



Choose a simple color palette to keep the room pulled together, advises designer Nate Fischer.

# MAKING IT WORK

Bring a little bit of the office into your residence with these tips for crafting the ideal remote workspace.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

Since the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of everyday life have changed. But possibly one of the biggest is how we work. While doctors, nurses, grocery store workers, first responders and even restaurant employees continue to head to work donning masks, those who are able opt to telecommute.

However, the space in which you work can

have a major impact on your stress levels, productivity and alertness throughout the day. As the health threat continues to grow, it's important to carve out a long-term home office, whether it's a nook or an entire room, that will allow you to flourish. "It offers a space [in which] to focus and concentrate," says Robert Esterley of both Esterley Designs and Sacred Living. "... I think it's also helping many

people find a new rhythm."

According to Julie Laughton of the eponymous Julie Laughton Design Build, now is the time to start planning for the transition to a new norm. "The world is forever changed and working from home can be even more productive and time-saving overall," she explains.

A few local designers have stepped in to offer tips on the best ways to transform a full

room—or even a small space—into a dream office that will have you lingering around even after the figurative 5 o'clock whistle blows.

## THE ESSENTIALS

When it comes to furniture, there are only two very pivotal pieces you need: a spacious desk and a comfortable chair. Esterley recommends starting out by creating a custom layout for the room, focused around your workspace. If you have more than one person working from home, he says partner desks can be a great way to maximize the area.

As far as the size of the desk, Nate Fischer, owner and design principal at Nate Fischer Interiors, says that anywhere from 24 to 30 inches is ideal. "This is not your junior high study station anymore," he explains, adding that most workers will want room to spread out.

Fischer notes that opting for a simple color palette is best if your aim is to keep the room pulled together. A desk with a wood finish or a solid neutral tone, like a gray or white, can make it easy to coordinate without being overwhelming. Laughton agrees: "I like soft, natural, organic materials and warm wood tones—not too dark, easy on the eye."

Because the desk will be the center point of your workspace, you want it to feel intentional. One way to accomplish this, according to Esterley, is to choose a piece that incorporates a hutch on top. This will allow for extra storage—an area in which you can place whatever tools and materials you'll use during the day, so you always know where to find them. This is important, according to Laughton, so that you



A 24- to 30-inch desk is optimal for an office space, Fischer recommends.

"don't have to keep moving your stuff and then it doesn't feel like your own personal space."

According to Chelsea Newton, a local resident, interior designer and owner of Laguna Beach-based Chelsea Lauren Interiors, the features the desks provide are just as important as the space itself. "Do you like the option to stand while you work?" she poses. "Then a desk that can transition from a sit to stand would be the best option. Others need more storage, so something with ample drawers will be important to them. I would start by figuring out your needs to see what ... shape and function works best for you."

When it comes to where you'll sit, Esterley

stresses that comfort is of utmost importance. While this will keep you focused and on track, he says it will also revolutionize the space into more than simply an office—it can double as what he calls a getaway room, "where you can read, you can sit and have a long phone conversation, and ... at night, ... just relax and dim the lights." He says it can also serve as a place to manage the home.

While Laughton agrees that finding a comfortable spot is key, she says that you don't necessarily need a whole room to create a dedicated workspace. "The office can be anywhere in your home that feels ... magical [and] Zen-like—[an area] ... that functions just right for you," she explains. "A typical place to put a workspace is a dining area or a breakfast nook where there is already a surface to lay out your things and good lighting."

For others, it may be better to dedicate a specific spot in the house to the job. Newton says that she prefers keeping her work life separate from her personal life—even at home. "Besides any distractions that may arise working from your kitchen table per se, it is also nice to have that mental separation," she explains. "The more you can separate your physical workspace, the less your work will seep into the rest of your life."

## THE EXTRAS

While your choice of desk and chair can make or break your home office environment, there are other items you can add to enhance it even further. Recessed lighting can bring in ample illumination without any harshness. "I do recessed lighting to place around the perimeter



TOP: RYAN GARVIN; BOTTOM: ASHLEY RYAN

Designer Robert Esterley suggests creating a custom layout for the room, focused around your workspace.





The home office of Disney legend Tony Baxter, created by Julie Laughton Design Build, features decor that adds a personal touch.



Plenty of light—both natural and recessed—is also important for any workspace to help illuminate the area.

of the room to give it a nice diffused light,” Esterley explains. He also recommends incorporating LED lights atop bookshelves for a subtle glow. Add a small table lamp at the work surface for some direct light and you’ll be good to go.

Functional pieces always come first in an office, but there’s no doubt that extra elements can really amplify the look and feel of the room. One thing you’ll want to determine early on is the color scheme. “Some of my clients want a calming color palette with minimal decor, as to not distract them from the task at hand, while I have other clients who find bold patterns and colors invigorating,” Newton says. “You have to find what works best for you and then build from there.”

Then, work in color, texture and personality through your choice of decor. This can include

pops of green brought in by potted plants, books of various shades on shelves or even brightly hued office supplies. Scenic or abstract artwork is another great choice, though Esterley says you can also use a picturesque calendar or even family photos to liven up the walls.

As Esterley’s Sacred Living firm takes a holistic approach to design, he notes that those special touches—like family photos and heirlooms—can really personalize a room. But there are some other pieces he personally feels are pivotal to a space that aims to promote peace and productivity. Aromatherapy is one of his favorite healing modalities, which he says can be brought in through an essential oil diffuser. To keep stress levels low, Esterley recommends a citrus scent. In addition, sound therapy can promote a calming atmosphere. He often

encourages the use of a noise machine or soft background music.

Esterley also suggests integrating tactile therapy components in an office, like a deluxe massage chair that offers everything from massage rollers and pressure point therapy to acupuncture. “That’s actually a very important therapy on a daily basis to de-stress,” he notes. On a smaller scale, consider adding a massage seat that can be placed directly on your chair, or a foot massager under the desk.

As for what to avoid, Esterley says that hard floors can lead to echoed noise, so, if you do include a solid surface, make sure to add an area rug to absorb some of the sound.

Whichever pieces you incorporate, make it cohesive and make it intentional, and you’re sure to find success. **LBM**