

Organizing your Workroom

This article got started because my workroom was a mess (see before and after photos)! In the process of cleaning it up over the summer, I learned a lot about organization, and thought I would share what I've learned. Where I have actually put the idea into effect, I took a picture.



BEFORE



AFTER

Selecting the Space

- Any available space can be fitted out as a workroom, ranging in size from a small closet to a whole room. Don't overlook any space – on the porch, in the garage, in the attic, that dirty corner in the basement.... They can all be turned into an effective workspace with a little paint and elbow grease.
- Any closet with bi-fold doors that can be liberated from more mundane uses can be quickly turned into a workroom through the addition of a chip-board or plywood bench held up by one or two drawer units, coupled with some overhead shelving.
- If you don't have a specific space that can be assigned to miniatures, at least try to identify a specific storage area where the little bits and pieces can be organized and easily located.

Lighting

- Overhead shelving above your worktable provides great accessible storage and takes up little space. It also provides you with a place to install fluorescent lighting under the shelf directly above your workbench.
- An adjustable light clamped to your bench can provide spot-lighting for various projects.
- A magnifying lamp with the light underneath the magnifier is very helpful to light up your work. Light is equally if not more important than the magnification because you can see much better with proper light. Alternatively, wear reading glasses from the drug store and get whatever strength is necessary to easily see without straining. Mini-work while "watching" television is good because the looking up, refocusing, looking down, refocusing, is good exercise for your eyes. Moral: Use whatever it takes to see without strain, BUT be sure your work surface has the proper light!

Working Surfaces

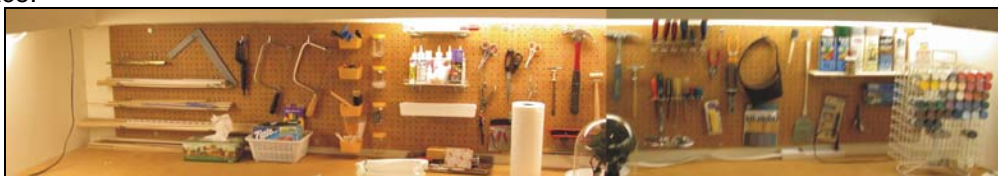
- Do you know that your ironing board makes a perfect work bench? It's portable so it can be moved anywhere you want to work. It has adjustable height so you can lower it down for good height etc. and

a washable cover too! Why do you need to iron anyway? This provides the perfect excuse not to iron. It takes up precious miniaturists' time anyway.

- An ironing board also works great if you have back trouble and can't sit for a long time. But if you can stand, you can work at an ironing board table (at highest level) for hours. Get some pieces of cotton fabric from a box of remnants, and put a piece over the board. Don't worry about getting glue or paint on it. Just throw it in the wash after a while. If you apply paint or glue with a needle, to clean the needle, just stick it into the fabric and slide it back out again. Works great. Because it's padded underneath, it's great for fragile stuff, almost like working on a long flat pin cushion.
- Or you can work on Styrofoam sheets or acoustic ceiling tiles. You will love the way you can pin items to them, spill and have the mess absorbed rather than dribbled down the front of you, stick your tools into them, brace glued objects with pushpins as they dry, etc. You will also enjoy the sound they make as you stomp them after a particularly frustrating design faux pas.

Storage Ideas

- Wood pieces such as clapboard etc can be stored in computer keyboard boxes. Check with your Tech department at work, or go and plead with Compu-Smart or Future Shop for spare boxes. Dowels, trims, mouldings etc. can be stored in Pringle boxes and coffee cans. Or, store strip wood, trim and dowels in PVC pipe cut to the length you need. And always have a dedicated box for scrap pieces of moulding and wood. You never know when you will need a little piece of wood.
- If you have some spare ceiling tiles around, hang one (or two) on the wall and put your teeny supplies (beads, etc.) in mini Ziploc bags, then use a pushpin to fasten them to the ceiling tile. Everything is visible at a glance. Or stick project instructions up on the tile for easy reference.
- If you have trouble finding just the right piece of mini-fabric or trim, take a box of sheet protectors and put the fabric, paper from the scrapbook store, pieces of felt, etc., in the sheet protectors and into a binder. Everything is visible, nice and flat and dust-free.
- If the white plastic covered wire paint carousel at Michael's feels a little too expensive for you to hold crafts that you've already spent too much on, start saving empty toilet paper rolls (cut in two) and empty paper towel holder rolls (cut in three pieces). Then, making sure they sit flat on a surface, glue the sides all together until you have enough to fill a sturdy box. The bottles of craft paint stand up nicely in these and if you put a little dab of the corresponding paint on the lid of each, it works great, and you can see all the colors at a glance!
- Plastic shoe boxes, sweater boxes, and larger "under-bed" boxes are an excellent way to store - - on shelves and in stacks. Also, the divided boxes for teeny tiny items which might get lost or broken in the larger boxes. The Lee Valley jeweller's boxes are great for findings. Inexpensive Zip-lock storage containers from any large grocery store work well. Just make sure you label the front so you can find (and file) things quickly.
- As for books, if you have a computer, you could start a data-base for all your dollhouse magazines, books and catalogues so you can find the one you want easily. Helpful, too, when you KNOW you have a book and it turns out you don't - you borrowed it from the library and returned it! God bless senior moments!
- **The Power of Pegboard** – inexpensive pegboard can be purchased at any home improvement store like Home Depot, and there are a wide variety of storage accessories (not so inexpensive) that plug into the holes to keep tools and other items handy and in view for easy access. This system can be installed under overhead shelving, and only takes up an inch or two of space.



- For those of you with little children, you can make an organizer for small objects with baby food jars. Get a piece of wood (1-2" thick and 4 inches wide, and however long you want). Put the lids face up on the piece of wood in a row (by face up, I mean with the "inside" up.) Drive a nail through the lid into the piece of wood so that the lid is attached. (The sharp nail point should be buried in the wood.) Screw the jars into the lids. Then nail or screw the whole board under a shelf in your workroom so that the jars are hanging down underneath the shelf. You can unscrew the jars, put small objects (beads, etc) in them, and screw them back onto the lid. They're out of the way, you can see what's inside since the jars are clear, and you're using space that would otherwise have been wasted.
- Stacking wooden trays from Ikea are great for carting projects around. The high sides ensure that pieces don't get lost.

Organizing Your Ideas and Projects

- Set up a small notebook, scribbler, or file folder for each of your projects. In it, keep track of photos, ideas, wiring, costs, wallpaper, purchases made, provenance of purchased items, paint colours, etc. for each major project you undertake.
- Use a desk drawer divider (from Office Depot or Staples) to keep frequently used tools close at hand, yet organized.
- If you start collecting things for an idea before you have the setting built, designate a container for each roombox or dollhouse room that you plan to create. In it, store all of the "bits" that you pick up along the way (or find when you are going through your treasures) for that room in its own box. Projects close to completion require larger boxes than those still in the distant future.



De-Cluttering

- It is sometimes very hard to get rid of stuff. To help out, use four key decluttering rules. First, use the smile test. If what-ever it is doesn't bring a smile to your face, then why do you have it? Then, ask yourself, "If my house burned down tomorrow, would I really miss this thing?" Next, ask yourself if you are planning to use the item in the foreseeable future. Lastly, ask yourself if the item can be easily replaced. If it doesn't make you smile, it wouldn't be missed, you don't have a plan to use it, and it could be easily replaced, chuck it!
- If your mini-workshop has reached the point where you can't find a thing, try some of these tips to unclutter your life.
 1. Try the "10 Minute Toss" - Each day set aside 10 minutes to unclutter a drawer, cupboard, shelf or area that needs attention. Doing that daily keeps clutter under control.

2. "Corkboards Cause Clutter" - Instead, buy a mounting strip and hooks (like the kind for hanging kitchen utensils). Mount the strip above the desk in your home office (sounds professional, doesn't it?) and hang BIG bull-nose clips from the hooks. The strip holds a ton. (Sunni tells me that her clips would be so full of papers and stuff that they would look like a rack of ballerina tutus.)
 3. The plastic containers that come from the store containing organic salad greens make perfect containers for unfinished projects, supplies, etc., and they stack well on a shelf. Or, buy the Zip-lock or Glad-ware food savers. They are cheap enough to buy a lot of them, and clear enough that you can see what is inside. Stackable sweater boxes made by Rubbermaid are also clear and work well when you need more space.
 4. Visit your local kitchen supply store to buy drawer inserts that can be cut to size to exactly fit your drawer. The inserts designed for spice bottles fit the standard sized acrylic paint bottles perfectly, while the cutlery organizers keep your various X-Acto knives, files, paint brushes, styluses, etc. organized neatly. If your drawer is deep enough, you can even get two layer inserts, with a sliding section on the top.
- Separate the items that you are getting rid of into various categories:
 1. Throw it out, because no one will want it or can use it.
 2. Start a kid's craft box where you can chuck all the things you don't need or won't use in the next two years. Keep it handy when visiting (or your own) children want to "play miniatures" with you, or, every time the box is full, donate it to a local daycare.
 3. Give to women's shelters. Even in shelters there are kids that need to play with something and women need clothes, household items or even material, thread etc, for setting up a new home for themselves and their kids, (many of these women get out of bad family situations with just the clothes on their backs). This is also an opportunity to de-clutter your closet. If it doesn't fit, and hasn't been worn in two years, give it away.
 4. Give excess supplies to a rehab hospital or seniors residence for use in occupational therapy.
 5. Libraries would welcome any no longer needed books, magazines, etc.
 6. Give to church (or your club's) garage sale (if its still too good to throw out then someone may buy it at a sale).
 7. Put an ad in the newspaper, giving away free crafter's stuff or whatever; it will go fast.
 8. There is always the old reliable method of putting it out on the front curb of your house with a big sign that says FREE, it always is taken by someone!