



# Home Work

## Personal work space makes the difference between creative confusion and artistic productivity

BY KIMBEL J. WESTERSON

**T**hink of an artist's studio and you may envision a large room with lots of light. A plein-air artist may consider a sketch pad, India ink and the places their car will take them to be all that's needed to work. Clothing designers might be surrounded with yards and yards of fabric, skinny mannequins and skinnier models. But some artists want the studio itself to be a source of inspiration.

Virginia Woolf said that a writer needed a room of one's own, while author Annie Dillard believed that a writer's work space should be spare, "...a room with no view so imagination can meet memory in the dark."

But the fact is, if you talk to 50 different artists about their studios and work areas, you'll get 50 different ideas of how that space should look, function and feel. Some need a protective cocoon, while others insist on plenty of breathing space. Obviously, a writer will need different conditions than a painter. Regardless of the artist's discipline or space requirements, each studio is as much a creation of the creator as any work of art, and a reflection of the personality which inhabits the space.

Peek with us into the spaces of inspiration for painter Judith Marshall, clothing designer Ashley Hackshaw and writer DeAnn Lubell. Each woman has crafted a unique place that exhibits organization, comfort and, always, character.

## STUDIO WITH A VIEW

Not everybody gets their wish list when it comes to designing creative space, but mixed media artist Judith Marshall knew her must-haves when Palm Desert architect Dave Prest and she planned out the studio in her Bighorn Golf Club home.

"It absolutely had to have great paper storage because of the collage I do," Marshall says. "I absolutely had to have great light. It also had to be very neutral. The walls are white, cupboards are silver—nothing competes with what I'm painting."

Trained as an interior designer, Marshall left the design business in 1980 in order to paint. "I wanted the ability to control my own work, just the freedom to create exactly what I want to create without time restrictions—a chance to be more personally creative."

Marshall points out what she likes best about the space: It's open, has great light, built-ins to hold paper and enough room for her press plus two easels. It also has room for quirkier objects such as a black wig stand sporting mouse ears and a full-size skeleton named Hermoine. All that, and she has a small office area, as well.

"I purposely kept the desk area small so that it wasn't going to become the office. Sometimes I now kick myself because there's really just room for my laptop and stuff piles up. But I did that on purpose so I go there to really work."

Books and writing also inspire Marshall, and her small office area contains a couch and floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. She includes the written word in her art, sometimes covering her entire canvas surface with writing as a sort of substrate over which she starts layering other materials.

Initially, Marshall wanted to make her space accessible only from the outside of the house. "I wanted to be able to go to my studio, and I thought it wasn't important to get there from the inside of the house," she says.

**Judith Marshall's studio, opposite, is open, has great light and built-in flat files to hold paper. There's also enough room, below, for her press plus two easels.**

"If you have a studio in your home, it needs to be a space that you feel you can go to. It's wonderful to be able to go to that space, that it's not accessible to everybody."

PHOTOS: OPPOSITE AND BELOW: CHARLEY AKERS/ASHLEY HACKSHAW; TALI SONG ROTH



Ashley Hackshaw and daughter Sienna get creative in their home studio.

## A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

Ashley Hackshaw answers the door wearing one of her own creations, a knit tank dress constructed in asymmetrical chunks of several different patterns. She walks from her painting studio area, set up in a spare bedroom, out past a central living area and points into the butler's pantry behind the dining room. "This is actually my shipping area. When I say I've taken over the whole house, I've like, taken over the whole house."

Hackshaw is the creative engine of Lil Blue Boo designs, named for her daughter Sienna's nickname, "Boo." She designs one-of-a-kind little boys' and girls' clothing from recycled knits—everything made from old T-shirts she buys in bulk at thrift stores, as well as bargain close-out fabrics. "All my friends know to never give anything away until they ask me," Hackshaw says. "I will get trash bags left on my doorstep of old T-shirts, old golf shirts that their husbands don't wear anymore."

Her sewing studio is located in a casita with a separate entrance, and is full of shelves and bins that are clearly labeled. "I'm a pack rat. But I'm an OCD pack rat. Everything has to have its place, has to be very orderly."

The business acumen obvious on Hackshaw's blog, [lilblueboo.blogspot.com](http://lilblueboo.blogspot.com), (Dharma Trading Company is her sponsor) is evidence of a very analytical as well as creative mind.

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Ashley Hackshaw and a few of her clothing designs.

She majored in mathematics at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, where she met her husband Brett. Both went into investment banking.

Feeling burned out from 100-hour weeks of leveraged finance structuring and underwriting financing for oil companies for six years (during which she earned an MBA), Hackshaw took a three-month leave of absence and never went back. "It was kind of one of those 'ah-ha!' moments where you're like, 'We have no life because we work 24/7 and do we want to have kids? Do we want to have a life? Do we ever

want to see each other?'" When the couple decided to relocate to Palm Desert, the process took only 30 days.

Business is so good that Hackshaw's items sell out immediately when posted online. Many friends have tried to persuade her to expand, but she resists. "I'm kind of at a point where the demand is there, but I can't meet the demand. Do I go any bigger? I kind of like having things like this where there's not any overhead, I have it all in my control."

PHOTOS THIS PAGE: TAIJU SONG ROTH



Ashley's craft studio and a sewing area reflect her penchant for organization and accessibility.



## Streamlining Your Own Workspace

\* **Go Mobile.** Rolling carts are helpful, especially for artists who move between work areas.

\* **Think 'Double Duty.'** Artist Judith Marshall designed a couch that's 78 inches long by 36 inches deep, with a top that flips over to become a work surface 38 inches high. It has flat files underneath the deck for drawings and paper. The cushions are covered in the same canvas she paints on, and it is on industrial casters so it is easy to move in the studio.

\* **Do it yourself.** While built-in cabinetry is beautiful, it is easy to create functional workspace from simple materials. Ashley Hackshaw and her husband created a sewing table from a broad countertop and industrial brackets attached to the wall.

\* **Put it away.** DeAnn Lubell says that she finds it hard to function when things around her are not stored properly. Invest in magazine holders, binders, color-coded file folders—whatever it takes to organize and get rid of clutter. Ashley Hackshaw hangs items from walls and from under shelves to keep clutter at bay.



\* **Keep 'em separated.** Drawer dividers are a must, whether you're storing pens and paperclips or paintbrushes and pastels.

\* **Within reach and view.** Keep your most frequently used items within easy reach, and frequently called numbers on a large bulletin board above your desk. Ashley Hackshaw keeps her most used items out in the open so precious creative time isn't wasted looking for them.



\* **Shelve it.** Marshall houses books and art magazines; Hackshaw stacks fabrics and books; Lubell accommodates personal photos, decorative items and books on bookshelves.

\* **Customize.** Collect storage items that are unique to what you do. Ashley Hackshaw uses cigar boxes to store various sewing materials and notions, while Judith Marshall needs flat files for paper. DeAnn Lubell finds three-ring binders invaluable.

\* **Stick a label on it.** No matter what you use for storage, making a proper label for it helps you locate it at a glance.

\* **Take it personally.** Just because you're in a work space doesn't mean that it has to be sterile. Even the smallest space has room for a personal touch such as a photograph of loved ones or an inspirational piece of artwork.

PHOTOS: TOP, TAIJU SONG ROTH; BOTTOM, CHARLEY AKERS



An eclectic mix of sentimental favorites creates positive energy and inspiration for DeAnn Lubell.

## A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

Writer DeAnn Lubell knew from a young age what she wanted to be when she grew up. “When I was 10 years old, I made my friends play ‘Foreign Correspondent’ with me.” When she was 18, she circumvented writing for the college newspaper at Western State College of Colorado in Gunnison, instead securing a job as a reporter for the city newspaper. From there, she’s only picked up speed.

Her home office is filled with objects that are symbolic of places and persons that are dear to her: Bright, close-up photographs of flowers (most of which she shot herself), images of family and friends, knickknacks and antiques, a baseball signed by Tommy Lasorda, an antique clock, a chess set that her grandfather carved—each has a story behind it. Favorite magazine articles that she penned dating back to the 1980s, and featuring stars such as Dinah Shore and Ann-Margret, hang framed on the walls. Her pride and delight in the room is obvious. “When I look around, it brings back good memories,” Lubell says. “No matter where I look, there’s something that will bring to mind a good, positive thought. Good energy.”

Lubell and her husband Joe



have lived in several different states, but no matter where she’s lived, her writing space has been important. “I’ve always set up little places wherever I’ve lived so the work environment for my writing, no matter what, would be conducive to making me happy, to making me relaxed as much as possible.”

Her most recent accomplishment is the completion of the historical novel, “The Last Moon,” which is an account of the deadly 1902 eruption of Mt. Pelée on the island of Martinique. Although she was inspired to write about the incident when she was in college, Lubell didn’t get the opportunity to complete research and visit the island until years later. And it still took a few more years for her to complete the novel. But her space was a constant anchor for her creativity.

“I did that (writing) in this room. It was here. It was quiet. It was relaxing. I felt inspired by everything that I have around me and could fully concentrate in a wonderful environment.”

Whether you build a studio from the ground up, take over a third of the house or just repurpose Junior’s now-vacant bedroom, perhaps it’s time to create your own inspiring workplace. Just think of the creative energy you’ll be ready to unleash!

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PHOTO: CHARLEY AKERS