

Making Our Home Office Mine

After my husband died, I made changes that would still keep his presence in this space

By [Leida Snow](#) | December 16, 2025 | [Living](#)

The home office I shared with my husband Lou was pretty much as it was when he died over two years ago. His area of our partners' desks was neater but still had his big blotter and his favorite pen. The walls were still crowded with his certificates. His frazzled folder-by-date still trumpeted his reminders.

In my grief, it had all seemed right. And then one day, it didn't. I decided to turn this shared space into mine — without losing Lou.



"I placed his huge desk blotter in a closet and eliminated some of the many souvenir mugs he'd filled with pens, rulers and letter openers." | Credit: Getty

It turned out to be the small project that kept expanding. I did some research and found helpful sites like [Architectural Digest](#). Their tips piqued my imagination, but suggestions like one to "set up a lounge zone" made me laugh, given the room's proportions.

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Over the months, I've dealt with the [piles of papers](#) and folders on Lou's desk and on the floor — throwing out a lot and putting what I couldn't part with in the file cabinets. When he was living, the office mess was a constant irritant that I tried valiantly to triumph over with [Feng Shui](#). Now I'd give almost anything to have him back.

I [donated](#) my husband's expensive cameras and lenses. Then I placed his huge desk blotter in a closet and eliminated some of the many souvenir mugs he'd filled with pens, rulers and

letter openers.

Five File Cabinets

The office furniture was a challenge. The five hulking file cabinets weren't going anywhere, nor were the bursting bookshelves. But changing the locations of the three standing lamps made a huge difference. The room is brighter and more balanced.

Then on to his certificates. That'll be easy, I thought. Not so much. Every possible, available space on the walls was covered with recognition of some

achievement. Literally, every conceivable spot. I used to tease Lou, unhappy at how crowded our office felt. Yet I found room to add a couple of proclamations that came when he died, wanting desperately to hold onto him through the various congratulations and words of praise from elected officials.

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Each framed certificate was hung by a nail and some sections of the walls were smudged once the frames came down. Removing the nails left holes. The holes had to be patched. It became clear I'd have to paint.

Imagine painting some place when you aren't taking down the shelves and the hundreds of books. When you aren't moving the file cabinets or the partners' desks or the shelf thing that

holds the printer.

Finally, the ridiculous faux paint job seemed finished. The painter had been so careful working around the immovable stuff. Only now the ceiling looked dirty and needed several coats. My small project mushroomed into something BIG. But fresh paint and clear walls made the room open and inviting.

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I wanted to make the office mine, but given the space-grabbing furniture, there was a limit to what I could actually do. Remove one of the desks? Take out one or two of the file cabinets? It would definitely make sense to make those changes.

On the other hand, why not keep the second desk so I could spread out when I'm working on a project? Why give up the storage luxury of the file cabinets? Now that I've cleared out some of the files, I've been able to stash many of the certificates in one of them.

My Decluttering Trick

Here's a *trick* I've learned about decluttering. Lou was a historian, and he saved massive records. It would take many days, if not months, to go through all of them. What I do from time to time is open one of the file drawers and reach for something. Then, if I have a question about whether I should save, donate or chuck the material, I simply return it to the drawer and choose another. If I'm ready to part with that, I head for the trash basket.



Leida Snow's updated office | Credit: Leida Snow

That's the whole *trick*. From time to time, I pick something I can deal with, either from my or Lou's files, and I never let myself consider attacking everything. I sometimes even set a timer, for 30 or 60 minutes, and accomplish what's possible in that time.

Almost all of Lou's certificates are now out of view. I placed one of them in a small hallway where I see it every day. It was from [Jerry Nadler](#), our Member of Congress. The Congressman spotlighted Lou's advocacy of the Second Avenue subway, over decades. In his entry to the Congressional Record, which he read at Lou's memorial, Nadler wrote of Lou's passion for public spaces and the key roles he played in the East Midtown Greenway and Sutton Place Park. He emphasized that he considered Lou a friend. I treasure this recognition of my husband's legacy.

Removing the certificates from our office was important, but I wanted Lou to be with me as I work there. I'm so proud of the photograph he took that graces the [Ted Weiss Federal Building](#), named for the late Congressman. It was Weiss' favorite photo and he used it on all his literature. On one of the walls of *my* office, I've hung two of Lou's prints. One is a best-loved image of the Brooklyn Bridge. He signed it: "To Leida — With all my love, Lou."

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The other is a snow scene that meant a great deal to him. As a former theater critic, I'm pleased that on the facing wall, I have two Broadway show window cards, each signed by the artist.

I've also displayed some snapshots of Lou us as well as a small one of two swans. I teased him the day he took the picture, wondering why he spent time looking for the perfect shot of some random birds. Swans typically choose their partners for life, though they do sometimes find a new mate if theirs dies. Lou was sending me a

message.

A friend reminds me that as we process our grief, our relationship with the one we've lost changes. What is left are the memories and the love.

When I enter the office now, the word that comes to mind is *serenity*. Our shared space always felt crowded and messy. It wasn't only the papers and folders strewn on the floor. So much of it was the dozens of multi-sized frames on every wall. Removing the certificates allowed the room — and me — to breathe. I can be comfortable here. I can work here.

The office is magically different now, though still a work in progress. It has the same lamps and the same furniture, yet it has somehow transformed. With the changes I've made, Lou is still with me, but the office isn't shared space anymore. It is mine.

Leida Snow is an award-winning journalist and communications coach. Follow her @LeidaSnow [Read More](#)

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