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HOT DESKING

Home desks are undergoing a renaissance as technology becomes more compact, allowing the designs to shine. Nicole Swengley reports

One might imagine that our desire for ever-smaller mobile devices has rendered the home desk something of a quaint anomaly in a domestic space. Far from it. According to interior designer Kahli Hage, "Our nomadic way of working makes a desk essential at home because it helps focus," he says. "It's an island that connects you to your professional life within a family environment. Clients increasingly ask for several of them around the home so they can use laptops and tablets in different rooms. We've just installed seven in a six-bedroom London house – in separate 'his' and 'her' studies, four bedrooms and a family room."

For Sara Cosgrove, head of interior design at The Studio at Harrods, the key to a successful design lies in the marriage of craftsmanship and technology. "A desk has to be equally appealing from an artistic perspective as from a practical one," she says. For one client she commissioned a bespoke desk with a solid-oak top and mirror-polished, stainless-steel



From left: Søren Nissen and Ebbe Gøhl for The Conran Shop American-walnut, Cortina and maple desk, £2,995. Melike Beyer for Ligne Roset walnut and steel Split, £3,175. Splinter Works French-walnut Siletto, £21,000

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Echoes of constructivism and futurism are reflected in Wolfson's creation, while Jonathan Baring takes inspiration from the minimalist pieces made by artist and sculptor Donald Judd in the 1960s

base, modelled on tree branches (similar commissions from £15,000). "It offered the connectivity that my client needed while reflecting the relaxed environment of his country home," she says. Meanwhile, OKA's Lantano console (£945), which has a seal-grey faux-shagreen and wooden top and gold-leaded metal legs, was seamlessly integrated within a crisply styled living room for another client. "Its surface is fairly small but it's a beautiful piece of furniture," says Cosgrove.

Far more dramatic is Siletto (£21,000, pictured on previous pages) from British design studio, Splinter Works. This theatrical yet functional desk-table is hand-sculpted from French walnut with one leg resembling a siletto shoe's stacked heel. "It was originally made for a shoe-mad client," says Splinter Work's co-founder Miles Hartwell. Aviation, however, inspired the firm's Belgavia (£15,900). Whirring propeller blades are evoked by its timber X-shaped base, while its streamlined, leather-wrapped top is attractively faced with French burr walnut. Accelerating the re-count, meanwhile, is the car- and aircraft-inspired Vantage (£3,725) from Hong Kong-based artist Michael Yeung. Its trunk-like top has two front panels that slide apart to reveal accessory compartments, while a rear section can be tilted and angled for iPad use.

As a NASA engineer's son, Philadelphia-born, London-based designer Philip Michael Wolfson has always been fascinated by fluid, dynamic shapes and his painted aluminium D-Line (£16,500, pictured overleaf) is characteristically energetic. "It examines the dialogue of angle and circle, line and plane – and the resulting geometric distortion and motion, of static versus dynamic forms," he says. "Through a minimalist simplicity and a pure and still whiteness, the mind continues to draw the line where it has physically ended."

Indeed, furniture as functional art seems to find its apotheosis in desk design. Echoes of constructivism and futurism are reflected in Wolfson's creation, while the Oxfordshire-based artist Jonathan Baring takes inspiration from the minimalist pieces made by the late American artist and sculptor Donald Judd in the 1960s. "I love the simplicity of his work and the exquisite way that it is put together," says Baring. While clean and slender, Baring's Macassar-ebony piece (£9,960, pictured on final page), which is hand-made with

stainless-steel leather-lined drawers and a hidden wiring track and pencil tray, remains imposing. "People do still like to have a large desk to sit at comfortably; it feels empowering," he says.

An original art-deco design prompted the angled writing table (£8,160, pictured below) by Rose Uniacke – winner of the Andrew Martin Designer of the Year Award 2013 – while art nouveau's distinctive spirit pervades L'Orchidée (£90,000, pictured top left), a one-off item by designer and maker Marc Fish, which won a coveted Bespoke Guild Mark from The Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers. This glamorous confection of zirconite, aluminium, oak and leather references Orchidees, a desk made by Louis Majorelle between 1905 and 1909 and now displayed

at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. Fish says his version – which is beautifully handcrafted with a tambour roll-top – symbolises the emotional and physical connection between a parent and child. "Its inspiration follows that passage of life – the cradling of a new generation, a new hope, the future," says Sørensen. Fish. "It also reflects the journey of furniture-making from the art-nouveau movement into the art-deco period, culminating in the acceptance of technologies in materials, manufacture and techniques."

Meanwhile, a sculptural Japanese aesthetic permeates the curvaceous Ebony (\$42,000, pictured overleaf), handcrafted in Macassar ebony and pearwood by Brian Newell, a master-woodworker who lives between California and Japan. "These lobed shapes are very popular in Japan," he says.

"The making of this piece was a real challenge. Subtle, fish-scale-pattern ebony marquetry was applied to 10 panels, which were compound-banded in a vacuum press before being joined. Its sculptural but also fully functional." The practicality of Studio's solid-wood Companions writing desk (from £2,274, pictured on final page) met with great approval when launched by manufacturer De La Espada in 2011. In walnut or European chestnut, it has a cork bowl on one side for wires or plugs, while its lift-up top closes to hide papers and a laptop. Chic pragmatism is also the hallmark of Tray (£2,826), by the award-winning duo Neris&Hui, and made by De La Espada in American black walnut or white oak, or European ash (stained brown or black). Conceived simply as two stacking trays on a wooden frame, the item is mobile, multipurpose and fun. Its single drawer contains a concealed and red

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leather-lined compartment, while an adjustable, fold-out mirror allows it to also work as a dressing table. Then, for a contemporary take on the ever-practical, classic secretaire, there's Melike Beyer's Split (£3,373, pictured on opening pages) made in a natural walnut veneer for French firm Ligne Roset. Traditional drawers are replaced by two storage chests mounted on a sliding system, with storage niches behind. Gliding covers conceal a space for cubing, while directional lighting is provided by a black-shaded light fixed to the piece.

Modern designers are also inspired by traditional architects' desks and chests. Plan (£1,200), by London-based James Tattersall, has a wide-top drawer – equally suitable for storing A1 prints and plans, or a laptop and files – with two smaller ones

From top: Philip Michael Wolfson painted-aluminium D-Line, £16,500. Brian Newell Macassar-ebony and pearwood Ebony, \$42,000

beneath. It's available with a blue top and oak legs, or a white top with walnut legs. Meanwhile, the long-established French brand Roche Bobois launched Archimède (£3,850), a new variant of its popular Architecte (from £2,460), earlier this year. With its aged iron fittings and solid-oak/cherrywood veneer, it effortlessly summons the spirit of an early-20th-century Parisian architect's atelier.

"A desk is a very reassuring object, as well as an efficient workspace, and while people often prefer a design with minimal lines they still want it to look impressive," says Hage. Indeed it's the high-quality finishes (burnished oak top, matte-lacquered niches, resin-lacquered steel legs) that give the linear Decalo (£3,230, pictured on previous page), created by René Bouchard for Roche Bobois, its cool edginess. An even simpler aesthetic is embraced by the asymmetrical frame of Alex Hellum's eye-catching lot desk made in oak (£4,995) or walnut (£550) by Joined + Jointed, a new design collective dedicated to producing beautifully crafted limited-edition items, available exclusively online.

Over at The Conran Shop, a sleek piece (£2,995, pictured on opening pages) by Danish designers Søren Nissen and Ebbe Gøhl, successfully combines a white Cortian surface with American walnut and 1950s-inspired pointed legs. Made for laptop or iPad use, it offers storage space for chargers and cables in its maple drawers, while a flip-up lid acts as a magnetised memo board.

Particularly geared to modern technology is ClassCon's Pegasus (from £4,719), launched at Internationale Möbelmesse Cologne in January. It's made from lacquered wood with a leather worktop whose magnetised wings roll away at either side to access compartmentalised storage space below. Its

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