



*This Hooker Furniture computer station blends with traditional interiors.*

a designer-  
writer offers  
solutions for  
where to  
place the  
computer

by thomas m. ciesla

# a pc view

**M**ore than half of all American households now own one or more personal computers (PCs), according to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics. This is an impressive statistic considering that we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the IBM 5150 PC just over a year ago. For the past 20 years, designers and homeowners have struggled to blend the PC's beige clunkiness into the home environment aesthetically.

Most American homes are still not designed with the PC in mind, and homeowners are hard pressed to find resources that provide simple, creative tips and tricks for locating a PC in areas that are both functional and non-disruptive.

Apparently home PCs are a dirty little secret from a decorating perspective; no one seems willing to show them off. It's true that PCs aren't as exciting as a big screen television or as sexy as megawatt audio/video entertainment centers,

yet there are more than 100 million homes with PCs in them. Where are people putting these things?

Lacking the luxury of having a separate home office, many homeowners initially set up the PCs in the dining room. As the number of families who sit down together for dinner continues to dwindle, this room with its spacious table seems a natural place to set up the PC and spread out papers. Just drive through your neighborhood one evening around dusk, when everyone has the

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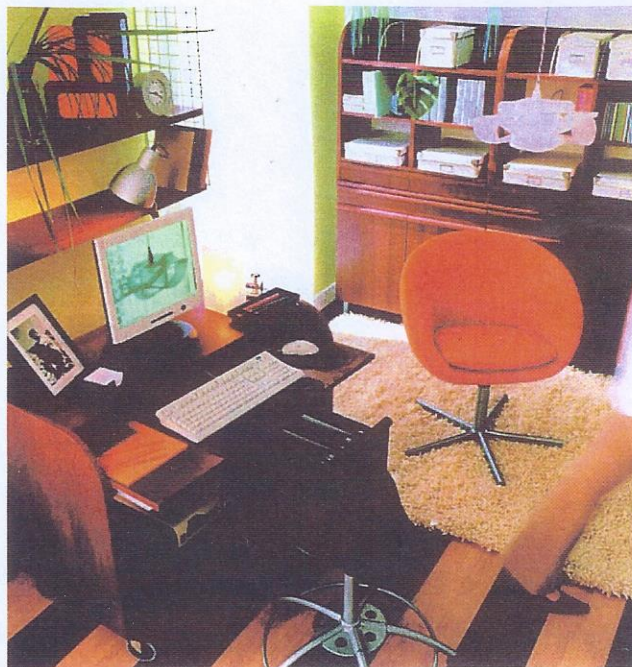

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Computer desk by Ikea.

lights on and the drapes haven't been drawn yet; you'll be surprised how many dining room windows are filled with the cool flickering blue light of a monitor. Most homeowners, however, quickly discover that the dining room is not the ideal place for a PC and begin searching for a more permanent location. So where should you set up your PC?

#### FINDING SPACE

The perfect spot for your PC depends on how active your household is, how the PC will be used and who will be the primary user. PC locations can be separated into two categories: dedicated and non-dedicated. Dedicated spaces allow you to work in a quiet area that is physically separated from the rest of the house. Non-dedicated spaces allow you to still be part of the general activities of the household, such as a corner of the den or family room. If your PC is used primarily for casual activities, a non-dedicated spot would be perfect. On the other hand, if your PC is used for desktop publishing or complex spreadsheet manipulation, you'll need a dedicated space.

A spare bedroom makes a great-dedicated space since it already has heating, cooling, power outlets and probably a phone connection in the room. If you're lacking a spare bedroom, look around your home for "stolen spaces." These spaces might be under the stairway, in utility rooms, walk-in closets or even closed-in porches. A three-by-five

foot closet is big enough to contain a counter to hold your monitor and keyboard and a few creatively placed shelves to give you enough storage space for a printer, paper and other supplies. Other folks faced with a small home but a large backyard look outside for dedicated spaces by building a small cottage-office in the backyard.

If your computer will be used for casual activities, such as game playing or Internet surfing, a non-dedicated space might be the perfect location for your PC. Don't rule out any area. A corner of the den, living room or even a spacious stairway landing could be utilized as a PC area. A variety of attractive workstations are available to hold all your computer components, and some manufacturers are producing armoires with an old world flair that complement any home decor.

If you don't want your PC to intrude into existing rooms, perhaps an unused closet backs up to your den or living room that you could convert by simply removing a wall and building in counter and shelf space and concealing it with a tambour door. You'll be surprised how many possibilities are available in most homes with a little imagination.

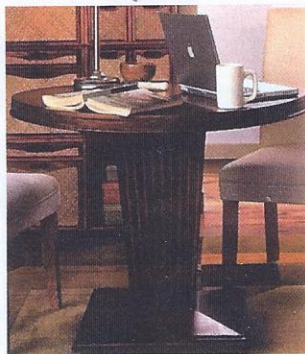
#### BOTTOM LINE

Advances in technology are providing homeowners with increasing options for attractive integration of computers in the home environment, as manufacturers are constantly

shrinking the size of various computing components. The trend to tower configurations for the processing box has moved it from the desktop to the floor, or even hidden in a ventilated cabinet. The development of the flat panel screen has changed the monitor—the most visually intrusive component of the computer—from a television-esque monstrosity to a device with a dramatically smaller footprint and a sense of elegance.

If you need a computer in the kitchen but just don't have the counter space to dedicate to a monitor and keyboard, new flip-down screens mounted underneath cabinets are a great solution. With the keyboard hidden in a pull out drawer, you flip down the screen when you need it and fold it out of the way the rest of the time. In other areas of the home other options include recessing the monitor below the level of the desktop, angled for a clear view. Even more exotic applications include placing the computer on a motorized platform that can be raised from a piece of furniture when in use and hidden out of sight at other times. Finally, laptop computers now equal desktop units in terms of storage and processing capabilities, allowing you to move from room to room to use your computer.

There's never been a better time to integrate a PC into your home environment. Advances in hardware, computer furniture and design sensibility offer the homeowner a myriad of choices, no matter how compact your living environment. As you plan your solution, keep in mind how you want to use the PC, the cost involved and the resulting comfort level. Availability of power outlets, phone lines, task and ambient lighting and temperature controls are just as important as the type of PC you select. For assistance, check your local bookstore for books on designing home offices, visit furniture stores to see what types of PC workstations are available, and consult with interior designers for help in uncovering those "stolen spaces" in your home. ■



*This pedestal table by Spiegel works well as an impromptu computer work station.*

## ergonomic tips

To help save wear and tear on your neck, back and wrists use these tips to set up a healthy PC environment.

### 1. Good Posture

Invest in a good adjustable chair. Sit all the way back in the chair for lower back support and keep both feet flat on the floor.

### 2. Monitor Position

The monitor should be placed so the top of the monitor is at eye level, and 15 to 30 inches away.

### 3. Document Holder

Using a document holder near the monitor will keep your head in a neutral position avoiding neck strain.

### 4. Your Wrists

To avoid repetitive stress to the carpal region and wrist muscles, your arms should be relaxed and at about a 90 degree angle. Use adjustable keyboard trays and support pads for both keyboard and mouse use.

### 5. Work Top Location

Whether you have a desk or a fixed work surface, choose an orientation that prevents glare from the window to shine onto your monitor, which will cause excessive eyestrain. If glare is unavoidable, shades or drapes can be used to reduce it.

### 6. Lighting

You'll need a combination of ambient and task lighting to avoid eyestrain and headaches. Ambient lighting is best achieved using ceiling mounted light fixtures, while desk-mounted lamps typically serve best as task lighting.

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