

shape your home

create a healthier home office

Turn your work space into a veritable Zen zone with these clutter- and stress-busting products.

BY BRETT HILL PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERICKA McCONNELL

Whether your home office is a desk in the corner of the kitchen or an entire room devoted to running a business, you'll get a lot more done—and feel better about doing it—if your space is organized and comfortable. “Being surrounded by clutter and chaos saps your energy, disrupts your concentration, and increases anxiety and tension,”

explains Jackie Craven, author of *The Stress-Free Home*. With more than 20 million Americans working at least part-time from home—and looking for ways to make their lives easier—companies are increasingly taking ergonomics and even nature into consideration when designing office products. Snap up these must-haves and you'll be on track to have your most productive, stress-free year yet.

A muted color can prevent eyestrain

1 Soothing paint colors

We've all heard that cool hues like blue and green create a tranquil atmosphere, while warm colors, such as yellow and pink, are energizing, but it's really a matter of personal preference. “When choosing a shade for your office, though, there are some rules worth following,” says Diane Roggow, a color psychologist in Westminster, Colorado. First, muted tones tend to be more peaceful than bright colors. Second, stay away from white. “It refracts light, so your eyes fatigue quickly,” says Roggow. And finally, don't overwhelm a room with too many contrasting colors—the busier the space, the harder it is to focus. To find your perfect hue, pick up samples at a paint store and try them on a wall before committing to a room. We like the new **Benjamin Moore Modern Tranquility** line, with easy-on-the-eyes shades like Capri Coast, Latte (left), and Green Tint (from \$41 per gallon; benjaminmoore.com).



These woven grass cloth magazine butlers from **WEST ELM** (\$19; westelm.com) can warm up a high-tech office.

Give your desk a break and do your business reading in a Lunna swivel easy chair from **IKEA** (\$219 for chair and footstool; ikea.com).

Bring a bit of nature indoors with a jute boucle rug from **WEST ELM** (from \$19; westelm.com).

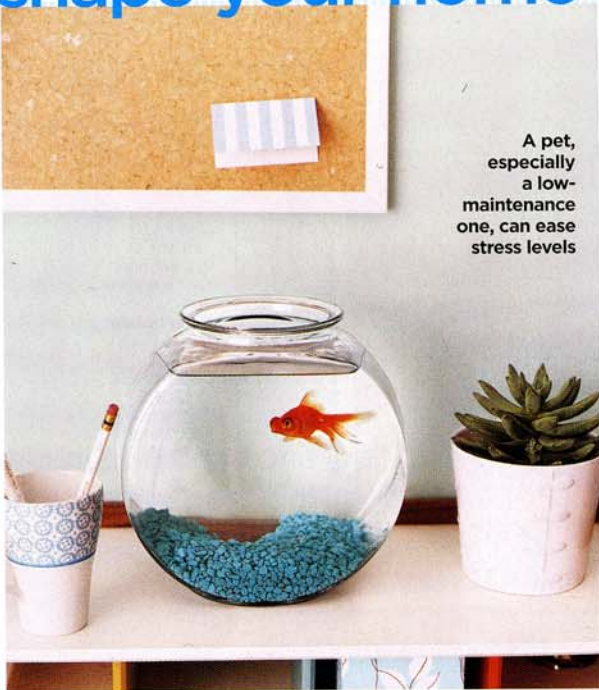


Pin invites as well as inspirational messages on a recycled-rubber bulletin board from **THE CONTAINER STORE** (\$30 to \$40; containerstore.com).

This walnut-sided George Nelson swag leg desk from **SAM FLAX** (\$1,745; samflaxny.com) features plenty of cubbies for storage, including one for your laptop.

The Think chair from **STEELCASE** (\$669; steelcase.com) lets you adjust the seat height and depth, the armrest height, and the amount of lumbar support.

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A pet, especially a low-maintenance one, can ease stress levels

2 An ergonomic workstation

The average desk is 29½ inches tall, a measurement that's been around since the 1950s, when mostly men worked in offices. "It's much too high for the typical woman," says Sally Longyear, an ergonomist in Palo Alto, California. While an adjustable chair will usually solve any height issues, some desks can be raised or lowered. They tend to be very "office modular"—and often pricey—but if you want the ultimate fit, they're the way to go, says Longyear. If you're on a budget, the **Ikea Galant** desk (\$139 to \$239) and **Fredrik** computer workstation (\$119 to \$149; both at ikea.com) have tabletops that can go as low as 23% and 25% inches, respectively, or as high as 38%.

3 Fully adjustable seating

Sure, it's tempting to drag your dining room chair

over to your desk, but a seat you can set to your proportions will improve your posture and prevent back pain. A good chair should have an adjustable back, seat, and armrests, as well as a lumbar support that moves up and down and in and out. A seat that slides forward and back to suit different leg lengths is a bonus but can be hard to find—unless you buy the **Leap** chair from **Steelcase** (\$799; homeofficesolutions.com).

Once you have your chair, raise or lower the seat so your feet are firmly on the floor or on a footrest (see No. 4), and your hips are slightly higher than your knees. "That's the ideal angle to avoid stressing your back," Longyear explains. To prevent repetitive strain injuries, your wrists should be lower than your elbows and your fingers should be slightly below the level of

your wrists when typing and using your mouse. Finally, when you sit with your hips against the back of the chair, there should be no more than a fist's length between your knees and the front of the seat.

4 A footrest

If you don't have a height-adjustable desk and chair, you may need a footrest under your workstation. "Your feet should be flat on the ground or on a footrest. If they're not, you tend to either scoot toward the edge of the seat, which is terrible for your spine, or tuck your legs under your butt, which can cause both neck and back pain," says Longyear. The **Fellowes** standard footrest (\$24; staples.com) has two height adjustments, plus a textured, no-slip surface.

5 A hands-free headset

"Cradling the phone in your neck is one of the worst posture mistakes you can make," Longyear warns. "It compresses the nerves that run from the base of your skull to your hands. It also causes pain and headaches by increasing muscle tension." A hands-free headset will not only

save your neck, it will also let you type, file, walk around, and multitask while you sit through a conference call. The new **Plantronics Calisto Pro Series** (\$280; plantronics.com), below, comes with a handset and wireless Bluetooth headset you can use with a landline or cell phone.

6 A heavy-duty paper shredder

Getting rid of piles of paper (some of it sensitive material that can leave you vulnerable to identity theft if you were to just toss it into the recycling bin) automatically instills a sense of calm, says organizing expert Donna Smallin, author of *The One-Minute Cleaner*. "I go through my papers to be destroyed while I'm on hold," she adds. Many small models are hefty enough to slice and dice documents, CDs, and credit cards. The **ShredderShark** (from \$57; target.com) slashes up to 12 stapled pages at once.

7 Natural elements

Bringing bits of nature inside helps create a more restful space, says Phyllis Harbinger, an interior designer and feng shui consultant in Cortlandt Manor, New York. Using real potted plants and fresh flowers (instead of fake ones) is an easy place to start.

Avoid neck kinks with a wireless headset



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"Green represents renewal, which is important in your work life," says Harbinger. "You always want to make your business more fruitful and satisfying." A small bonsai or aloe plant like ones from **Office Playground** come with seeds, planters, and care instructions (\$20; officeplayground.com). Other objects from nature—say, a quartz rock or seashell used as a paperweight or a piece of driftwood for a doorstop—help keep work in perspective, even if only in a subliminal way.



8 A calming fountain

The sound of flowing water has long been associated with meditation and relaxation. "It's white noise, which helps block out distractions like street traffic or the TV in the apartment next door," says Craven.



The **Tranquil Falls** tabletop fountain, below left, is handmade with copper, slate, and river stones (\$229; serenityhealth.com).

9 The right lighting

"Your computer screen should be the brightest spot in the room," says Longyear. "If your overhead light outshines your monitor, your eyes have to work too hard to read the screen." To save your sight, turn off or dim the overhead bulb and add task lighting. Place either a floor or desk lamp at the side of your monitor and angle it so it illuminates just your desk, not your computer screen. "That will help reduce glare," explains Longyear. **Sunnex** floor and table lamps (\$250 and \$210; comforthouse.com) come with 20-watt daylight-simulating halogen bulbs and flexible necks for precise adjustments. If you don't want to invest in a new lamp, replace your regular bulb with a full-spectrum version that combats eyestrain (\$10 to \$16; comforthouse.com). Finally, to avoid glare from sunlight, don't put your desk in front of or opposite a window.

Multitask with a smart (and sexy) phone



10 One planner/calendar

According to a survey by Whomi, a New York City-based maker of time-management accessories, 79 percent of women rely on at least two different methods for tracking schedules, while 65 percent report using three or more. To stay organized without having to coordinate multiple calendars, keep a single agenda for home and work. For paper fans, we suggest the 8-Days-a-Week planner from **Bob's Your Uncle** (\$16; seejanework.com), below. It has room for all your Monday-through-Sunday appointments, plus an extra column for someday to-dos like "Learn Italian." If you prefer your agenda in digital form, opt for a smart phone you can use for e-mail and appointments, in addition to making calls. The iPhone from **Apple** (\$399; apple.com), above, is still the one to beat, but no matter which model you choose, it won't do you much good if you don't learn how to use it properly. Smallin recommends teaching yourself one new feature every day to avoid becoming electronically intimidated.

Feng shui for beginners

Minimizing clutter is one of the basic components of feng shui, the ancient practice of increasing energy flow through design and the placement of objects in your surroundings. Interior designer Phyllis Harbinger offers four simple ways to reap the benefits of feng shui without doing a complete work space renovation.

● **Keep your home office out of the bedroom** "The bedroom is supposed to be a place of rest and renewal," says Harbinger. "Having your office in there not only can encroach on a relationship, it can also make it difficult to relax and sleep."

● **Position your desk so you face the door** This is called the Command Position. "When you have your back to the door, you're vulnerable," Harbinger says. "If you have no other option, hang a mirror in front of your desk so you can see who's coming in."

● **Be careful how you place those mirrors** One that's just big enough to allow you to see the door is a good thing. A mirror that reflects your entire desk symbolically doubles your workload, adding unnecessary stress, says Harbinger.

● **Don't overcrowd the room** "Too much furniture blocks chi [energy], which in turn keeps you from doing a good job," explains Harbinger, who suggests clearing 3 feet around each piece.