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FASHIONABLE FUNCTION

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written by Jennifer Horn, Telegraph Correspondent

Have you ever had the dream where you are surrounded by soothing music, enveloped in a warm glow, wrapped in a blanket of peace and serenity, while you work at your impeccably organized desk in your beautifully decorated home office?

For many of West's clients, the most valuable service she offers is her hands-on assistance. West recognizes that sometimes it is easier to get through the ugly part of the job - deciding what to keep and what to toss - when you have some friendly guidance and support.

"I don't just come in and tell them what they need to do," she said. "I stay and help them do it."

Home offices can be challenging, West said, while working her organization magic recently.

"You need to remove anything that is not absolutely necessary, and then try to divide the functions of the room into separate spaces," West said. "By disconnecting the work table and desk, you can create smaller, manageable spaces for each function: work at the desk, scrapbooking at the work table."

Oftentimes, homeowners take advantage of the space on the floor when organizing, but West said to think about going up.

"People often miss the obvious: The most wasted space in the room is the walls," she said. "Make better use of vertical space by organizing upward. Add shelves or storage on the walls to create new space. But be careful not to go too high, it may look overwhelming. And you need to be able to reach it or it isn't functional."

These days, creating spaces that are both organized and attractive is easier than ever before. There are now plenty of new opportunities to add trendy and stylish organization pieces to any room. Whether you shop at Pottery Barn or Target, the choices are numerous, with styles and price ranges for every consumer.

West emphasizes the importance of being comfortable in your room and making use of the items you love most.

"An oversized chair and ottoman may be too big for the office, but if it is your favorite place

to curl up together, it has to stay," she said. "Use the ottoman to store your scrapbooking supplies, and tuck it away under the work table when not in use."

Not every item has to be used exactly as the manufacturer intended. Simple wooden file boxes can be turned sideways and screwed into the wall to create unique but practical storage space for desk supplies. By mounting your favorite photos on their fronts, they also become attractive frames that add warmth to your office.

"By getting the desk supplies up off the desk, you create more space to work on your projects," West said.

Not everything has to go. Some things are retained strictly for sentimental purposes.

"We need to find a way to retain the sentimental value of possessions. For example, (one client) has stationery from her father's company, even though he has retired. She could frame a single sheet of it, perhaps with photos of her father, and use the rest of it for scrap paper."

"When a room feels crowded or small, creativity and productivity is lost," West said. "That's when things get out of control."

"When you organize, you first need to understand how you work, and what systems work best for you," West said. "Otherwise, your organized room won't stay that way because it doesn't make sense to you. Ultimately, you need to be able to maintain whatever organizing system you choose, or the clutter will quickly get out of control again."

Baskets as drawers, wooden boxes as shelves, ottomans as cabinets - form and function do indeed become one in today's home office.

We all dream of it: drawers in which you can find the paper clips, rubber bands and stamps without digging; cabinets in which paper supplies and envelopes are not only conveniently stored, but artfully displayed; and desktops that are actually visible.

Deep in our hearts, we think it's impossible.

In real life, real rooms used by real people just don't look like that. Especially home offices. Current projects are stored in piles - one on the ottoman, another in the far corner and those with the most pressing deadlines right on the desk chair. Important phone numbers are filed on mini-notes stuck on the computer screen, the bulletin board, the back of the door - everywhere but in the phone book. And worst of all, your personal touches - those items that make the room feel cozy and warm - are completely obliterated by an avalanche of unorganized, unidentifiable "stuff."

How can an office ever be functional?

According to Sue West, a professional organizer and owner of Space4U in Amherst, the solution is simple: Get organized.

Want to be more productive? Get organized.

Want a prettier, more peaceful space? Get organized.

Want to relax and enjoy the hours you spend in your home office? Get organized.

"Organizing is about the systems and the functions of the room," West said. "It's what's

behind the design and decoration. Decorating and interior design are about creating an image, a style, a feeling. But if you can't keep up with the paper monsters - or toys, or whatever your clutter may be - it's not a good feeling."

Everyone wants a room where function and form meet to create useful, pretty spaces, and West said it's not hard to accomplish.

"Organizing is at the heart of the room; it's what makes the room livable," she said. "When your guests see your room, they see the furniture, the colors, the lighting effects. They get a sense of style. But whether it is a playroom, a kitchen or a home office, when you turn a chaotic, paper- or toy-filled room into a calm, clear, organized space, you are the one who benefits."

The first step to an attractive, peaceful home office, according to About.com's interior design page (www.about.com), is to pare down the clutter and keep at hand only what is needed and frequently used. The web site recommends creating a separate space for everything you use regularly, including mail, phone books, paper and reference materials.

Creating a functional space doesn't mean giving up on style. About.com suggests bringing personal style into the home office through color schemes, personal photos and creative accessories, such as baskets or fabric boxes. Creative touches make a space more fun, more alive and, as a result, more useful, according to the web site.

West agreed: "My clients tell me that once they have organized and decorated their spaces, they feel more creative, more serene and even more effective. They are motivated to achieve more. Once one room is completed, you know more is possible. But you have to start somewhere."

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