



6 Small Spaces

That make great places to work.

By JANINE BOLDRIN, *Army spouse*

It's easy to assume, each time you PCS to a home you wish were just a little big bigger, that you have to forgo an office. Not true: You don't need an entire spare room to have an office. Instead, take a tour around your home and look for places that fit both your work requirements and personal style preferences.

If your home is short on space, creativity is the key to creating a fun and functional office. Whether you do paid work, study for school, need room to pay bills, or want a place to scrapbook, an office should be a personal oasis where inspiration can brew and work can get done. In less time than you might expect, you can transform just the right nook into a place you love spending time and feel inspired to get your work done. Here are six ideas for spots to store supplies and start working:



Photo by Laura Petrilla

1 Office in a Box

Virtually any spot in your home becomes a workspace if you use an office armoire. This piece of furniture keeps clutter contained and out of sight. Kathryn Bechen, author of "Small Space Organizing: A Room-by-Room Guide to Maximizing Your Space," says the armoire is her favorite solution for shared office spaces, since the mess disappears when the doors are closed. Inexpensive office armoires can be found at discount furniture websites like overstock.com. Or hunt for an old television armoire at thrift or nonprofit furniture stores. Bring one home, spruce it up with paint and pictures, and if necessary add extra interior shelving to serve as a desk for a laptop. Then open the doors, pull up a chair and you're in business.

Office Equipment "Must-Haves"

Bechen suggests a quality paper shredder and small all-in-one fax, scanner, printer and clear, stackable plastic containers that can allow you to see what is inside.



Designer **Brian Patrick Flynn** helps clients find niches and alcoves perfect for a mini-office. In this design, a deep shelf functions as a desk, then smaller shelves can hold books or office supplies. Photo courtesy of HGTV.com.



Photo by Steven Dionna

2 Closet Space

Find another spot for the linens, because sometimes a closet is the only place you can set up an office in a small home. Check out The Container Store's Office in a Closet, which transforms a closet into a functional workspace and includes shelves to hold equipment and supplies. Great solution for families with young kids—you can lock up access to important papers and electronics. Only downside? Your “office in a closet” has to be reinstalled at each new duty station, putting wear on the equipment and requiring fixing the holes left behind. (And, of course, you’ve got to find another home for those linens.)



Photo by Sebastian Anthony

3 Under the Stairs

Why not reclaim the space under the stairs for your office? You only need to brighten up the area, so you don't feel like you're in a cave. “You want to be drawn to your home office like a magnet,” says Bechen. “Motivate yourself to work there, and make it as pleasant as possible.” She points out that you don't need to get hung up on painting the walls: Instead, transform a thrift shop desk with bright, glossy paint, hang up colorful family photos or inspirational quotes. One thing to banish from your tiny office? Distracting clutter, including toys. This is your space, so ask kids to respect the area where you get work done. >>

(until you're ready)

Bechen says one of the biggest mistake people make is running to the home office supply store too soon. Instead, try this:

- ▶ Before shopping, go through your paper files. Purge as much as possible, then organize what's left. You may find you need less space for files than you'd expected.
- ▶ Next, decide what supplies your chosen space can handle and which you really require.
- ▶ Once you know what you need, search your house to see if you can repurpose things you already have. Ice cube trays can hold small supplies, flower planters are funky containers for pens, and kitchen flatware trays are great storage for sticky notepads, scissors and letter openers.
- ▶ Finally, when you do hit the stores for what you truly need, think functional before fun.

4 Up High

If you have a landing at the top of the stairs or a loft overlooking the living room, the openness of this office space lets you keep tabs on household goings-on while doing your work. Just keep in mind where power sources are located to avoid running cords across the room. Since you're in the open, consider an office armoire or other closed storage to keep clutter out of sight. And if you're considering a landing, be sure you have enough space so you don't have to worry about falling.

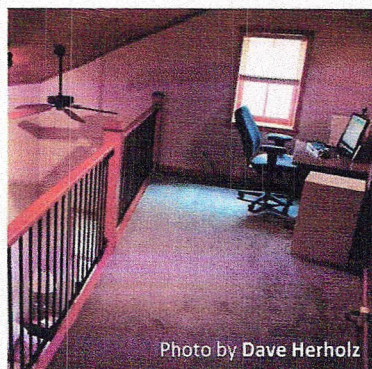


Photo by Dave Herholz

5 Corner Office

Can't claim an entire room as your office? A corner or section of a room can work, especially if you divide it off. Love natural light? Pick a spot with a window. If possible, avoid setting up your office in the master bedroom, which should be a serene place where you don't think about work. If you must put your office in a bedroom, use a room divider or hang a decorative sheet you can easily open and close to section off your work area.

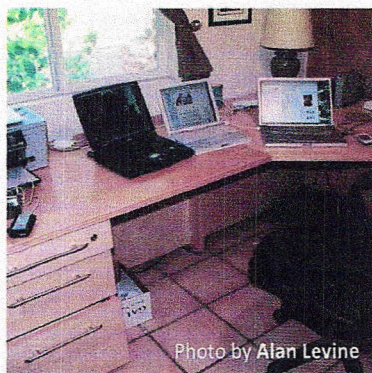


Photo by Alan Levine

6 Mobile Workspace

Don't have even a corner you can designate as "the office?" Take your office around the house by boxing all of your office materials in a portable container or small rolling cart with drawers. This is most practical for people who use their home office mainly for paying bills or handling household paperwork, or those who work from home just occasionally. Frequently end up working at the dining room table? Keep supplies in a nearby cupboard instead of a portable container. This makes for easy cleanup when you need the table for dinner, Bechen says. ★

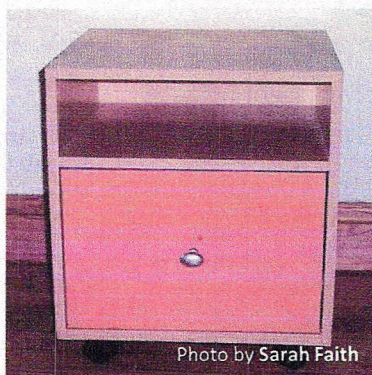


Photo by Sarah Faith



Photo courtesy of Rachel Patnode

Reader Tips

"My home studio is very small, so I try and maximize all the space I can. My husband helped me make this framed peg board that hangs just above my workspace. I painted it a fun, light color, framed it and started organizing. It keeps all my tools within reach, organized and out of the way! Best part is it can move with me when we PCS."

(Rachel Patnode, Army spouse & owner of Bella Sorella, an online, handmade kids' clothing shop)

"I work from home and my office space now has pictures of my favorite places from everywhere we've lived. I'll look up and stare at snow, lighthouses, mountains, beaches, city skylines, never-ending fields—a sample of each place. I work as a writer, so it inspires me and calms me, too."

(Karri Moser, Army spouse, freelance writer)