

DESIGN JUNE 21/JUNE 22 2008

HOUSE & HOME

Design

Top desks and desk-tops

A chic, user-friendly place to work is becoming a sought-after feature in many homes, writes Nicole Swengley

In today's switched-on, wired-up world it's not only the design-conscious self-employed who want bespoke workstations and stylish storage. Even occasional home-workers have a demand for multi-functional furniture that doubles up for home or office use.

There's another, more pragmatic reason for creating a congenial workspace at home. London-based architect Alan Crawford believes a there is a financial imperative underpinning the numerous requests he has received for property extensions to house home offices. "The impact of the credit crunch means that people want to maximise the potential of their existing home rather than move to a bigger one," he says.

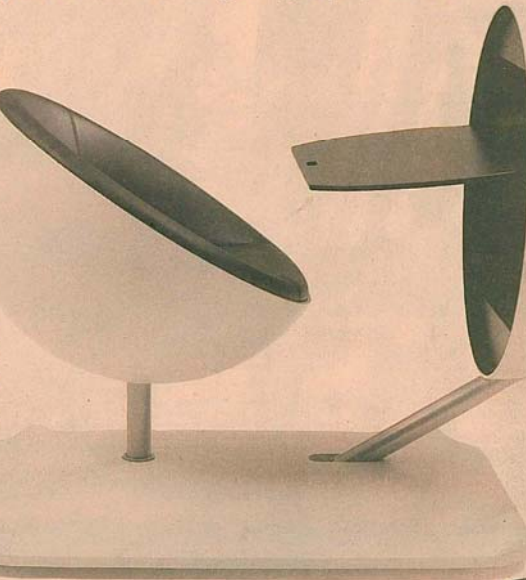
Although our ubiquitous use of laptops and smart phones allows us to work from a sofa, kitchen table or bed, this ignores the fact that many of us prefer to focus on work tasks in a quiet, dedicated space with specific furnishings to store reference materials and books. And most people want desks and filing cabinets that add to the aesthetics of their interior rather than mirroring a corporate environment. "It needs to be a balanced harmony between work and play," says Martin Waller of New York and London-based interior designers Andrew Martin International.

Sandra Nimmerly, an interior designer based in New York, says, "Desks can be sculptural statements and files can be kept in beautifully designed - even vintage - cabinets." Karen Howes of London-based interior designers Taylor Howes, agrees, adding: "We often design armchairs that look like pieces of furniture but house printers and files."

Mary Cook, an interior designer in Chicago, is finding the current demand for bespoke home offices "overwhelming", with people asking for "everything from alcoves to whole rooms". She recently fitted out a home office for a jewellery designer in a luxury high-rise condominium in downtown Chicago. It has built-in wenge work surfaces, shelving and cubby holes, with each drawer handle made from a different type of stone. But "if workspaces enter other, more formal areas of the home - places where you'd entertain", she says, "then clients want dual-purpose furniture."

Waller cites a trestle-style, A-frame desk with a simple glass top and chrome base from Andrew Martin International, costing £1,695, as a good-looking yet practical design for home or office use. Nimmerly favours "the P System" by Hedi Slimane, a former menswear designer for Yves Saint Laurent, because it's "minimal, practical, sculptural and multi-functional".

A good place to find the latest home office solutions is the annual Salone Internazionale del Mobile, held in Milan in April. Significantly, numerous exhibitors this year showed innovative home office designs in the main halls even though a dedicated



'People are looking for designs that reflect the style of their home and for beautiful, tactile furniture that has integrity in its own right'

workspace exhibition, called SaloneUfficio, was also staged at the fair. The move emphasises that home office kit is now as well-designed as any other contemporary furnishing, and is considered mainstream, rather than as a speciality sector of the global furniture industry. "As the concept of work and the workplace changes, so office furniture is being redefined, with designs becoming less corporate and more comfortable, practical and elegant," says Manlio Armellini, chief executive of Conait, the fair's organiser.

One of the eye-catchers at this year's Salone was Artfort's Globus mobile workstation designed by Michel van der Kley. The latest version of this ball-shaped multi-media workstation (£3,780) opens out to reveal a touch-screen desktop. It is supplied without hardware but has been prepared for a computer with speakers, touch-screen, card reader, USB hub and webcam. Space-saving good looks combine with practical advantages, as the workstation is compact - and any sign of work is completely concealed when visitors drop round.

The space-saving Zelos desk from German manufacturer ClassCon also drew admirers in Milan. Designed by Christoph Döninger, this glossy black or white lacquer box, on chrome legs, opens out to reveal a leather-covered writing surface with open-ended storage compartments on either side. The desk (£2,570 at Aram Store in London) also has neat slots to allow cables to exit underneath.

Anyone who prefers to have their stationery and other work essentials directly to hand might check out Orcus, designed by Konstantin Grcic, which has proved a bestseller for ClassCon since 1995 (from £3,995 at Aram). Like Zelos it's basically a box on legs, but instead of opening laterally it has a drop-down front that reveals four drawers and six shelves, plus a secret compartment. The Orcus's black leather-clad writing surface contrasts with the high-gloss, white lacquered exterior (it's also available

holder on wheels and comes in non-corporate blue or champagne as well as black, grey and brown.

As for storage that matches your glass-topped workstation - or, indeed, your elegantly ethereal Louis Ghost chair - look no further than the Conran Shop's modular Optic system. Its cube-shaped containers are made of transparent, faceted polycarbonate and can be built up horizontally and vertically to create a unit of the required size. Single 40-cm cubes cost £148 each.

Another chic design on show in Milan - and one that exemplifies Nimmerly's emphasis on the suitability of strong, sculptural shapes for contemporary interiors - was Nueva Linea's Bulugo desk by Spanish designer Jon Abad. Perfect for compact spaces, the wood-and-steel desk (from £1,800) has a trestle top and will be available in September in wenge, natural oak, teak, walnut or in coloured lacquered finishes. Meanwhile, Eugadesign exhibited the Pasodoble (about £1,800), a birch plywood writing table whose mobile surfaces slide horizontally to reveal storage areas below. Like the Bulugo, it would happily double up for work or play.

If your requirements veer more towards home use than heavy-duty work use, then designer Christophe Pillet's Nancy desk by the Italian manufacturer Porro could be just the ticket. Its slim silhouette has soft lines evocative of 1950s designs, while the lacquered blue, red or white wooden surface conceals three drawers, opened by pressing a button hidden underneath the top. The Nancy will be available this autumn at around £2,380 from London furniture retailer Viaduct, at Porro's showrooms in New York and Los Angeles, and at Laminite in Chicago and Miami. A simple and beautiful piece, it might even encourage the lost art of letter-writing.

Perhaps you live and work in a period house. Then you can still introduce the latest technical wizardry into a traditional library without spoiling its classic appeal. Tim Gosling, the London-based fine furniture-maker, conceals high-tech cabling and directional lighting within historically inspired, meticulously crafted bespoke furniture. He builds rise-and-fall audio-visual units and incorporates design tricks, such as pull-out laptop shelves and drop-down flaps concealing DVD players into pieces appropriate to a particular period.

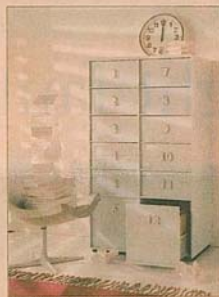
Gosling has just completed a hand-crafted library with silk-lined doors in a Grade I listed house in London and, for a Chelsea penthouse, a glamorous, contemporary desk in American walnut with a shaped surface inlaid with Santos rosewood and oyster-coloured shagreen leather. "Many clients spend a large amount of their down-time at a desk or work area," he says. "So they are looking for designs that reflect the style of their home and for beautiful, tactile furniture that has integrity in its own right."

A clever or clever solution for book storage is Italian designer Bruno Rainaldi's Ptolomeo. This free-standing, powder-coated, steel-and-chrome unit is a simple 215cm-tall pole fitted with slim, open-sided, shelves that disappear from view when stacked with books. It takes up minimal floor space and can also be wall-mounted.

Surfaces can also be kept clutter-free by using a versatile storage system from Italian manufacturer Emmebel. The custom-built, lacquered wood Toolbox is available in 24 matt colours or a bespoke colour to suit a homeowner's decor. Units are wall-hung or supplied on castors, with each door or drawer-front marked with a large numeral. Size can also be tailored to specific requirements, with prices starting from £411 for a one-door unit at Geoffrey Drayton.

Meanwhile the cBox, a neat, two-drawer storage or filing cabinet from Italian manufacturer Delficht, doubles as a seat with the addition of a cushion to its indented top surface. It comes in six colours and can even be supplied with an optional fragrance cartridge. The fragrances, including amber, rose, citrus or vanilla, last for up to three months before needing to be replaced. The cBox costs £291 from Eiko in London.

A whimsical novelty perhaps, but yet another way to make working from home much more fun.



Multi-functional Artfort's Globus mobile workstation (main picture), Toolbox (above), Tour by Tagliabue (below left), Ptolomeo desk stand

in white-stained pearwood or maple).

Anyone looking to conceal work-related items discreetly within a more sculptural design might consider Tour, from Italian manufacturer Tagliabue. This large oval cabinet has a sliding tambour front. Available with a natural wood or lacquered exterior, it stands on short aluminium legs and comes fitted with a monitor shelf, keyboard surface and internal shelving. The interior is fitted with electric plugs and recesses to accommodate electric cables. It costs £2,995 at London furniture retailer Geoffrey Drayton.

If you prefer to work in a less enclosed space, Tagliabue also makes the Blüte PC workstation (£1,315, also at Geoffrey Drayton) which consists of two bean-shaped surfaces - one for monitor, one for keyboard - with shallow revolving drawers beneath the lower surface. The sturdy aluminium structure and base comes with power sockets. Meanwhile the X.Abita range from Italian designer Fabio Piretti of Ponti Terenghi includes smart, minimal workstations with enamelled metal frames and glass surfaces, specially designed for desktop computers. The A103 design (from £750, £260) has a suspended computer tower-holder, extendable keyboard and choice of sandblasted or coloured glass surfaces, while A104 (from £1,131, £368) has a glass tower-

