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PROPERTY



On show: images of Prof Robert Kelly's home office went viral after his children video-bombed his live BBC interview

From home office to luxury haven

As our personal and professional lives become increasingly entwined, studies and work spaces are getting a whole new look, says **Emily Brooks**

Depending on whom you ask, the home study is either thriving or heading in the same direction as the fax machine: extinction. While the ability to work anywhere means that many more of us are dropping the commute, limited space at home means that dedicating an entire room to work seems wasteful.

Multi-purpose rooms have replaced straightforward home offices, with the decor evolving to suit: the television can be used for video-conferencing by day, and for watching a movie by night; the desk is a more elegant piece of furniture that better blends in, rather than a commanding lump of leather-topped mahogany dominating the room.

"We have set about designing desks that depend less on the need for bulky storage and instead provide a sleek and stylish space to work," says Stuart Sharpless, director of furniture company Decorus. Its designs include the mid-century-inspired Montpellier, with tapered legs and a "floating" top, and the Valencia, another visually light

model with a slim block of veneered wood sitting on a bronze frame. For the high-powered, "work" at home often encompasses intimate meetings with business associates rather than typing on a computer. "We're seeing a huge demand for rooms which can be used to work in - be it checking emails or taking a conference call - that can also be used for entertaining clients," says Louise Wicksteed, creative director of architecture and interior design firm 1508 London. "Because working nine to five



is now a thing of the past, many of our clients don't like the thought of always being stuck behind a desk. As our personal and professional lives become increasingly entwined, our clients are seeking flexibility and comfort when working from home."

At Ashberg House, a Chelsea new-build designed by Morpheus, the study can be accessed directly via lift from the hallway, so business guests don't need to pass through any other private spaces. A luxurious haven, it offers panoramic views, a signal that the home office is moving up the hierarchy of spaces: as we spend more time working from home, they are given prime spots with views and light, rather than being tucked away in a gloomy corner. "We consider how the office could become a sanctuary at home - people need quiet space to work or simply just 'be'," says Sam McNally, co-founder of design studio Echlin.



In rooms where there's not enough space for a dedicated office, designers are clever at making working areas look integrated. Tor Vivian of Tor Interiors suggests a tall unit in the kitchen that blends into the rest of the cupboards, where the door folds back to reveal a little working area; light-filled landings are also a good spot to place an antique writing desk, preferably with a roll-top to hide clutter, she says. Built-in joinery can disguise businesslike filing systems: "There's still a lot of messy stuff that needs to be hidden away, and if you can't tell what are filing cabinets and what's a cupboard it looks less office-like," she says. Vivian mixes and matches this closed storage with open shelving displaying books and decorative objects, so the room still looks like an interesting place where you might want to relax as well as work.

"Often, the private club feel works best for studies and home workspaces," says Marie Soliman, associate director of interior architecture and design firm Lawson Robb. For that, read masculinity - smoky timber inlaid with brass, with clubby chairs and drinks cabinets complementing the more functional working elements. For a softer look, task chairs can be upholstered to feel more domestic: for a project in Butler's Wharf in London, Almas Shamsheer of Maisha Design custom-upholstered swivel chairs with a patterned fabric on the back. Since the working zone is a part of the open-plan living room, it gives a more pleasing view of the chairs.

The (relative) demise of paperwork means our desk areas can look quite beautiful. When it comes to furniture, there are some classic pieces to choose from - some of the most enduring 20th-century classics were designed for offices but look equally good in the home, including Vitra's Soft Pad chairs, designed by Charles and Ray Eames in the Sixties and the choice of architects and designers ever since; and the spring-loaded Tolomeo desk lamp, which is light but perfectly balanced and moves at just a fingertip touch. Furniture company Thonet still makes classic tubular chrome Bauhaus desks and chairs, by designers such as Marcel Breuer.

Counteract the more functional elements of an office with storage and accessories in natural or handcrafted materials, such as leather and rattan. Box files in lively patterns can prettify shelf space: Harris & Jones makes some of the most covetable, which are handmade and can be embossed with text. It all helps to blur the boundaries, creating space that's a pleasure to work in, where you'd be happy to linger when the paperwork and the emails are done.

Home comforts: custom-designed chairs in a Butler's Wharf office created by Maisha Design, above; Echlin's work space in Kenure House, left; and the Morpheus-designed Ashberg House in Chelsea, far left

