



Larger-than-life flowers fill the office floor.

Photos by Dee Zunker Photography

ONE ROOM

Home office is bold portfolio sample in itself



"I wanted it to be worthy of inviting a client into my home," says interior designer Rhonnika Clifton of R J Clifton Designs.

Floor to ceiling, interior designer's work space matches her super-colorful personality

By **Diane Cowen**
STAFF WRITER

Take one look at Rhonnika Clifton's new in-home office, and it's not hard to assess her personality: unabashedly bold and colorful.

The 40-year-old interior designer and Houston native turned what was a little-used room into an office for her business — R J Clifton Designs. She operated a different decorating business from 2006-13, took a break

to get a degree in interior design from the Art Institute of Houston and then relaunched in 2015.

She'd been working out of the northeast Houston home she shares with her mother to avoid the overhead of an office, but it just wasn't working.

For a year, she worked on plans to make it comfortable and inviting, functional and beautiful. At a design conference, she met a vendor who decorates floors by putting images

Office continues on D2

Up your décor game at Access Design

Event featuring speakers coincides with annual Showroom Sample Sale

By **Diane Cowen**
STAFF WRITER

The late-summer edition of Access Design on Aug. 22-23 comes with a bonus: It coincides with the Houston Design Center's annual Showroom

Sample Sale, when the shops there open their doors to the general public and clear out inventory at drastically reduced prices.

Access Design is the quarterly event hosted by the Houston Chronicle

and the Design Center, a collection of showrooms, many of which are open to the trade only. During the annual sample sale, you'll find bargains on everything from lighting and accessories to furniture and rugs.

The lineup of speakers will help anyone up his or her at-home game, with advice from four much-in-

demand interior designers.

For the 4-6 p.m. Aug. 22 Design Happy Hour, Courtney Elias of Creative Tonic will speak on "A Creative Tonic Spin on ColorFULL Design," followed by Lauren Haskett of Lauren Haskett Fine Design speaking on "Get It Right: Plan Your Home Like an Ex-
Design continues on D2



Houston interior designer **Lauren Haskett** will speak Aug. 22 at the Design Happy Hour.

Courtesy photo

THIS WEEK: Mystical Arts of Tibet tour hits Asia Society Texas Center. **PAGE D3**

DEAR ABBY: Wife concerned over husband's behavior when he's been drinking. **PAGE D5**

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"This office is bold, but it's totally me," Rhonnika Clifton says.

Photos by Dee Zunker Photography

Essential elements of an at-home office

Lighting: For her office, Clifton added five recessed lights in the ceiling and a pair of wall sconces and brought in a table lamp. She said that many older homes have inadequate light, so you need to layer it with lighting you can use separately, depending on how much you need.

Desk: Consider the kind of desk, what you'll use it for and whether you'll use it a lot or occasionally to determine if you need a more traditional desk with drawers or something more modern and minimalist.

Storage: Think through how much storage you need and what you'll use it for. She converted a closet by removing a clothes rod and adding a pegboard and shelving. It also has enough room that she can hide an unsightly document shredder in it.

Electrical outlets: Think through how much office equipment you'll need or where you'll use table lamps. She added outlets for a television, computer printer and a shredder.

Function: Make it as multifunctional as possible, she said. Her office is 12 feet by 13 feet, but she has built-in cabinets, a small table and chairs, a desk with an office chair, a small bar and a niche with a chair and small workspace.

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on vinyl that can actually go on your ceiling, floor or walls.

She knew she wanted a big, bold colorful floral pattern but had to win over her mother since the change would be more substantial. They started with something simpler on the garage floor, and her mom told her to go for it.

Now, the floor has a black background with seriously-larger-than-life flowers in pinks, blues and creams, with vivid green foliage.

"I wanted to use black and thought about putting it on the ceiling, but then I decided to do the floor. I found a floral image, tweaked the colors and voila," said Clifton, who also teaches design classes at Houston Community College. "This office is bold, but it is totally me. The rest of my home does not look like my office. This is Candy Land. It is a fantasy."

She pulled the pink from the flowers – it's Sherwin-Williams' Eros Pink – and used it for the ceiling and the interiors of bookcases.

"I call it my 'Barbie pink.' That's the one color I've always leaned to over the years. I love all colors, but if I had to pick a favorite, it would probably be pink," she said. "When I thought, 'What can I go bold with?' pink kept sticking out to me. So if I do pink, I want the most bold, bubblegum popping pink I can find."

Though the room is bold, it works because she pulls the various prints from the colors in the flooring. Her window has a black-and-white geometric-print fabric, and a counter in the back has a decorative pillow in another black-and-white print.

A pair of black sconces frame a colorful abstract painting on the back wall, and it, too, sticks to the colors of the room.

As contemporary as Clifton's designs are, she loves antiques for the sentimentality they can bring to a home.

When the 12-by-13-foot space was a sitting room, it held a pair of Victorian highback chairs, a Duncan Phyfe sofa and a mahogany table. She kept the chairs, painted the wood frames and reupholstered them with navy-blue velvet and a nailhead trim.

"My mother wasn't tied to those chairs, but I was. That's the room where my mom would lay out our Christmas presents," Clifton said. "So I respect when clients say they have heirlooms that have sentimental value. If it's a picture, let's update it in a new frame. That's the appreciation of the Victorian chair. It's all about a balance of new and old and making it blend beautifully."

She added a cabinet and bookshelves at the back of the room for storage, and a closet that had been in the room was revamped with a pegboard and shelving to hold fabric samples and other things she needs to use with clients.

Businesswise, it has been a game-changer for her. "It hasn't always been a



Clifton makes the most of her 12-by-13-foot space via savvy storage, namely a closet revamped with a pegboard and shelving.

smooth road coming out of school and starting my design firm. When I thought of creating this office, it was with the clear intention that I was going to take my business to the next level," Clifton said. "I wanted it to be worthy of inviting a client into my home."

In addition to a desk and chair she works from, the tall Victorian chair sits in a niche where an assistant might someday work. There's a tall, glass-topped table with bar stools where clients can sit for presentations against a wall that holds Clifton's framed diplomas and awards.

"I love fashion – the fashion world is fearless. I look at how fashion designers put together prints and patterns and bold colors," she said. "People come to me to tap into something. They have a quiet appreciation for color but don't know how to pull it together."

Clifton finished her office in March 2018, and though it's not the kind of room her mother might choose to live in, she knows she has her approval.

"My mom loves it, but she doesn't outright tell me that. She's active and goes to church meetings and water aerobics with her friends, and one day I was sitting here working, and I looked up and three of her friends were walking in. I could hear her say, 'Come look at Rhonnika's office, come see what she did.' That's when I knew she was OK with it."

diane.cowen@chron.com

DESIGN

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pert, from Kitchen Design to New Furniture." Wine, soft drinks and light bites will be served.

From 10 a.m. to noon Aug. 23, Jana Erwin of Nest Design Group will speak on "Finding Your Unique Style," followed by Jacob Medina of Medina Designs speaking on "Modern Design: The Art of Mixing and Matching." Coffee, juice and breakfast bites will be served.

Register at accessdesignexperts.eventbrite.com and use promo code 8222 for free tickets.

Showrooms participating in the sample sale include Charlotte Nail Antiques, Design House, James Craig Furnishings, Lighting Treasures, MAI Memorial Antiques Interiors, Manchester Carpet, Off White Showroom, Scene One Interiors and Teri Pugh Studio.

The design event and sample sale benefit Dwell with Dignity, a charity that installs complete home interiors for deserving families. During the sample sale, the Design Center will have food trucks serving lunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

diane.cowen@chron.com



Julie Soefer



Bethany Takes Photos



Julie Soefer

Courtney Elias, from left, principal and creative director at Creative Tonic, Jacob Medina of Medina Designs and Jana Erwin of Nest Design Group will speak on various topics Aug. 22 and 23 at Access Design.

Access Design

When: 4-6 p.m. Aug. 22 and 10 a.m.-noon Aug. 23

Where: Houston Design Center, 7026 Old Katy Road

Tickets: \$10; accessdesignexperts.eventbrite.com

Sponsor: Pelican Builders

Showroom Sample Sale

When: 5-7 p.m. Tuesday kick-off party; 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Aug. 21-23; 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Aug. 24

Where: Charlotte Nail Antiques, Design House, Inc., James Craig Furnishings, Lighting Treasures, MAI Memorial Antiques Interiors, Manchester Carpet, Off White Showroom, Scene One Interiors and Teri Pugh Studio at the Houston Design Center, 7026 Old Katy Road

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