

BAZAAR

Business

Harper's Bazaar's essential guide for working women

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When your home is also your place of work, a comfortable, inspiring office is essential. RACHEL MEDDOWES rounds up the funkiest furniture, slickest stationers and most user-friendly IT support to help make your action station work as hard as you do. Photographs by GRAEME MONTGOMERY

Never before has working from home been such an attractive proposition. The number of home-workers has more than doubled in the past eight years and, by 2007, it is predicted that some five million of us will be at it. Essential to the success of any home office is a calm, inspiring and comfortable workspace. For some, that will mean a modern, white-walled, paperless environment kitted out with design classics; for others, it means a cosier retreat, decorated with elegant antique furniture, wallpaper and a notice-board for photographs and mementoes.

If you plan cleverly, all you need to begin with is a comfortable desk and chair, good lighting, a compact computer with internet access and a printer, a simple filing system, and some storage space. But great accessories will make your working day much more enjoyable, and there's no shortage of places from which to get desirable equipment and stationery to suit all tastes.

And, of course, from broadband to the BlackBerry, the right technology is paramount. But without the support of a PA or an IT department, it is worth seeking out the services of the numerous people who can

help make things run more smoothly. Remember, working from home is a complete lifestyle change: don't underestimate the time it will take you to adapt – and for friends to realise you are not available during the day just because you are at home.

Planning your home office

The ultimate modernist shelving company, VITSOE (020 7935 4968) has planners that will design storage specifically to suit your space using its special interconnecting shelf system; you can also download a planning guide from the website, www.vitsoe.com.

The brand new Anyroom:Everyroom free-standing shelving system will revolutionise the way we think about storage – it's flexible, reusable and unique; for more information, contact ELDRIDGE SMERIN (020 7228 2824; www.eldridgesmerin.com), the ingenious architect designers behind its creation.

HUBBARDS (020 7837 4366; www.hubbardscupboards.com) is the best source of leading producers of slick yet functional filing systems and bookcases.

For practical design advice, visit a branch of HABITAT (0870 411 5501; [\[.net\]\(http://www.habitat.net\)\); for £200, its in-house team will plan two rooms for you.](http://www.habitat</p>
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With a style that's often described as 'quiet glamour', TODHUNTEREARLE INTERIORS (020 7349 9999; www.todhunterearle.com) offers a chic, elegant office-design approach.

Beautiful yet practical office spaces are a forte of the designers at TAYLOR HOWES (020 7349 9017; www.thdesigns.co.uk), who combine the best craftsmanship and technology.

Functional office equipment

Filing cabinets are essential but generally not very pretty: for minimal and modern, it has to be BISLEY's steel cabinets, available in 15 colours and more shapes than you knew existed. Ring 01483 485600, or visit www.bisley.com.

For vintage cabinets in wood or metal, go to CASTLE GIBSON (020 7704 0927; www.castlegibson.com); and to have your cabinets – or indeed any piece of furniture – covered in your favourite material so they blend into the background, get in touch with BOMBUS (07788 446321; www.bombus.co.uk).

For utilitarian office essentials including notice boards, stationery, franking machines, folders, box files and packing products, try

VIKING DIRECT (0800 424445; www.viking-direct.co.uk) or SLINGSBY (0870 607 6077; www.slingsby.com).

Lighting

Go to the experts, who can help set up intricate lighting systems to beat fatigue, and desk lamps that will cast just the right light from the darkest winter months to the long days of summer. Vast lighting emporium CAMERON PETERS (01235 835000; www.cameronpeters.co.uk) can advise on the best products and help you plan your lighting; and JOHN CULLEN (020 7371 5400; www.johncullenlighting.co.uk) offers a one-room lighting-design service, from £100.

Getting started

Setting up a home office can be a seriously time-consuming and at times frustrating business that can all too easily take you away from your real job.

BUSINESS LINK (0845 600 9006; www.businesslink.gov.uk) is a government-funded organisation that provides free practical advice and information about starting and running your own business, from getting finance to tax and payroll issues.

Get help with all those tedious set-up tasks in the early stages – from organising your computer network and broadband providers to changing phone lines and waiting in for deliveries. A practical person from one of these companies can take away the pressure: ALTER EGOS (0118 940 4993; www.alteregos.org.uk), from £35 an hour; HIRE INTELLIGENCE (020 8487 9450), from £50 an hour.

IT support

These super-patient technical bods are here to help with everything from set up to system crashes, offering telephone assistance or home visits: LIFESTYLE IT (020 8423 2244; www.lifestyleit.com), from £90 an hour; PROSYN (0845 644 2351; www.prosyn.co.uk), from £50 an hour; ZARCUS (0845 230 7730; www.zarcus.com), from £95 an hour; and TEMPLETON-SMITH (020 8947 7832; www.templeton-smith.com), which offers free phone support to existing clients.

For Mac starters, Apple Store has launched the ProCare package, which, for £79 a year, includes having your new computer set up, files transferred from the old one, weekly one-to-one training lessons, priority bookings at the Genius Bar (a drop-in advice centre), and annual tune-ups. Every Mac comes with 90 days' free support: AppleCare provides

web-based self-service, technical support and a worldwide network of repair centres. There's also the excellent AppleCare Protection Plan, from £129, for extending warranty and support coverage beyond the initial period. Free workshops on all aspects of using Apple run all day, every day in the Regent Street shop: APPLE STORE, 235 Regent Street, London W1 (020 7153 9000; www.apple.com/uk/retail).

Internet tips

For free or low-cost digital telephone calls all over the world, talk through your computer by registering with SKYPE (www.skype.com); the only prerequisite is that you have to be on broadband. Better still, join JAJAH (www.jajah.com) to connect by phone to any other registered worldwide landline or mobile for free.

The domain-name registration company that has been recommended time and time again is WWW.SUPANAME.NET.

Advertise any of your old equipment, computers, printers and furniture at FREE-CYCLE (www.freecycle.org), and the happy recipient will collect it from your door.

PA/secretarial services & home help

For part-time secretaries or flexible admin support to help with anything from filing to book-keeping, call URBAN PA (020 8487 9400; www.urbanpa.com), from £30 an hour; or PA CONFIDENTIAL (020 8980 9091; www.paconfidential.org.uk), from £15 an hour.

THE GOLDEN RULES

- 1 SPOIL YOURSELF WITH FRESH FLOWERS, FABULOUS CORRESPONDENCE CARDS AND LUXURIOUS SCENTED CANDLES, AND PIN UP SOME BEAUTIFUL PICTURES OR PHOTOS; LET'S FACE IT, YOU WILL PROBABLY SPEND MORE TIME IN YOUR OFFICE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE HOUSE.
- 2 BE PREPARED TO SPEND A DECENT AMOUNT OF MONEY ON COMPUTER EQUIPMENT AND SETTING IT UP. UNLESS YOU ARE A TECHIE WHIZZ, PROFESSIONAL ADVICE ON THE BEST SOFTWARE, WIRELESS SYSTEMS AND BROADBAND PROVIDERS WILL SAVE TEARS OF FRUSTRATION.
- 3 EVEN WITH WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY, THERE ARE ALWAYS UNSIGHTLY CABLES TO MANAGE; GO FOR A DESK THAT HAS A SHELF OR BOX HIDDEN AT THE BACK WHERE YOU CAN TIE UP ALL THE CABLES TO KEEP THEM OUT OF THE WAY.
- 4 A COMPACT ALL-IN-ONE PRINTER, SCANNER, FAX AND PHOTOCOPIER WILL

For lifestyle managers who will get the chores done while you work, including shopping, cleaning, buying presents and party organisation, try BUSY PEOPLE (020 8981 8972; www.busy-people.co.uk), from £8.50 an hour; or BUY TIME (0870 486 2624; www.buy-time.co.uk), from £25 an hour.

Flowers

Have a seasonal bouquet delivered every week of the year by designer florist JAMIE ASTON (020 7387 0999; www.jamieaston.com), from £35 a week plus delivery.

ISLES OF SCILLY FLOWERS (01720 422666; www.islesofscillyflowers.com) will dispatch cheery narcissi in winter and pretty pinks in summer; 10 weekly bunches cost just £100.

THE REAL FLOWER COMPANY (0870 403 6548; www.realflowers.co.uk) specialises in old-fashioned roses and will deliver weekly from £40.

Stationery

It is impossible not to be impressed by great invitations, business and correspondence cards. Invest in bespoke services from SMYTHSON OF BOND STREET (020 7318 0505; www.smythson.com); HAZLITZ (020 7225 7590; www.hazlitz.com); or PICCOLO PRESS (01667 454508; www.piccolopress.co.uk).

For beautiful, unusual correspondence cards, try FORTNUM & MASON (020 7734 8040; www.fortnumandmason.com). □

SAVE ON SPACE. HEWLETT PACKARD (0845 270 4215; WWW.HPSTORE.HP.CO.UK) HAS THE BEST SELECTION OF MULTIFUNCTION PRINTERS, FROM £72 PLUS VAT.

5 IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN, EXPLAIN FROM THE OUTSET THAT YOUR OFFICE IS YOUR SPACE. BE DISCIPLINED ENOUGH TO GO IN AND DO CHUNKS OF WORK RATHER THAN POPPING IN AND OUT, WHICH WILL LEAVE THE CHILDREN THINKING THEY CAN INTERRUPT YOU AT ANY TIME.

6 KEEP ALL YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL FILES SEPARATE. THIS MAY SOUND OBVIOUS BUT, AS THE WORKLOAD MOUNTS, A SIMPLE, EASY-TO-USE FILING SYSTEM IS INVALUABLE.

7 BE UTTERLY RUTHLESS WITH PAPERS YOU DO NOT NEED TO KEEP: FILE AWAY THE VITALS AND SHRED ANYTHING WITH YOUR NAME OR PERSONAL DETAILS ON (MAKE SURE IT'S A CROSS-CUT SHREDDER FOR TOTAL CONFIDENTIALITY).