

AT HOME

Miss Manners' wedding checklist
To ease the burdened bride, Miss Manners offers a list of things not to worry about - like showers, stamps and matching mothers. Page 54.

Deaths 56, 57

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Home

IS
WHERE
THE

Office IS

Whether the space is cramped
or cavernous, home office workers
love the flexible schedule —
and the nonexistent commute



Richard Colman and Gayle Knight Colman do tax and financial advising from the spacious office quarters in their Carlisle home.

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JOANNE RATH

By Margo Miller
GLOBE STAFF

Richard and Gayle Knight Colman remember the phone call that did it. They were at work in Boston's financial district, crunching numbers with 200 other people in the same office. It was a lovely winter's day, the last night's snow still pure. A friend phoned to say he had spent the morning playing outdoors with his small son. This got to the Colmans. If they spent the rest of their lives working for a corporation, they would never get to play in the snow with their kids. So they quit their jobs and went into business for themselves at home.

Home at the time, a few years ago, was a Cambridge condo. They worked in the basement, where Rich jury-rigged a phone system and they kept warm with space

heaters. As the business grew - they do tax and financial advising for an hourly fee - it began taking over the apartment. They said goodbye to the dining room table.

Home since last spring is a saltbox in a new development in rural Carlisle. From the country road, you'd never know those windows over the garage belong to the conference room for the Colman/Knight Advisory Group, as the couple call their firm. While some towns ban home businesses, they're OK in Carlisle, if the offices don't look like offices. So as long as the electricity doesn't go flooey - in the country, trees have a way of falling on power lines - the Colmans are in business. Their cats like the country. One day, they say, they'll start having children.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / WENDY MAEDA

Gil Murray, an artist who specializes in portraits of houses and buildings, has a studio in his Watertown home.

OFFICE, Page 54



GLOBE STAFF PHOTOS / WENDY MALDA

Patsy and Gil Murray run their Attic Studios out of the second floor of their Watertown home.

For some workers, home is where the office is

■ OFFICE

Continued from Page 51

Home offices are not exactly new, especially in small-town New England, where a doctor or lawyer might hang his shingle on the front porch and conduct his practice in a room off the front hall. These days, a growing part of an interior designer's portfolio. "I figure 60 percent of the sun porches I do over are for home offices," says Anne Lenox of Partners in Design of Newton. Judging by house plans in shelter magazines, more and more people are asking architects to allow for a future home office, even if it's only building cabinets for the home computer and the personal fax.

There probably isn't a typical home office any more than there's a typical kitchen. The Colmans lord it over 900 square feet, and there's another 900 available on the next floor. But Harry R. Kirsch runs his Florida-based empire from one end of a basement family room in Auburndale. His kids used to play Ping-Pong there. Beyond the sliding glass doors is a terrace and an enviable view of the Charles River. In warm weather, while the fax is tied up hissing memos, Kirsch can sit out and read the morning paper. Or row on his rowing machine, or pedal on his stationary bike. As his own boss, he can play tennis when he likes. He's that Harry Kirsch, the demon of Longwood.

Kirsch is in the health care business, the president and chief operating officer of International Magnetic Imaging. His company finances and equips private clinics with magnetic resonance imaging equipment, a diagnostic tool whose images are better than CAT scans for detecting problems in the central nervous and cardiovascular systems. When Kirsch's actual presence is required by his management team in Florida, he drives to Logan and gets on a plane. Otherwise, he's an "absentee executive," he says. His "office" is a space 8 by 10 feet plus a couple of file cabinets in the furnace room. He works at an ordinary desk. He has a word processor and a printer. And a speaker phone. Of the two phone lines, one is dedicated to the fax. The fax is the kind that doubles as an auxiliary phone and copier. A large part of Kirsch's time is spent dealing with documents. Memos. Letters. Refining language in contracts. The sort of thing a man who types with two fingers can do on the computer while listening to Florida on the speakerphone. As long as Federal Express can find his house - you don't fax the boilerplate on contracts, he says - he's in business.

And as long as the UPS truck can get up their hill in Watertown, Gil and Patsy Murray can do business as Attic Studios. He's an artist who specializes in doing portraits of people's houses or famous buildings. Those scenes of Boston (and Portsmouth, N.H., and Portland, Maine) signed I. Gillis Murray are his work. Patsy's work is getting them made into note cards and sold in gift shops. Or made into stationery. "Ninety-five percent of the people who get the house portrait get the stationery too," says Patsy. The Murrays and their business occupy every inch of the second floor of a two-family house. His studio is on the back, part of the old laundry porch, off the couple's bedroom. Finished note cards arrive from the printer's by UPS and are trundled upstairs.

At Attic Studios, "Shipping" is



Patsy Murray handles sales of her husband's work.

what would be a child's bedroom if there were still kids at home. The shrink-wrap machine is as big as a crib. "Sales" is another small bedroom. There's a two-line phone system, a computer and laser printer. "No fax - we really don't need one," says Patsy. She used to spend the day at the computer, logging inventory, studying profitability on spread sheets, and keeping customer records up to date. Now the Murrays hire an office manager. "She frees up my time to sell," Patsy says.

Why work at home? For a good many people, part of the pleasure of work is being with people. But for a sizeable percentage of the work force, "hell is other people."

The Murrays had disliked their

other jobs. "It was torture to get up at 6:30" to get to her typesetting job. He had always loved painting architecture. There was a personal reason, too. It was a second marriage for both, and they wanted to spend time together. Not that Attic Studios handcuffs one partner to the other. She's out selling them. The Murrays like the flexibility of working at home. He's an early riser. She'd rather work late. He is only steps from his studio. "My work, it's hard to turn on, turn off," he says. "If I get an idea, I get up and go into the studio, even if it's midnight." And the Murrays love talking about their business. "We talk about it constantly," he says. "If there's a question about something, you just pull the

file. It's so convenient to have the office mixed in with our life." To shut Attic Studios out of their life is as simple as shutting the doors to Sales and Shipping. Then the visitor sees only a sunny apartment with well-loved furniture and Gil Murray's collection of old tin toys.

With their office over the garage, the Colmans don't have much of a commute home. They walk down the office stairs to the hall that leads to the kitchen. Here is domestic warmth, brick and pine and good smells. The Colmans make a point of going home for lunch. It can be quick, or leisurely, Gayle says, but they need a break in a day that begins at 8 and may not end till 6 or 7. There's time in the day for errands. "One of us is always here," she says. And of course the office equipment is on duty 24 hours a day.

Rich is a tax attorney and Gayle a certified financial planner. Their clients are small business people worried about the economy who are apt to phone several times a day for advice. There's a conference room, when meetings are required. Gayle has her office and Rich his. Each has a computer and a laser printer. "We produce a lot of documents," she says. One of their computer software programs is an electronic newspaper, as gaudy as USA Today. Rich shows a visitor what the market is doing, what the weather is in Chicago, what's recommended on TV, what the president is saying. Their phone system has five lines, one dedicated to the fax. There is air conditioning to keep the machines happy. A power outage would be bad for business, so they put in a battery system to back up the generator. Installing the generator required a crane. Passersby marveled: "What have you got in there? Something like a nursing home?"