



The Perfect Place to Write

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I USED TO THINK the perfect place to write would be a booklined study, with an old-fashioned typewriter on an antique leather-topped desk. There would be an armchair in the corner where I'd read during breaks from writing, and a low table on which to spread out my manuscript; and in fact my study in the attic is, more or less, my dream study. Except that instead of a typewriter, I have a more practical desktop computer with three screens, which would look a bit silly on an antique, leather-topped desk. The room *is* booklined, though. Well, one wall anyway. There's no armchair, but there is a small sofa, so when I get stuck on a plot point or when I just have no idea what happens next, I can take three steps away from my desk, curl up on the sofa and have a little nap. Also, given that my study is right at the top of the house, I can – theoretically – shut myself away from domestic distraction.

But after ten years as a novelist, I find the 'perfect' surroundings are not necessarily as conducive to writing as I thought. After all, writers like books, so working in a booklined study means there's always the temptation to take a break from writing in favour of reading. My three-screen computer set-up, while it's incredibly useful to have screens for research as well as the one for my manuscript, also makes it ridiculously easy to check Facebook and Twitter. And while being in the attic means I can't physically see the domestic chores that need doing, I know that they're there, downstairs, calling me.

So for me, the perfect place to write is not the booklined study, but



somewhere away from home, away from those distractions I seem unable to ignore. I'm at my most productive on writing retreats, where we're all far too self-conscious to spend too much time on our phones, and where working in the company of other writers seems to generate a sort of collective creative energy. But writing retreats are expensive, so the next best thing is my local coffee shop, where there are always others bashing away on laptops. If I go early, the staff are happy for me to spend the morning there with just one large coffee. I don't connect to Wifi and I switch off mobile data, and soon, the gentle hum of conversation, the background music and the hiss of the coffee machine combine to help create the 'bubble' I need to be in if I'm going to write productively. Being able to get myself into that bubble or 'zone' is the best thing about coffee shop-writing, because no matter how stuck I've been previously, within ten minutes of starting work, I'll be completely absorbed in the world of my novel.

So while the 'perfect' place to write might be on a beach in the Bahamas with a gin and tonic in one hand, I'll settle for my local coffee shop.