



Illustration by Romain Lenancker
CA: What's your favourite piece of graphic design?

RL: I like the work of Jean Paul Goude, especially his work for the Galeries Lafayette Paris. The images are

simple, beautiful and of a very particular style; somewhere between scenography, fashion, photography and graphic design.
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How to rent a studio

Getting your own studio is a tempting prospect. There's just the small matter of finding the right space at the right price

From lone freelancers tired of the cat's company to collectives who want to feel, well, collective, there may come a point when a home office won't do. If you're a freelancer, a creative incubator can be a good step up – think serviced offices with business advisors thrown in. "I get time with like-minded people, access to business help and a good canteen," says web developer Adam Robertson (www.robeam.com), who works from Bristol incubator Spike Design. "It's great having someone to ask about contracts and invoicing."

Illustrator Jenny Nightingale (www.jennynightingale.co.uk) is based at Krowji, a creative cluster in Redruth, Cornwall. "I can bounce ideas off other creatives, although working alongside others isn't great if your art forms are incompatible, such as a messy painter beside a designer with expensive equipment," she says. You need to cultivate realistic expectations, as Sam Menter of Pixel Thread (www.pixelthread.co.uk), another Spike Design resident, explains: "I thought I'd meet loads of people needing help, but everyone's trying to build up work themselves." His advice? "Ask if there's a social aspect – do people get to know each other?"

For more autonomy, consider a shared studio like the one Cassie Leedham, graphic designer and co-owner of Good Show Studio (www.goodshowstudio.com), is setting up in Leamington Spa. "It's important to have your own space so you can leave it in a mess without upsetting anyone – and consider getting a cleaner, as cleaning duties may cause tension," says Leedham. "Dull as it sounds, the key to a harmonious workplace is having rules so everyone has the same expectations."

It can be hard to find the right space and even harder to secure it. "It's not unusual to take six to 12 months to find the right premises," says Business Link advisor Chris Simpson (www.businesslink.gov.uk). "It's not worth signing in a hurry, so don't feel pressurised. You want favourable get-out clauses, such as a review after one or two years, and a written agreement about what your deposit covers and when you'll get it back." Rob O'Connor, founder and creative director of London-based

Stylorouge (www.stylorouge.co.uk), agrees: "Landlords don't want to pay to change a contract, but if you're not happy, say so."

What with rent bonds, business rates and solicitors' fees, plus buying furniture and taking out public liability insurance, set-up costs can run into thousands, but don't be tempted to skip getting legal advice. "It's worth paying a solicitor to check the lease rather than taking the owner's word," says Chris Simpson. You should also make a change-of-use application to your local authority, because you may need authority approval before you can use the building the way you want. "People often forget this, but you could be fined, thrown out or both," he says.

Ask to see bills too. When Traffic Design Consultants (www.traffic-design.co.uk) moved offices, they negotiated an excellent rent. "Then we got our quarterly bills for communal charges," says creative director Scott Witham. "They were extortionate. We did see an example beforehand, but we should have asked for a year's worth."

Rob O'Connor recommends staking out the local area. "Ask about the landlord. Talk to current or previous tenants," he suggests. "Look for a generous space, good ventilation and good light. If they say you can make alterations, get permission in writing and make sure local authorities approve any plans."

Above all, make sure that the space is somewhere you're going to feel inspired. Stylorouge has a playground area where people can get dirty and use paints, while Cassie Leedham is planning a display wall decorated with creative ideas and current projects. "We're aiming for it to be full of inspiration," she says. "I can't wait to get in there."





Studio options

01 Serviced offices or incubators

An inclusive fee for everything from web access to milk keeps things simple, and incubators nurture start-ups and provide business advice. If you want a serviced office, look for other creatives. "If most people leave at 5pm, it can be soul-destroying," says Leo Pitt of Function Design (www.function-design.co.uk). "Check the cost of leaving, too; ask what they charge to forward mail and calls."

02 Shared professional studios

Hiring a studio means more freedom and control, but of course the price is higher. So, for small businesses, sharing is a cost-effective way to rent a more independent workspace. Make sure there's a clear understanding between the people who are moving in, to avoid tensions or rivalry. You should also work out how you'll cover bills and expenses if someone leaves.

03 Larger professional rented spaces

Nothing beats the space and privacy of a standalone studio, but you'll need to make a long-term commitment. "If you're not prepared to stay for a few years, you probably shouldn't go in," says Rob O'Connor from Stylorouge. Ask what any communal charges cover and check whether the lease requires you to redecorate every few years – or to undo any refurbishments when you leave.