

Lifestyle/ Interiors &amp; Living

## Home office tips for tiny apartments: Hong Kong designers on making your environment more productive

If you're working from home in a typical Hong Kong flat, it's hard to make a workstation in the available space. Four Hong Kong designers, used to adapting small spaces, share some ideas about creating your home office.

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A multitasking table in the bedroom by Liquid Interiors. Photo: courtesy of Liquid Interiors

Hong Kong is quickly becoming a city wracked by cabin fever. In an attempt to halt the spread of the coronavirus, most workers remain at home.

That may sound like a blessing in disguise, but there's just one problem: the average Hong Kong flat is just 470 square feet.

Packing both domestic and professional lives into such a small space can be tricky. But there's one group of people uniquely qualified to tackle the challenge of working at home: Hong Kong designers. After all, they think about space for a living, and they are familiar with the constraints of [a typical Hong Kong flat](#).

Peter Lampard, co-founder of Hong Kong-based design studio Deft, says he and his partner Norman Ung always keep flexibility in mind when they are designing residential spaces.



In this flat Deft designed for a young couple with a baby, a custom-built bed includes a pull-out desk. Photo: courtesy of Deft

“We like to incorporate multifunctional furniture in most of our projects, at least keeping proportions that are flexible for different functions like work [and] dining,” he says.

In one flat Deft designed for a young couple with a baby, a custom-built bed includes a pull-out desk. “It was designed with the same ergonomic proportions as an office desk to make the transition [to working at home] easy,” says Lampard. “It’s enough for a computer, keyboard and papers.”



A bedside table, make-up table and work table all in one, designed by Liquid Interiors.  
Photo: courtesy of Liquid Interiors

Liquid Interior founder Rowena Gonzalez also has an eye on multipurpose spaces when she is designing flats for her clients. In one project, she designed a fold-out cupboard that can serve as a nightstand, vanity or desk. In another, she converted a spare bedroom into a walk-in wardrobe with a long desk for working at home. Another features a kitchen island designed specifically for working at home.

It's not a problem if there's no room for a desk, even a multifunctional one.

"If you have imagination and the right furniture, then you can create desk space in places that are less obvious," especially the bay windows that are common in many Hong Kong flats, says Gonzalez.



Bay windows are good places for a desk. Photo: Dick Liu

Adjustable standing desks are particularly helpful because they can be mounted on just about any flat surface – and they help avoid the fatigue that comes from sitting all day. The Freedesk, which was initially launched through a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, is a simple tray that uses an elasticated folding leg system to pop up to different heights. It can be folded flat and stowed away after work hours.

A more elaborate alternative is the Fellowes Lotus, a sit-stand height-adjustable desk that can be attached onto a flat surface. It swivels out of the way to clear up space when you aren't using it.

But desks are only part of the puzzle of working at home. “It’s more a matter of the space in one’s mind than the physical space,” says Hong Kong-born, New York-based designer Paul Mok, who is familiar with working in cramped spaces in both cities. “I think it’s helpful to clearly define and divide the workspace from the living space, or at the very least from the sleeping space.”



A bay window desk in a flat in Tai Po designed by Raz Interiors. Photo: courtesy of Raz Interiors

He suggests stocking your home workspace with work-related items like books or a pin-up board; he often has a moodboard in front of him to provide inspiration.

“A body is trained to perform a certain behaviour in certain daily-used spaces,” he says. “So if one never worked from home before, it’d take a long time and lots of effort to convince the body that the space that has been a space for resting for years, if not decades, is now a space for work.”

Mok also recommends creating a transition zone between living and working spaces. “I think it would probably be helpful to do something to the corridors, however small it is,” he says. “Change the lighting condition, colours, decoration to make the corridor a clearer division zone.”



Natural light is important when you work. Photo: Shutterstock

“The most important thing that you need for a productive workspace is focus,” says Gonzalez, whose design practice focuses on health and wellness. “Clear off the desk space as much as possible. Put away things you don’t need, store the things around you in closed storage so that you don’t feel overwhelmed with clutter.”

She also says natural daylight is crucial to feeling happy and healthy while working at home. “Far too many times I see people try to work in a dark space of their home, or even in a storage room and it is far less efficient than a place with natural daylight and a view to outside,” she says. “If you are facing east and the sun then buy a sheer curtain thick enough to block out the heat and strong glare but still thin enough to allow light to pass through as well as some view of the outside.”

Beyond natural light, Gonzalez recommends having both ambient light and a more focused task light. There are now many LED lights on the market that can change colour, from cool white light to stimulate energy to warmer yellow light to wind down at the end of the day.



Don't forget to take a break and get away from the screen. Photo: Shutterstock

That touches on an important point. Working in an office provides plenty of opportunities to stretch your legs or chat with a colleague, but at home, it's easy to go stir-crazy if you don't remind yourself to get up and move around from time to time.

Lampard sets an alarm every two hours to remind himself to take a break, and he insists his designers do the same. "I think sometimes they can get too caught up in trying to start focusing that they go too far and end up really uncomfortable and claustrophobic," he says.

It's a reminder that it's important to leave work at the office – even if the office is at home.