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Show Only: Open Houses New Developments

The 50-Foot Commute



Benjamin Norman for The New York Times

Katherine Sayn-Wittgenstein works in a bedroom-turned-office in an apartment on East 17th Street that she lives in with her husband, Keith Wang. He works there, too. The office "lets us have a great work-life balance," he says.

By JONATHAN VATNER
Published: May 20, 2011

AS technology makes it easier for workers to do their jobs from home, buyers and renters in New York are seeking dedicated space where they can install a computer, a comfortable swivel chair and a desk, and block out productivity-sapping distractions.

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The market is responding with places to set up shop in your pajamas. Windowless rooms that in the past might have been used as bedrooms — though not legally — are now advertised straight out as offices in older conversions, many of them former commercial buildings in the financial district. And some new construction floor plans now include rooms designed from scratch as offices.

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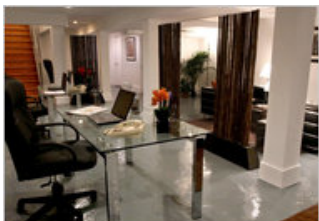
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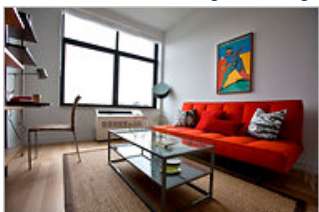
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Tina Fineberg for The New York Times

OPEN FOR BUSINESS A duplex on Dutch Street has an unusually large home office, 1,200 square feet.

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Caleb Ferguson for The New York Times

Left, one of the home offices at Industry, a new luxury condo complex in Long Island City, Queens.

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Dan Neville/The New York Times

CLIENT-READY A home office can be part of the package at Griffin Court, a new building on West 54th Street. Forty-two of the 95 units have dedicated office space.

“The world is not on a 9-to-5 calendar,” said Susan de França, the president of Related Sales, which next month will start selling condominiums at [One MiMa Tower](#) on West 42nd Street. Of the 151 condos, 22 have areas labeled as home offices. They have windows and are large enough to be legal bedrooms, but Ms. de França’s team decided to sell them as offices: “We’re designating them as home offices because that’s appealing to our buyers,” she said.

Similarly, in eight of the two-bedroom apartments at L Haus, a Long Island City condo, a small windowed room that could be a legal bedroom is designated as a home office. Only one has been released to the market: No. 4H, which has 1,432 square feet of space and is priced at \$920,000.

At the [Industry](#), another new condo in Long Island City, 11 of the 76 apartments have spaces designated as home offices. Apartments have white oak flooring and gray oak cabinets, and the building offers a landscaped roof terrace. Units with home offices start at \$525,000; No. 6F, a model unit with one of the two-bedrooms furnished as a spacious office, is selling for \$829,500.

Home offices are in 21 apartments at [the Sheffield](#), built in 1978 but renovated over the past six years, with sales beginning last year. Four of these are for sale. Unit 56D, a 1,498-square-foot two-bedroom listed at \$2.95 million, has an office nook off the living room that receives plenty of light from the floor-to-ceiling windows.

In Unit 42S, price tag \$1.345 million, one of the three bedrooms has been configured as an office, with a wraparound desk and open shelving — and, as a bonus, a close-up view of the Hearst building. Unit 51Q1, \$1.405 million, is an 875-square-foot one-bedroom with a windowless office area off the living/dining area.

Mercedes House at 555 West 53rd Street, developed by Two Trees Management Company and designed by Enrique Norten, offers five rental apartments with home offices, in inside corners of the Z-shaped building, where a legal bedroom wasn’t possible. The one-bedrooms with home offices start at \$3,600 a month, and two-bedrooms start at \$3,900.

David Walentas, the founder and principal of Two Trees, said that home offices were more prevalent in residential conversions in Dumbo, which his company was instrumental in developing. “You have these deep windowless spaces that are ideal for home offices,” Mr. Walentas said. “A lot of people work at home and use them.”

For example, at Gair 2, a building in Dumbo that Two Trees also developed, 34 of 106 units are one-bedrooms with home offices, starting at \$2,900 per month.

And at [Griffin Court](#), a new development at 454 West 54th Street, 42 of the 95 units have “dens” — nooks with open doorways that are often used as home offices, said Kenneth Horn, the president of Alchemy Properties, the developer of Griffin Court.

The dens are near bathrooms, making the space even more useful. And many of the units also offer terraces that look out onto a private courtyard. The dens were included to attract

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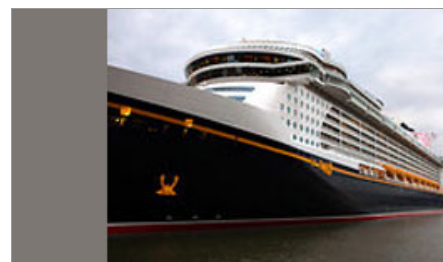
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buyers looking for more space without the added cost of an extra bedroom.

“We wanted to keep as many units below a million as possible,” Mr. Horn said. “We decided that the ones with the dens would be more salable than your straight twos.”

Keith Wang and Katherine Sayn-Wittgenstein bought their three-bedroom penthouse near Gramercy Park in 2007 for the sun that streamed in from the enormous skylight over the living room and kitchen, and for the roof deck that stretched for more than 1,000 square feet.

The couple were buying a place to live, and didn't realize that the apartment, at 233 East 17th Street, would become their office, too.

First, Ms. Sayn-Wittgenstein, who sells Web conferencing software, took a job that allowed her to work at home, so they converted the bedroom off the kitchen — separated from the other sleeping areas — to a home office. Soon after that, Mr. Wang started his own company in the stem-cell industry and began sharing the office.

“We love the flexibility of working from home,” Mr. Wang said. “It lets us have a great work-life balance.”

The small room has two desks, a bookshelf, plenty of artwork and two windows, which were especially important.

“With the two of us working in such close quarters, they make it feel a little bit more spacious,” Mr. Wang said.

The couple are moving to Boston and are selling the apartment for \$3 million, through Tamir Shemesh at Corcoran.

Most spaces advertised as “home offices” are alcoves or windowless rooms that cannot legally be called bedrooms. The New York State Multiple Dwelling Law says rooms for sleeping must have at least 80 square feet of floor space, no measurement less than 8 feet, and window area that measures at least 12 square feet and is also at least a 10th of the area of the room. There are also rules about how much space needs to be between the window and the next lot. In addition, there are exceptions to this rule for some older buildings, according to an official at the New York City Department of Buildings.

A room that falls outside these parameters is given another name — media room, den, library, dining room — but more and more these days it becomes the home office.

Buyers looking for home offices will find plenty in the office-to-residential conversions in the financial district. The buildings, which include 75 Wall Street, 20 Pine Street, 40 Broad Street and 15 Broad Street, among many others, can have layouts of up to 100 feet deep, said John Cetra, a founding principal of [CetraRuddy Architects](#), which designed L Haus and redesigned the Sheffield. Because the windowless spaces in the middle of these buildings cannot be used as bedrooms, homeowners often use them as offices.

“It's a good way to utilize the deep floors in ways that are interesting, and to take advantage of that space,” Mr. Cetra said.

Generally apartments with office space are significantly less expensive than comparable ones with an additional legal bedroom. In a report released in January by Platinum Properties, rents for studios with home offices in the financial district were almost 10 percent lower than those for one-bedrooms — yet the units were more than 5 percent larger, on average.

“When someone can’t really afford a one-bedroom and they don’t want a studio,” said Khashy Eyn, the president of Platinum Properties, “it’s a dream come true.”

At [20 Pine](#), a former bank building, a 1,372-square-foot studio with an office is listed with Warburg for \$1.065 million, whereas a 1,185-square-foot one-bedroom is listed for \$1.65 million.

That studio is made up of a “great room” with the kitchen 30 feet away from the window, as well as a spacious windowless room designated as a “study” on the floor plan. The study has a large closet and is near the front door.

“It’s large enough to be a two-bedroom, but it’s a studio with a home office,” said Deborah DeMaria of Warburg, the sales director for 20 Pine.

According to New York City zoning rules, up to one quarter (or 500 square feet, whichever is less) of any apartment may be used for a “home occupation,” which includes most desk jobs — though not interior decorating, real estate, insurance and selling stocks, among other professions. Generally speaking, said Michael Slattery, a senior vice president of the Real Estate Board of New York, occupations that are perceived to generate noise, odor or too much pedestrian traffic are not permitted.

In parts of Lower Manhattan, up to half an apartment can be used for a home occupation, and up to three outside employees can work there. A broader range of occupations is allowed, as well.

Three employees in a home might seem like a crowd, but not in No. 1A at 7 Dutch Street, a ground-floor apartment in the financial district. The 3,400-square-foot two-bedroom three-bathroom duplex loft includes a 1,200-square-foot office in the basement with a separate entrance and a bathroom.

The newly renovated apartment has exposed brick and high-end kitchen appliances. Though the office receives little natural light and the shape is narrow, \$1.539 million for a live/work apartment of that size is quite a find, said the broker, Javier Lattanzio of Time Equities.

Working from a home office can be a money-saving proposition. Not only may the owner apply business funds toward the purchase of the apartment, but he or she may also deduct the proportionate amount of common charges and utilities as a business expense. The usual benefits of homeownership apply, too, in that the mortgage interest is tax-deductible.

“If you’re paying commercial rent, you get no depreciation, and you get no opportunity for appreciation,” said Roberta Axelrod, the director of residential sales and rentals for Time Equities. “And of course, you’re living at home and not spending time commuting.”

The important thing with a home office, Mr. Wang said, is to find a way, at the day’s end, to close that office door — whether or not there is one.

“We’ve had to set boundaries in terms of when we’re working and when we’re not,” he said. “Otherwise you find yourself working 15 hours a day. You get up, you check e-mail. You go to bed, you check e-mail.”

But working at home allows him and Ms. Sayn-Wittgenstein to raise their year-old child instead of having to hire a full-time nanny. “We are certain we’ll never regret spending more time with our daughter,” he said.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: May 29, 2011

An article last Sunday about spaces that can be used as home offices misstated the minimum square footage of floor space required by New York State law for a room used for sleeping. It is 80, not 132. (Exceptions to this rule are allowed for some older buildings.)

A version of this article appeared in print on May 22, 2011, on page RE1 of the New York edition with the headline: The 50-Foot Commute.

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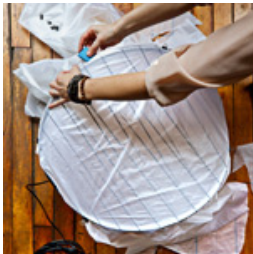
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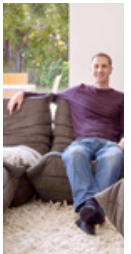
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