

# habitat

Exploring the places where architects work > lee CALISTI architecture + design



**In a prime example** of practicing what he preaches, Lee Calisti, AIA, works out of an office that is part of the house he recently designed from scratch. Not only does this help to give clients a hands-on example of his portfolio, but also allows him to be a hands-on husband and father. *Columns* spoke with him about what it is like working from home.

#### What is the office coffee policy?

It's just me; I have to get it myself. Of course, I don't get into trouble for eating someone else's lunch out of the refrigerator.

#### How long have you been in this space?

We moved in officially at the end of August 2007, although I operated my business in here from the beginning of July 2007, putting up with the construction noise in the background.

#### Who designed the office/space?

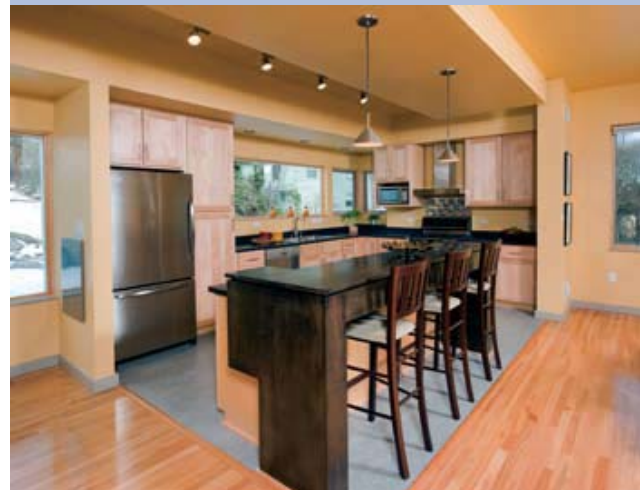
I did, but my wife had a major influence.

#### Would you say the philosophy of the firm is expressed through the design? How?

Yes. It is simple, modern, and green. However, the intention was built around the pursuit of adhering to a tight budget that the average homeowner, seeking to build a new house, could afford.

#### Why was this location/neighborhood chosen as home base for the firm?

It was not our original choice, but through a series of unusual circumstances, we were fortunate enough to find this lot. The site was an undeveloped lot in a 1960's city neighborhood. Since the infrastructure was already in place, no virgin land was disturbed. Also the proximity to the downtown area makes it easy for us to walk or ride a bicycle if desired. The "completion" of the street



Photos by Ron Lutz II, except kitchen photo by Craig Thompson

**FIRM:** lee CALISTI architecture + design

**SIZE:** A 2217 sf house of which 242 sf is given over to the office and related functions

**LOCATION:** City of Greensburg, PA

made it attractive to the neighbors who spent almost 40 years prior looking at an empty lot.

#### Did you do anything special to meet sustainable and accessibility standards?

From choosing a building site to selecting materials for use in the home, sustainability without excessive expense was the goal. The house serves as a "live/work" space which, beyond other benefits, eliminated the long commute of one person in the household. Through the use of a local contractor and many local materials, less energy was required to build it than the typical builder houses popular in the area. Solar orientation was also very important in the design process. Additionally, energy saving choices included spray foam insulation, low E windows, an extra high efficiency HVAC system and water heater, low or no VOC paint, and a number of recycled materials for flooring.

#### What/where is the client base? What are client reactions to the space?

My work currently is in Westmoreland, Allegheny, and Fayette Counties. Almost every one of my clients has been in my office. One major impact is having to clean up the house consistently in case I want to show a client around. The overall reactions are very positive. It is so much easier to show

someone a detail or space in person than to draw or model it. They get it right away.

#### What amenities are unique to the office?

No commute, especially late at night. I am walking or biking distance to downtown Greensburg. I have been able to spend considerably more time with my son and wife. I have never missed school functions that happen during the day. Sometimes I am the only dad at field trips and school parties. It's a blessing that I am very aware of daily.

#### How has the work environment influenced the way you work?

It is essential to be disciplined since there are more distractions. I am not sure I have mastered that, but at least I am aware that it exists.

In designing one's own house and office you become aware of the accountability of design decisions in a way that could never happen otherwise. This house is an ongoing lab for ideas and experiments in construction. Moreover, I can truly sympathize with my clients when they have to make decisions based on cost. This awareness is not limited to residential architecture, but to all architectural work. It goes back to that simple question that clients would ask, "would you do this on your house?" I can answer that much better now. **C**

