

TUCKED IN A POCKET

WHETHER CUSTOM OR PRODUCTION-BUILDER MADE, MINIATURE OFFICES THAT FIT JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE MAXIMIZE SPACE IN A BUSY HOUSEHOLD



PATRICK LANGSTON

They sound cute as a button, but they're becoming serious business in the modern home. Pocket offices - attractive and ultra-efficient workspaces tucked into kitchen alcoves, popped into unused closets and slid beneath stairs - are all the rage when it comes to maximizing space in busy households.

'You can personalize (a pocket office) with family photographs so you feel more like you're in small room instead of a closet.'

PAUL KARIOUK

Designer and architecture professor at Carleton University



ABOVE: Pocket office: A sleek white kitchen by Paul Kariouk includes, at one end, a tiny, perfect home office with desk, shelves, computer terminal and a slide-out keyboard. When not in use, its closed doors make it look like kitchen cabinetry. **LEFT:** Richcraft now routinely provides either an office nook or larger work area in its one- and two-bedroom condos, like the Logan two-bedroom corner unit at Galleria 2.

Thanks to technology (think laptops, iPads and keychain memory sticks with vast data capacity), we no longer need acres of space for children's homework or to log a couple of hours after dinner on that all-important office project.

"Portable is what's happening. You don't need a dedicated space like a den anymore," says Cheryl Adams, senior designer at the Ottawa branch of California Closets, which creates custom spaces including pocket offices. Now everyone shares the same, smaller space - presumably without too much squabbling about who gets it when.

In fact, the U.S.-based National Association of Home Builders last year noted the rise of pocket offices and the demise of the little-used den as a major trend. The little guys, it seems, are cropping up everywhere, from kitchen pantries to great rooms.

Observers note that, in the United States, in addition to the miniaturization of technology, a long-depressed economy has meant smaller houses

and the growth of multi-generational homes where multiple generations live under the same roof. That means less space for non-essentials such as full-scale home offices.

Canada's economy and housing market didn't suffer the same depredations, but local builders and many designers report growing interest in pocket offices.

"I'd estimate 60 to 65 per cent of our buyers want something like this," says Christine Marsala of Tamarack Homes' design centre. Kitchens and lofts are especially popular for pocket offices, she says. Some buyers have even had the main- or second-floor laundry room relocated to the basement and converted the laundry room into compact office space.

Although some other builders report fewer or no requests for the offices, they may, like Minto, already include a computer niche in selected models. Richcraft Homes now routinely provides either an office nook or larger work area in its one- and two-bedroom condos.

Because they are so small - with good planning, you could do one in less than 15 square feet - pocket offices fit almost anywhere: off a hallway, a staircase landing, in an attic.

Kitchens are especially popular. That's partly because they allow parents to monitor children's Internet activity. Adult users, meanwhile, can multi-task, catching up on bills while keeping an eye on the roast, for example. Although a pocket office in a high-traffic area such as the kitchen would work less well if you're trying to concentrate on writing the Great Canadian Novel or if you work from home full time.

Paul Kariouk, who has a design practice in Ottawa and teaches architecture at Carleton University, created a sleek, white kitchen for a client that includes, at one end, a tiny, perfect home office.

It has a desk, shelves, computer terminal and a slide-out keyboard (the musical kind). When not in use, its closed doors make it look like kitchen cabinetry.