)](#)
- [COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE; Project Aims for More Bustle in a Former Egg Capital \(June 9, 2004\)](#)

Related Searches

- [Home Furnishings](#) [Add Alert](#)
- [Office Buildings and Commercial Properties](#) [Add Alert](#)
- [Housing](#) [Add Alert](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM ◀ ▶

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| STYLE » | OPINION » | T MAGAZINE » | OPINION » | HOME & GARDEN » | N.Y. / REGION » |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|