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Style Directions:
Raising the Bar

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(Home) Office

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Technology Advancements Enable Stay-At-Home Workers ... But They Still Need Furniture

BY LARRY THOMAS

Rapidly changing consumer work patterns and even more rapidly changing technology are continuing to drive the home office category, despite the move toward designing homes with more open floor plans.

Such floor plans typically don't allow for a dedicated home office space, but producers say that doesn't seem to have crimped sales. Instead, consumers are creatively developing spaces for multiple uses in their homes. And producers say some are even buying home office furniture with no intention of setting up a home office.

"People are finding ways to integrate office pieces throughout the home," said Lorri Kelley, president of office and entertainment furniture resource BDI. "That's why we're designing pieces that are more modular in nature. We are making sure that our product offering will fit into a variety of rooms, for a variety of functions in a variety of layouts."

She said increasing real estate costs, and the ease of conducting meetings and collaborating with co-workers without everyone being in the same room is decreasing the need for workers to go to a company

office every day. Instead, she said many are choosing to work from home at least part of the time.

"We know the category is going to continue to grow just for that reason," said Kelley. "That just makes the development and integration of these types of products even more important."

Consumer research by Impact Consulting Services, parent company of Home Furnishings Business, showed that, among recent purchasers of home office furniture, nearly half (46.4%) use their furniture for work when they're not in their regular office. Another 42% said they use it for home and family business, while only 11.6% said it is used for a home-based business.

Nearly 60% of those surveyed said the furniture was going in a room specifically set aside for a home office, while 42% said their office was in a room also used for other functions.

Tim Donk, director of marketing at Legends Furniture, said he believes the increasing use of rooms for an office and other functions is contributing to strong sales of his company's writing desks. Such desks will more easily blend with almost any type of room décor, unlike the large executive desks

that once dominated the category, he said.

“We do really well with our 60-inch writing desks ... and the matching bookcases,” he said. “The bookcases are something that can be used virtually anywhere. They don’t even have to be in an office.”

Among consumers in the Impact Consulting survey, some 26.1% said a writing desk was their preferred style of desk, which was second only to an L-shaped desk at 27.5%.

Corner desks came in third at 15.9%, and executive desks were next at 14.5%. They were followed by desks with a hutch (8.7%), a secretary (4.4%) and roll-top desks (2.9%).

Donk said he was surprised by the strong showing from L-shaped desks, given the trend toward smaller living spaces and the reduced need to accommodate desktop computer towers and large amounts of storage space for paper files and books.

“It’s always interesting to see how furniture industry trends are driven by electronics,” he said. “We used to sell a lot of computer desks, but back then, almost everybody was using a desk top, and there were no smart phones.”

Desks with an adjustable-height feature that allows the user to stand while working weren’t included among the survey choices, but Kelley said that style is rapidly gaining in

popularity. In fact, BDI and other producers, notably resources such as Twin-Star and Turnkey, are devoting increasing amounts of time and showroom space to develop these products.

“We have been exceptionally pleased with the (sales) results from our standing desks,” Kelley said. “It will be significant part of our product development strategy going forward.”

She said the adjustable-height feature is being marketed as a health benefit, noting that many health experts now recommend that office workers stand 45 minutes to an hour in the morning and afternoon. Kelley, who uses an adjustable-height desk in her office at BDI’s headquarters in Chantilly, Va., said they also help alleviate neck and shoulder cramping that can result from long periods of sitting “hunched over a computer.”

Donk said he also has an adjustable-height desk in his office at Legends Furniture in Phoenix, but is more skeptical about the long-term prospects for the product. He believes it will continue to gain strength in commercial office settings, but may not catch on in residential use.

“There’s some novelty to it. But I think the jury is still out,” said Donk. “We decided it would not be that strong of a residential item.”

Donk and Kelley are in agreement, howev-

er, about the trends in finishes they’re seeing. Suffice it to say the lighter and grayer the better.

“The growth of gray has been remarkable to watch,” said Kelley. “It’s fun to see fashion start to come into furniture, particularly in case goods.”

Donk said the gray finishes that are most popular in the Legends line have a casual rustic feel. “Most of our better-selling writing desks are along the rustic line. The grays still have legs,” he said.

Desks have always been the centerpiece of the home office category, and the Impact Consulting survey showed that more than 59% of respondents had purchased a traditional desk or computer desk in the past two years.

The most frequently mentioned item, however, was a desk chair, which was purchased by 47.8% of respondents. Some 36.2% said they had purchased bookcases for their home office, 15.9% had purchased a file cabinet, and 10.1% had purchased a work table.

In addition, one-third of survey respondents said they spend more than 15 hours a week in their home office, while another 10.1% said they spend 10 to 15 hours. Another 30.4% said they spend five to 10 hours per week, while 26.1% spend less than 5 hours. ■



Marge Carson’s Grand Traditions

The European-inspired, opulent 24-piece collection has elements of Italian, French and English design, with particular influence from 17th - and 18th- Century Italian antiques. Features include generous scale, intricate carvings, solid brass, hand-cast hardware, and an aged gold leaf finish trim.

BDI's Sequel

The stylish adjustable-height desk from this best-selling collection includes hidden flip-down drawer fronts and magnetically attached, cable-concealing panels. Approximate retail price ranges from \$1,399 to \$1,799, depending on the size of the desk.



Gat Creek's Eastwood

Blending easily in a room that combines a home office with other uses, this top-seller features a pull-out desk top and two generously sized drawers that run on undermount self-close, full extension drawer glides. The bottom drawer can accommodate letter/legal size hanging files. Approximate retail price is \$1,879.



Sligh's Greystone

This best-selling collection reflects a soft sophistication, featuring a contemporary fretwork pattern and striking brushed nickel hardware. Pieces are wire brushed, finished in a pearl gray with a hint of white hang-up. The Demilune desk retails for about \$2,799, while the file chest is at about \$1,699 and the desk is at about \$1,499.