

Ask an expert

How to do away with unwelcome draughts, restore weathered timbers and prevent water-damaged floorboards from dampening your spirit. Plus, home office storage ideas.

Q We have an old brick and weatherboard home that's cold and draughty. How can I insulate the house to make it eco-friendly and cost-effective? *Peter Webb, Victoria*

A "Insulate your house with bulk insulation within the roof space to ensure heat doesn't escape into that area," says Angus Kell of Archicentre, "and make sure your windows and doors are well sealed." During the day, keep blinds and curtains open to let sunshine in; close them in the afternoon when the temperature drops and install pelmets to improve thermal efficiency. Rugs will reduce heat loss through the floor at night. Look at increasing your home's north-facing openings (don't forget to add shade for summer) and divide the house into demarcated zones so you don't waste energy heating unused areas. Finally, ensure your heating appliances have a high energy rating. *Archicentre; (02) 9555 5111 or www.archicentre.com.au*

Q We've ripped up the '70s vinyl in our bathroom and had the floorboards sanded, but they're water-damaged. We've been advised to re-cover the boards with vinyl or tiles, but I desperately want to paint them white. *Julia Lambert, Queensland*

A Unfortunately, damp floorboards are a common problem in older houses and painting isn't an effective option. "I wouldn't recommend floorboards at all in bathrooms," says builder Coby Rotenberg, who's on the books at Service Central, a company which matches consumers with tradespeople. "You'll soon find cracks reappearing as the floorboards inevitably get wet again. Check the timber supporting the floor. You need to know whether the damage is at surface level or if the problem is more complex." A long-term solution would be to install a waterproof membrane, then tiling. If you are determined to keep the boards, Rotenberg says, take them



Wall-to-wall carpet and rugs will reduce heat loss through the floor, and pelmets improve thermal efficiency. Ensure heating appliances have a high energy rating and close off rooms that don't need to be warmed.

up and allow them to dry out, then reinstall and polish with three coats of polyurethane. *Service Central; 1800 737 842 or www.servicecentral.com.au*

Q The doors, windows and marine ply cladding of our home, all western red cedar, are peeling and discoloured. We've coated them with Sikken's oil, Danish oil and other brands, but they soak in rather than coat the surface. Is there any magic bullet? *Sandy Fitzgerald, NSW*

A Oil-based treatments require yearly maintenance and if you have followed

this time frame to date, painting may be a better option for you. It's best to use a protective paint, like water-based Wattyl Solagard Deck & Timber Paint, but you won't be able to apply it unless the previous oil-based treatment has completely worn away, says Wattyl Paints' David Mulford. "To tell if the finish is still working, flick some water onto the timber's surface. If it shows a watermark, the moisture protection has gone. If the water beads, there is still oil in the wood and you won't be able to paint over it; continue with an oil-based preparation." *Wattyl; 132 101 or www.wattyl.com.au*

HAVE A QUESTION?

The *House & Garden* little black book contains the who's who and what's what of interior design and all manner of household matters. If you have a decorating dilemma, send it to us and we'll seek the professional opinion of the best in the business.

WRITE TO US

Send your questions to *H&G Advice*, GPO Box 4088, Sydney, NSW 1028, or email h&g@acpmagazines.com.au.

Three of a kind

How do you make your home office both effective and attractive? Here are some tips from those in the know.



Kim Crestani
Architect
Order Architects
(02) 8267 7555 or www.orderarchitects.com



David Ey
Architect
Studio Nine
(08) 8132 3999 or www.studionine.net.au



Clare Cousins
Architect
Clare Cousins Architects
(03) 9329 2888 or www.clarecousins.com.au

Q My first home office was a computer on the kitchen bench. Now I also need a printer, fax, scanner and iPod dock. How can I integrate all this equipment in my new office? *Jack Cox, Victoria*

A Congratulations; it sounds like your business is doing well. Everyone has used off-the-shelf storage at some time or another but my advice for your new office set-up would be to invest in bespoke joinery, especially if you plan to use this office long term. Yes, it will cost more, but on the other hand you will get exactly what you need. What's more, it may be tax-deductible as a work-related expense. I suggest you commission a young architect or an interior designer to design the layout for you, then get a quote from a joinery company that offers both quality and value. Do some research – ask among your friends for recommendations or do an internet search for companies in your area.

A IKEA and Freedom have a vast range of products for home-office layouts, as does Officeworks, with its Criterion Workzone workstation system. Chain-store solutions will always involve some level of compromise, however, because the units come in standard sizes and configurations, which may not perfectly suit your requirements. It comes down to the space available. If the units fit your requirements, great – it's an economical way to go. If you need to squeeze your available space to the last millimetre, a custom-designed unit is a better solution. Ask a furniture designer or a recent graduate of architecture to design something unique for you.

A I'm a huge fan of IKEA and use its furniture in my own office. For basic essentials, I suggest white metal cabinets and a white timber trestle base with white laminate top. Shelves can be mounted above. If you choose a trestle base with a lower shelf, it's useful for storing books or your computer CPU. This monochromatic scheme is timeless and can be styled in various ways with coloured accessories. The IKEA PS cabinet is designed to hold electrical equipment, with holes to accommodate cabling requirements. Doors conceal the equipment when not in use and the top can be used as a desk return for additional space. An iPod dock is attractive enough to be displayed on top. **H&G**