

LIGHTENING UP A WORK SPACE

BY DENISE GEE PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM STITES

Why does an office have to look like, well, an office? Unused space over the garage lets a Tampa designer fashion an office with cottage style.



With bare windows (*above*), "I feel open to new ideas," says Debbie Clifton Perez. A hutch over her marble-top desk keeps supplies and family photos in sight. Debbie and her guests find that creativity is sparked by sitting in French-style outdoor furniture softened with cushions (*right*).

Sometimes just what you need is right in your own backyard. That's what Tampa designer Debbie Clifton Perez realized after she began to renovate the 1926 Mediterranean-style home that she and her family recently purchased. Although the house has a room that could hold a small office, Debbie needed more space for her home-based interior design business.

Fortunately, another space called to her—a sunny room above the garage. "One day when I was up there cleaning, I had the door and windows open. The birds were singing and the weather was wonderful. And then it hit me: Why can't I work from home *away* from home, so to speak. I realized that this is where I'd be happiest, where I'd be more creative. The abundant light is a gift." >> on 136C



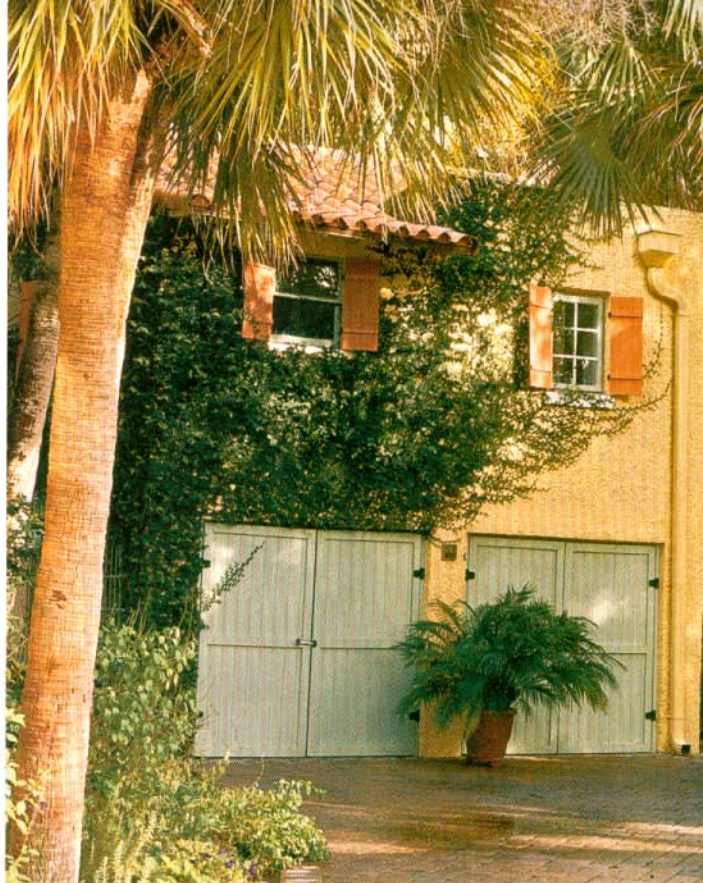
STYLING: STEPHANIE DAVIS

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Her first move was to transform her “treehouse” into an inviting and enlightening workplace. “I chose colors that were soothing—like nature itself,” she says. The office walls are painted the hue of hay, which reminds her of her favorite travel spot, the south of France. For even more of a country French look, Debbie groups vintage metal furniture painted shades of cream and sage green around a rustic blue bench, shaping a cozy sitting area. Cushy floral pillows soften the space, anchored by a sea grass rug. “People are immediately drawn to this area,” Debbie says. “Maybe it’s because they feel like they’re relaxing in a courtyard. This spot doesn’t seem so officey; it transports you to a more open frame of mind.”

When detail-oriented work needs to be discussed, Debbie moves her clients to a double-sided desk topped with marble. Baskets in slots along each >> on 136D

Debbie’s 20×20-foot office, above a 1920s-era garage, wears organic hues of sunflower and sage—a nod to Provence, where the designer finds inspiration.



TRY THIS

Use similar-size baskets to organize small goods within a bookcase. "The baskets keep clutter out of sight," says Debbie Clifton Perez. To easily know what's inside each one, do as the designer does: Label a vintage-style paper tag and tie it to the basket handle with twine.



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side allow the designer and her office visitors access to a supply of note-taking materials.

Because the garage space below her office is plumbed, Debbie was able to incorporate an old-fashioned kitchenette with marble countertop and vintage sink. The 4x8 niche "is perfect for a microwave and cappuccino maker so I don't have to run back and forth from the house."

The room functions well for Debbie's professional endeavors, and it inspires her. "It's my creative space, my art studio for painting and jewelry making," she says. "Because of the open windows, I never feel closed in. It's funny: At work is where I want to be." ☺

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To avoid having the wall look too weighed down with books and baskets, the designer lines the top of the case with some of her own paintings and extra baskets, and she lets plants thrive under the open window.