

Facelifts for the office

Star designer Christopher Lowell banishes the clutter, adds fresh look for winners of Your Money Office Makeover Contest; key advice: 'Bins are the new drawers'

When Margarita Rosa, the founder of Margarita's Breast and Cervical Cancer Survivors Support Group in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, heard she'd won Your Money's Office Makeover contest, she cried so much she couldn't catch her breath.

"Oh My God! I can't believe it!" she screamed into the phone.

It wasn't just that she was a devoted fan of Christopher Lowell, who would come to her office as part of her prize.

Margarita and her husband, Pedro Rosa, had just launched their nonprofit a year before and needed all the help they could get in providing free medical testing, health education and counseling to their clients.

New to running their own show, it looked like they had just moved in and dumped the contents of their boxes. The two were tripping over each other.

Then Lowell arrived at their door.

Margarita screamed again. "Okay, bye now," Lowell deadpanned. Then he got down to business.

The designer swiftly crafted a plan that would streamline the messy office and carve out discrete spaces within the small room. A critical addition would be modular storage pieces,

stackable book cases from his Office Depot Integrat8 line that could be added to over time.

"One simple concept gives you a lot of flexibility," he said. "Invest now in what you can afford."

Heeding Lowell's instructions, the Rosas purchased his and hers matching curved Integr8 desks with hutches on top, providing both privacy and more storage.

The addition of bookcases in front of their desks created a separation between their workspace and their clients' waiting area.

In all, the Rosas spent \$860 on their makeover, mostly covered by the \$500 gift card and an additional Office Depot discount.

The sum is small relative to the dramatic transformation. Papers and objects have been swept off the floor and everything has a place.

"They now have privacy while only being inches away from each other in tiny square footage," Lowell said. "More importantly, they now have room to do God's work — healing and counseling the sick. Bravo!"

PAINT: Nothing transforms and freshens a work space more easily than putting color on walls. It's the cheapest way to add mood, character and a theme

to your office.

THINK PAPERLESS: With computers handling much of the work for many businesses, extensive space-clogging file cabinets are becoming obsolete. Invest instead in a good scanner and communal hard drive. This will free up floor space and allow employees to share information.

BRIGHTEN UP: Replace overhead fluorescent lights with track lighting. The move will create a modern attitude in your office, help establish a more creative environment, cut down on computer screen glare and enhance your new wall color.

STORE IT: Build floor-to-ceiling shelves on smaller walls and paint them the same color as your wall. Add decorative storage containers with lids. This will keep supplies hidden from view. The decorative containers will also add a designer element.

DEFINED SPACES: Place back-to-back bookcases perpendicular to walls to maximize storage and valuable wall space. They help separate one work space from another and provide privacy. Try arranging six of them in a square in the center of a room to create an instant communal library — a room within a room.



LINDA ROSIER/DAILY NEWS



chaotic home office, adjacent to Lofaro's bedroom. All of it had to go.

In its place, Lowell recommended items that had lots of built-in storage and plenty of surface space. He chose sets of stackable bookshelves that can be horizontal or vertical, a sleek wide desk and a service table Lofaro could use for assembling client pitches.

"Years from now, it will still be in style," Lowell said of his office design. "The idea is: It grows as you grow."

Lowell's biggest must-get for Lofaro were woven bins from his Office Depot collection. They come in four earthy colors. "Bins are the new drawers," Lowell said.

Taking his queue from the bins' colors, the designer recommended that Lofaro paint her office a darkish green.

"I love it," the small business owner said.

Lofaro spent a total of \$995 on her office redo, investing \$495 of her own money beyond the \$500 Office Depot gift card. Her spending included \$75 to have someone assemble the Office Depot desk.

She purchased 12 bins – 10 large and two small – for a total of \$247.

Lowell liked the finished look.

"Where once there was chaos and clutter, the pieces she selected with organizational bins have more than solved the problem," he said.

Lofaro said she was grateful for the gift card, but was even happier that Lowell got her to focus on organization.

Like Renée Zellweger in "Jerry Maguire," she said: "He had me at storage."

Christopher Lowell didn't hold back when he arrived at the Valhalla, Westchester, office of occupational therapist Joan Sullivan.

"It's a little Ma and Pa Kettle in here, honey," she was told.

Sure enough, Sullivan and her partner, Sally Poole, who run Hands-On Rehab, a hand rehabilitation practice, were suffering from a serious case of disorganization.

With little available storage space, items used daily for therapy were plopped down all over, making them hard to find when a new patient arrived. Big, unsightly towels hung on racks in full view of patients.

"Nothing has a permanent home," Sullivan said.

Fortunately, Lowell had some simple, inexpensive remedies.

For the shabby reception area, he recommended building shelves on barren walls to free up space on the reception desk.

"If you can't build out, build up," the designer said.

For the chaotic treatment room, Lowell prescribed a row of low bookshelves to run underneath the base of the windows. The small items used for therapy should be organized in woven bins, available from Lowell's Office

Depot line.

"No more plastic boxes," he said, adding, "Go to a luggage store, get luggage tags. That way people will know where to put them back."

Sullivan's landlord would be

For a shabby reception area, Lowell recommended shelves to free up space. 'If you can't build out, build up.'

paying for new carpeting and paint. Lowell suggested soothing earth tones.

"Nothing has a more universal appeal to either sex than something that is nature-inspired," he said.

When her makeover was completed, Sullivan was thrilled.

"Everything is bagged and tagged, everything has its place," she said.

Sullivan spent \$1,800 on her office redo, \$500 on items from Office Depot and \$1,300 on custom cabinetry.

"It was a relatively minor investment in having a better practice," she said. "It was money well

spent."



RICHARD HARBUS



DEBBIE EGAN/CHINA DAILY NEWS

It's a sunny morning at the Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, home office of Francesca Lofaro and the cheery business owner is thrilled to have already accomplished much of her to-do list for

the day. "Look at this! I get so much done!" said Lofaro, pointing to her streamlined workspace, nestled on the top floor of her Queen Anne-style, mid-19th century house, where every invoice, file and brochure has its place.

It wasn't always this way. Lofaro used to sit at an old-fashioned secretary's desk, circa 1960s, that was overwhelmed with papers. A lab table she

found on the street that likely came from a nearby school served as her workstation.

It hardly fit the image of Lofaro's company, Mellini, an importer of high-end plaster, mosaics, stained glass and church furnishings from small artisans in Florence, Italy.

"Oh my God! Oh my God!" Lofaro screamed as a black car carrying Lowell pulled up in front of the house she shares with her elderly parents.

Moving quickly past the trays of cannolis, prosciutto sticks and sfogliatelle Lofaro had laid out for the occasion, Lowell got down to business.

"These tiny drawers! We don't work that way anymore!" Lowell said as stared at the



AFTER



JAMES MONROE ADAMS IV

“Help!!” Francesca Lofaro wrote in entering the Your Money Office Makeover Contest. “I am lost in a sea of folders and sketches. ... I need the space to be more functional.”

Before her office makeover, Joan Sullivan wrote that she was “a small business owner drowning in disorganization.”



The office of Margarita's Breast and Cervical Cancer Survivors Support Group suffered without private space to speak with clients, its founder wrote in entering the Your Money contest.