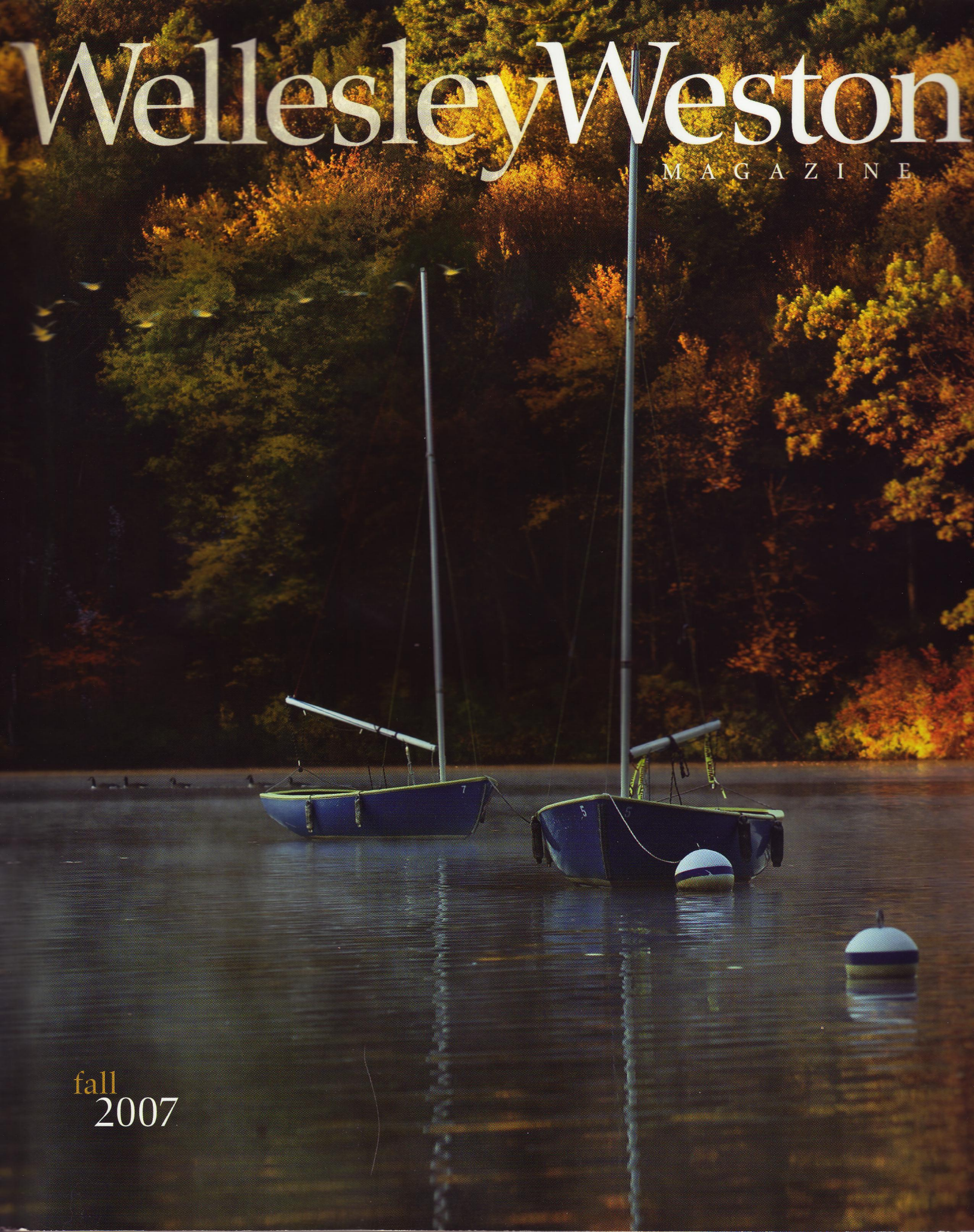


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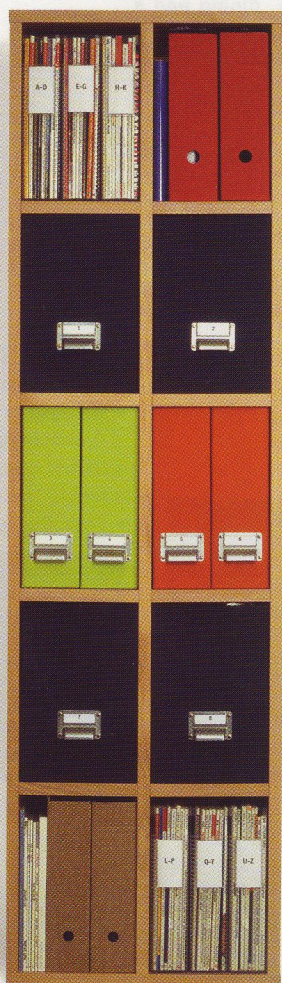
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10 tips to...

(HELP YOU ORGANIZE YOUR HOME OFFICE)

The towers of paper, mountains of folders, and piles of periodicals are the only things visible, but you know there is an office in there somewhere. Whether it's a nook in the corner of your family room, or a full-fledged business office, there are days when you just have to close the door and hope that the stacks stop multiplying.

But now that the weather will inevitably get cooler and the pace of daily life is about to be kicked up a notch, it's a great time to think about getting things in order. Here are a few tips from the experts to get you started. These folks really know how to stay organized.



DORLING KINDERSLEY/GETTY IMAGES

one Just do it.

The first step can be a baby one. Officially schedule a couple of hours on your calendar and just start sorting through the clutter. Pick one area to tackle first, like your desk drawers, the closet, or a file cabinet. If you don't "schedule" it, it won't happen, much like every other aspect of our busy lives.

two Move it.

Move out (and keep out!) what doesn't belong in your office. Banish the ironing board, the golf clubs, and the treadmill that hasn't been powered up since the late nineties. This will give you more elbow room to get in there and start organizing.

three Assess your space.

What are your priorities? Is your office the household's official bill-paying-calendar-management-headquarters, with perhaps a craft table on the side, or is it the area where you run your business or work from home? The specific uses of your office will help you precisely define your equipment, furniture, and storage needs. Decide if your current set-up needs a serious step-up.

four Find the urge to purge.

The organization pros estimate that most people keep 70 percent more paper than necessary. That's a lot of trees. So when you start sorting, decide what to 1) keep and file and 2) toss or recycle. When you sort through the "toss" pile, make sure you use a shredder (the cross-cut type is recommended) to eliminate personal information.

five Get it into your system.

How do you make sense of those jumbled piles of old files and previous attempts at a filing system? Take it one step at a time. Start by sorting your papers, bills, and correspondence by date and year. Once you have that finished, take each year and separate into categories such as insurance, health, utilities, and donations, to name a few. As you progress, you will begin to see a pattern develop, and your own customized filing system will emerge based on the types of expenses, responsibilities, organizations, and activities you need to keep track of. Be sure to keep active files close at hand, and others tucked away. The idea is to keep paper off your work surfaces, and touched as few times as possible.

Sources:

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SIX Downsize and de-clutter.

The trends for office equipment are quite conducive to maximizing space and minimizing clutter. Think about investing in a combo printer/scanner/copier/fax machine to save space and reduce the alarming number of power cords that are underneath your desk. Prices for these types of machines are very reasonable these days.

seven Be creative.

Take advantage of the great customized storage options available through office supply and organization stores. Invest in things like vertical file slots for the wall, book cases, and magazine holders. These can be simple or elaborate as long as they work for you, and there are plenty of options to choose from. To make the tedious task of filing a little more pleasant, invest in some new files, labels, and other office materials. Supplement what you already own with some stylish new supplies. A great website to visit for ideas is: See Jane Work (www.seejanework.com). You'll find product lines by Russell+Hazel, Caspari, and Kate Spade, to name a few.

eight Back it up.

Make sure you are diligent about backing up your files if you do a lot of work on the computer. Think of it this way: what would be devastating to lose? Photographs, e-mail, calendars, work documents? Back up what's deemed valuable as often as possible.

nine Maintain order.

Now that you actually have a spot on your desk to place your cup of morning coffee, congratulate yourself on reaching a long-term goal of an ultra-efficient work space. Carve out a few minutes each day, or at least once a week, to keep things in order. Remember, there's always room for improvement, so if something is not working, make adjustments. You're always the CEO in your own office.

ten Ask for help.

Sometimes, the office chaos is just too overwhelming for one person to handle. If you find yourself constantly "re-organizing" your office but continue to be surrounded by a confusing array of half-hearted organizational attempts, consider hiring a professional organizer. An experienced organizer can help you get to the root of your organizational problems and work out a sustainable system designed to meet your particular needs.

(JENNIFER S. BUCKLEY writer)

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