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# AMERICANWAY

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# here's your home work

by Neal Zimmerman

Get out the graph paper. Your assignment: Create a home office that works. Don't worry, a seasoned workplace architect is here to tutor you.

When you first set up your home office — er, desk in the corner of the guest room — you thought, what the heck. You'd only be working at home on weekends, and maybe one day a week, if you could persuade the boss.

Now, you're one of the millions working at home two days a week or more. That makeshift workstation got old a long time ago. And you've seen some really cool setups in magazines and on television.

If you can afford to dedicate the space and the money to create a dream office like the ones in design publications, that's terrific. But you don't have to spend a king's ransom to create an aesthetically pleasing and perfectly functional workplace at home. Neal Zimmerman, AIA, has planned dozens of home workplaces over the years, and he's carefully studied hundreds more. Here, he'll show you how the best of them — no matter what the budget or other constraints — share three basic features.

## on balance

Good home workplaces help balance home and work life. When you work at home, regardless of your family situation, you'll mix your personal and family life with your business life. To balance this mix successfully, you'll have to create separations between home and work. In some cases, the boundaries may be physical. In others, the boundaries may have to be negotiated. If you don't have a spare





room available, you may have to set up in a shared space, such as a family room or den. In this case, I recommend that you establish working hours that everybody — including you — agrees to respect. Even if you live alone, separation between work and living space is important — for personal visitors and for your own psychological well-being.

## organization man (or woman)

Good home workplaces are well-organized. Working at home demands an even greater degree of organization than working in an office. Generally, space in the home is at a premium. This puts a crunch on available real estate for things like work surfaces, equipment, and storage. If your work stuff starts drifting outside your work zone, things will get out of balance. Moreover, an organized workplace is the backbone of efficiency and productivity, which yield more time for work or for pleasure — your choice, when you work at home.

## you've got personality

Good home workplaces have a personal spirit about them. When you work in a traditional office, someone else usually makes all the decisions about your workplace, including which chair you sit in. When you work at home, the decision-making is all yours. You can make it as you want it, not only in function but style.

You should create an environment that you feel good about, that's a personal reflection of you. You'll spend a lot of time there earning the money that pays for everything else. You should not only be comfortable, but you should enjoy being there.

## now, step by step

It's easy to rattle off these three basic features, but now, you're probably asking yourself, "Where do I start?" To help you answer that question, I've identified five basic steps anyone can take to create a home workplace that really delivers.

Know your needs. Without this knowledge, you can't take any further steps seriously. Knowing your needs requires that you sit down and methodically make a list of everything you use in your work, from computers to paper clips.

I suggest you start by determining the size and number of workstations you'll require. If all the work you do at home is on a computer, then perhaps you'll need only one station. On the other hand, if your work involves handling special hard documents such as legal briefs,