

Home office design: Separate space and a walk to work

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It happened by accident. When Kurtis and Wanda Weller Sakai went to remodel their 1971 Ojai ranch house, the original plan was to add a fourth bedroom for Kurtis to use as an office. “We realized that if we went over 500 square feet, the add-on permits would get very expensive,” Kurtis said. A new master suite consumed much of that square footage, so architect [Darwin McCredie](#) shifted gears and added to the front of the house a compact 14-by-14-foot office — no bathroom, no walk-in closet, to stay under that magic number of 500.

The result is a work space that feels apart from the rest of the house, a quality enhanced by the fact that the office is accessible only by an exterior door at the end of a long covered porch.

“It feels a little funny going out there in my pajamas sometimes,” said Kurtis, a designer of athletic footwear for clients such as Ugg, Teva and Patagonia. But as someone who always had worked out of a spare bedroom, he now finds the separation that comes with the new office configuration to be a revelation.

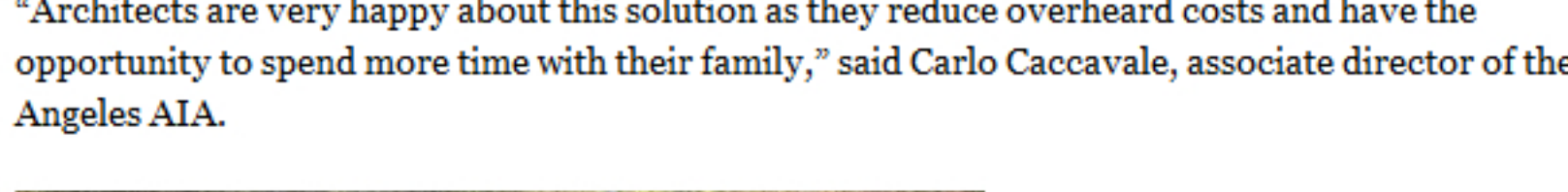
“The detachment feels serious,” he said.

And that is the point: At a time when so many people are bringing the office home, there’s a growing desire for more separation, physical and psychological, between work and personal life. One of the most recent surveys on the subject, released last month by Wrike, which makes online project management software, found that among about 1,000 people who responded 83% said they worked from home at least part of the day.

“It is such a pleasant thing to truly have a sense of separation,” Kurtis said. “My office might as well be down the street. It’s a physical and mental space where I keep all of my problems. You can truly forget about your work and not have it stare at you while you’re walking down the hallway.”

At a home tour organized by the [American Institute of Architects’ Los Angeles chapter](#) last month, three out of the five homes had a detached office. It’s an increasingly common solution for L.A.’s creative class, which does include the architects themselves.

“Architects are very happy about this solution as they reduce overhead costs and have the opportunity to spend more time with their family,” said Carlo Caccavale, associate director of the Los Angeles AIA.



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For many, an office located at home but not in the home is proving to be the best way to reconcile work life with family life. Filmmaker and commercial director John Dolan said he chose a detached structure in his Studio City backyard even though he could work in an office in Hollywood. He likes the quiet and privacy. He also likes being by his two boys, ages 4 and 5.

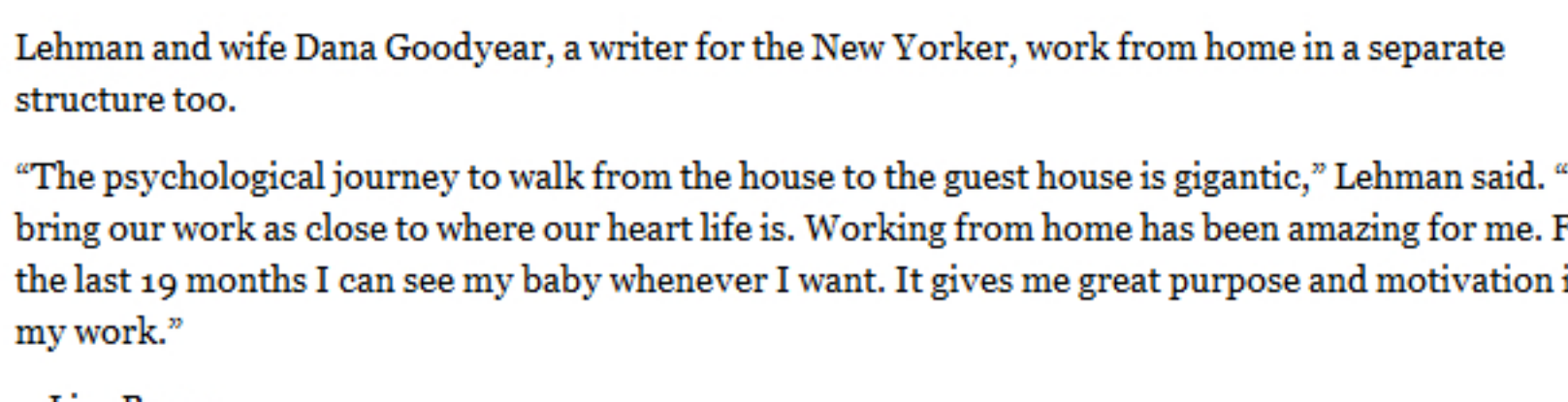
“That is the biggest challenge of working from home,” Dolan said. “Being in a detached space helps a lot. But it’s hard for the kids to understand that I’m working.” And on the plus side: “being able to have lunch with them and clear my head by jumping on the trampoline with them.”

Developer Billy Lehman recently installed a K4 Kithaus, a prefab design often used as an extra bedroom or office, in the Brentwood backyard of a writer-producer couple with kids. The couple found it was impossible to get work done inside the home, so they added a dedicated mini-building in back.

Lehman and wife Dana Goodyear, a writer for the New Yorker, work from home in a separate structure too.

“The psychological journey to walk from the house to the guest house is gigantic,” Lehman said. “We bring our work as close to where our heart life is. Working from home has been amazing for me. For the last 19 months I can see my baby whenever I want. It gives me great purpose and motivation in my work.”

-- Lisa Boone



Bill Beuter, co-founder of [Make Architecture](#) in Los Angeles, designed a 235-square-foot detached workspace for “The Office” actor Rainn Wilson, left. The architect recalled starting his practice a dozen years ago with Jess Mullen-Carey out of Beuter’s garage.

“There are benefits to not having to go anyplace, especially if you want to tackle something immediately,” Beuter said. “But some people just don’t want to encumber their personal space.”

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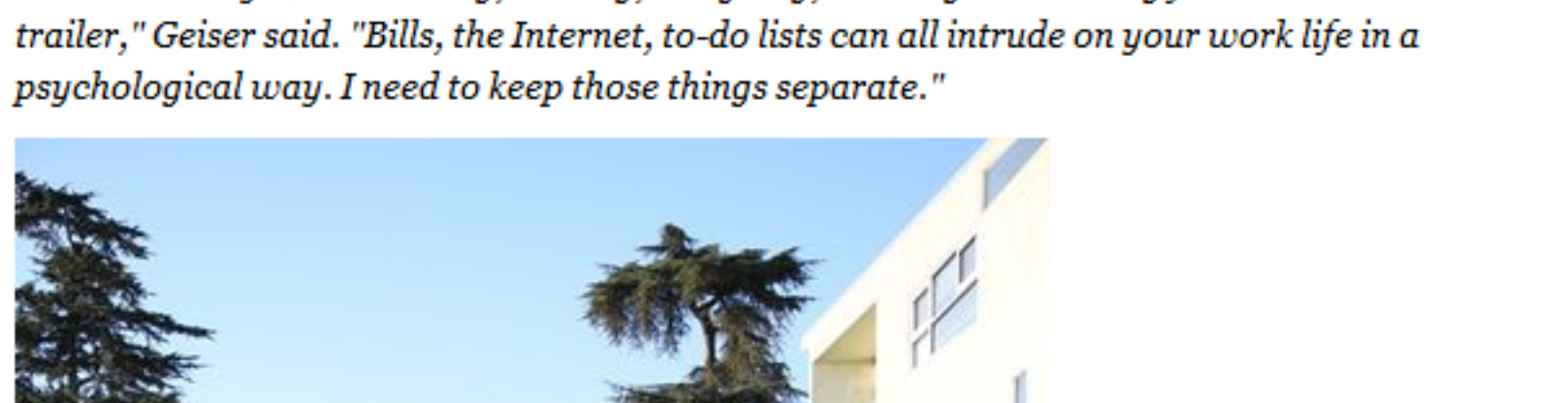
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The detached office for actor Rainn Wilson opens up to the outdoors. “It’s really a beautiful little space perched at the crest of a small rise in their rear yard,” said Bill Beuter, who designed it with business partner Jess Mullen-Carey for an episode of the DIY Network’s “Man Caves.” “The windows we incorporated face out over the small rise, which results in a feeling of being in the treetops.”



Los Angeles artist Janie Geiser, who teaches at CalArts, works in a 1955 Airfloat Land Yacht in her Los Feliz backyard. “Thinking, writing, designing, building and making films -- it is all done in the trailer,” Geiser said. “Bills, the Internet, to-do lists can all intrude on your work life in a psychological way. I need to keep those things separate.”



The Franklin Hills home of architect [Christopher Payne](#) features an office by the side of his pool.



A prefabricated [K4 Kithaus](#) serves as a writer’s retreat for a writer-producer couple in Brentwood.