



REDO OF A FATHER'S FORMER WORK AREA UNCOVERS A GREAT WORK SPACE FOR GEOLOGIST DAUGHTER

# AN OFFICE EXCAVATION

BY JOETTA MOULDEN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANET LENZEN

When petroleum geologist Denise Stone first called about redoing her home office, I was excited to help. Home offices always are a stimulating challenge, and it is rewarding to tailor furnishings to serve both the very specific needs of a client's profession, yet make the room blend seamlessly into the home's decor.

A friend of geologist David Fontaine, whose home makeover appeared last fall in *Houston House & Home* ("Eureka," *DIY Decorating*, November 2005), Denise knew what she was getting into. "You made a big impression on me when Dave said you told him his labor-of-love stained porch ceiling cast a "bubble gum pink" glow over the back of the house. 'Wow,' I thought. 'She is brutally honest.' That is exactly what I need."

Denise figured that if Dave had not fired me on the spot, took my comments in stride and even agreed to paint his precious ceiling, this was a sign. "It did indeed look like bubble gum, and I was stunned at the improved outcome," Denise says with a laugh. "I clearly needed you to get me rolling."

**AFTER:** Eliminating the curtains and swag lamp and emptying the room of the recliner and inadequate bookshelves made room for new Ikea office systems that provide accessible closed storage. The new curved desk allows room for three computer monitors, and fresh blue paint creates a calm, organized feeling with a place for everything — even her dad's desk and her hard hat.

**BEFORE (INSET):** Moving into her dad's office, Denise was trying to work in a room that provided little storage for her clients' files and geological reference books. The desk space was inadequate for the three computer monitors she needed to purchase.

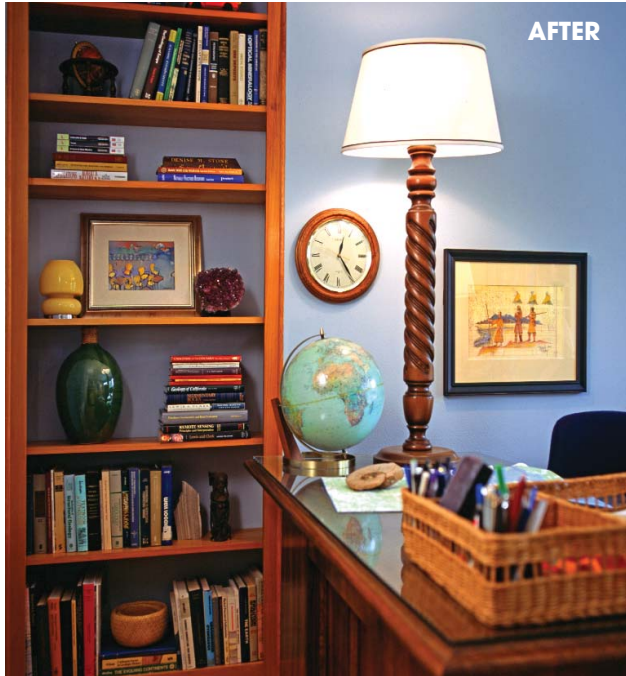
## A BIT OF HISTORY

During the initial visit, Denise explained the background story I needed to hear. The office had been her father's when he was alive and still had his things in it. After his death, Denise moved in with her mom, who was having health issues and needed her attentive care.

A consultant since 2003, Denise had mainly worked in various oil company offices, not at home. "Prior to that, I worked for 18 years for a major Houston oil company. In late 2005, I decided to try working from home in order to keep a closer watch on my mom. I was tired of the commute, long hours and wanted to be my own boss," she says.

Denise decided to transform her dad's home office into the functional office of a successful geological consultant — a room in which she could focus on work and meet clients, as well serve as a welcoming place where she could have objects she enjoys around her and where she would actually want to spend time. The room required very specific storage to meet her needs and a new, conveniently placed desk space. She wanted to keep any additional furnishing costs to a minimum in order to invest in top-notch equipment.

"I wanted to keep Dad's desk because it is a fixture in the room and reminds me of him and the hours he used to spend there. Plus, it looks really good from the living room," she says.



AFTER

## TRADE | secrets

- To eliminate costly mistakes and stay within your budget, hire an objective professional to help you plan your space before you go shopping.
- Think outside the box. You can mix a dark-stained antique desk with birch veneer office components if you let the desk be the “star.”
- Let your profession announce itself in your office.
- Sometimes the most effective strategy is not to buy more furniture and accessories for your home, but to first rethink the pieces that already are paid for.

AFTER: (above)

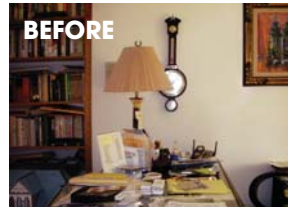
Once novels were removed, plenty of space was uncovered for Denise’s geology reference books. A dramatic custom lamp was made from a plant pedestal her parents brought back from Italy. A basket organizer corrals desk clutter.

AFTER: (below)

New storage cabinets from Ikea, a magnetic whiteboard and painted and re-matted discovery well test photos make this working home office as functional as it is attractive. Maps are at the ready, stored in an old Army artillery shell basket.



AFTER



BEFORE

BEFORE:

An overflow of novels and lack of file storage created a feeling of chaos in the office.

## ENTER PERSONALITY

An important goal of ShelterStyle.com is to capture the unique personality of every client and incorporate his or her personality into each room. Denise is vibrant, highly intelligent and quick to laugh. She also craves brightness, calm and orderliness — key elements that were lacking before.

The room was dark, cluttered and full of things unrelated to its newly desired purpose. Most of the furniture didn’t make sense for her needs, nor did it project the image of a successful geologist. The background featured colorless white walls, vintage family furniture, a huge hanging lamp next to a ceiling track light and a folding metal table “desk.” There were novels on the bookshelves instead of geology books and rock specimens. She was operating out of boxes of files on the floor. There was a huge dollhouse, handmade by her aunt, on the floor in front of the desk. It was pure chaos.

“The room had gradually become a mix of my things and family things. It was disorganized and overflowing. Just walking in there would get me down. I felt I needed to reduce the chaos and make major changes,” she explains. “And I wanted the office to have a newness to reflect the new chapter in my career.”

It was overwhelming, and Denise was stuck. The first thing I suggested was for her to buy *Lighten Up! Free Yourself From Clutter* by Michelle Passoff. It is a light read that is guaranteed to get anybody “unstuck.”

The new office needed space to house a fax, a phone and a three-screen computer workstation to employ the latest technology in her work. To communicate concepts, geologists draw often, and Denise needed a large magnetic whiteboard that she could both draw on and hang geological maps. She needed closed storage to conceal files, unattractive binders, folders, clients’ CDs and office supplies. At the same time, she wanted the office to look nice from the living room. I suggested that placing the “working” elements along the right side of the room would hide them from view when seated in the nearby living room.

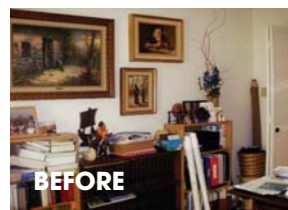
Gently, I explained that she should proceed with emptying the room, painting it a color she loves and reorganizing it so she could be productive. Her dad would want her to tailor his old office to meet her needs and would wholeheartedly approve of her decision to work at home in order to keep an eye on her mom. Since one of Denise’s concerns was trying to blend her dad’s desk into the room, I suggested the opposite: Let it be the unique “star” in the room and make all the other new furnishings accent it, rather than “match” it.

## THE MAKEOVER

The first step was emptying the room, taking down the curtains and the hanging lamp and moving the dollhouse, armchair and end table out. “I liked it when you said take these curtains down right away — today!” Denise says with a laugh. “It not only immediately brightened the room, and my spirits, it got me started on this journey.”

When she showed me a photo of a room with blue walls that she liked, we picked out two colors for her to paint sample poster boards. Denise likes blue because she likes being outdoors, the color is restful and blue makes her feel good. After painting the samples, she selected Sherwin-Williams “Frosted Denim,” # 1219. “The color boards made me sure of the color choice before buying the paint and helped me transition confidently from white walls to blue,” she says.

My design intern, Anya Idris, and I wrote a detailed master plan, agreeing she’d first use Ikea’s custom office software to play around with a floor plan using their components. She created a final AutoCAD furniture plan that Denise clearly felt worked.



BEFORE

BEFORE:

Inadequate file storage caused files to be crammed into too-small shelving and to mingle with an old set of encyclopedias, family photos, maps and artwork, causing a cluttered feeling in the room.

“The drawings made me really ‘see’ the furniture arrangement and put to rest any concerns that the pieces wouldn’t fit,” Denise says. “And I liked the fact that I had homework assignments. There was a written action plan to follow and solutions within reach. I like doing things myself whenever I can. I loved the resources you provided — stores I didn’t know about before. Completing the assignments one at a time got me involved and one step closer to where I wanted the room to be, giving me ownership of the transformation.”

Denise admits the scariest part of the experience was buying the light Ikea “Effectiv” Add-On components and “Galant” desk with “T” Legs and two side tables in birch veneer, not knowing for sure if she’d like them with her dad’s desk. She also bought a birch veneer “Billy” bookcase and “Billy” CD Tower.

“That was my leap of faith,” she says. “I was tired of second-guessing the wood tones...would this one match the desk or not? It was exhausting going to different furniture stores. I remember Rick, my handyman, and I unpacking that first box and seeing the light and dark woods together, saying ‘This looks pretty good!’ I knew that bringing in such unexpected touches would make things more interesting, and I liked the components’ clean, contemporary design. Once I got passed that, everything else was easy.”

Using drawings, I specified the exact size range her large magnetic board needed to be (Denise found it at [www.magnatag.com](http://www.magnatag.com)), and I suggested we hang her three framed photos of discovery well tests in a row next to the magnetic board. For unity, I suggested Denise re-mat and paint her diverse picture frames a deep metallic bronze (Modern Masters Metallic Paint Collection in #ME 525 English Brown) to blend the majority of the artwork in the room. (I have found you can unify a wide variety of artwork by selecting one common mat and frame color.) We also simplified the amount of artwork by selecting those pieces that were the most meaningful to her. To further brighten the room, I suggested that the dated, yellowed mini-blinds be replaced with 2-inch white vinyl blinds from Home Depot, which also let in more natural light because the slats are further apart.

For lighting, Denise showed me a lamp with a stacked marble base from her childhood (perfect, since she is a geologist), and I suggested she take it to Alcon Lightcraft to have it rewired and to buy a new cylindrical white shade trimmed in

soutache braid. Then she brought out a tall wooden spindle that was originally a floor pedestal her parents bought in Italy. During a move, the top was lost. I suggested she transform it into a lamp and put it on her desk with a matching lamp shade to cut down on the visual chaos of too many elements. “It never would have occurred to me to use it that way or to use them both in the same room,” Denise says.

#### PERSONAL TOUCHES

The final touch was infusing Denise’s personality in the office, to recall her travels she has experienced practicing geology. I suggested she hang the two hunting spears she had hiding in a closet above the room’s windows. Denise bought the spears from a Turkana tribesman in the Chalbi Desert of Kenya while doing geological surface mapping in the East African Rift Valley. When asked if she had any rocks, she pulled out some unique specimens that we tucked into bookshelves. A globe further reinforces the unique spots to which she has traveled.

“My whole career, I’ve always had an invisible person furnish, arrange and appoint my workspace...according to rules for my job function. After 20 years, I knew exactly what I needed to make me the most productive. It was empowering to be involved in creating an office for myself, with my work needs and style the number one concern.

“My new office is calm and tranquil...and organized,” Denise adds, “and I have learned how an improved environment can have a huge impact on your psyche and the way you feel. If my dad were to see the office today, he would definitely approve.”

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