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WHEN HEADQUARTERS MEETS LIVING QUARTERS

Workspaces That Inspire

by Iyna Bort Caruso

As more people work from home, fewer of them are content to commandeer a spare bedroom for a makeshift office or carve out an alcove for a studio. Instead, they're building wings, designing free-standing workshops and customizing floor plans to create live-work environments that are as architecturally arresting as they are inspiring.

Arthur Carter is one individual who has successfully balanced life and work in extraordinary surroundings. The former investment banker, founder of The New York Observer and sculptor built a 1,100-square-foot studio on his 1,500-acre Connecticut farm.

Carter, whose works have been exhibited in galleries in the U.S. and abroad, uses the studio to sketch and sculpt. He says he carefully weighed the merits of building a standalone structure against integrating the workspace into his existing home, which dates back some 350 years. Ultimately, however, "I didn't easily see how I could add a good amount of space without compromising the integrity of the home's architecture."

He collaborated with Mark Simon of Centerbrook Architects in Centerbrook, Conn., on the design of the studio, which draws on the property's 18th century roots. Simon says, "The common goal was to make a spacious studio fit in a delicate New England landscape with several old houses."

The studio is a barn-like saltbox with a lead-coated copper roof and vertical cedar board siding. The interior features a fireplace, kitchen and bathroom. For Carter, maximizing daylight was an important factor in the design. That was accomplished through a large arched window, facing north for even lighting.

The New Must-Have Space

According to a 2007-08 consumer preferences survey by the National Association of Home Builders, 50% of recent or potential home buyers find a home office desirable. And among properties of distinction, they are essential. In Toronto, Ontario, Claudia DiPaola of Sotheby's International Realty Canada says, "Ten years ago, an office was a plus. Today, for executives and professionals, it's just a must."

Broker-owner Vivian Bridaham of The Collection Sotheby's International Realty in Bozeman, Mont., has two homes on the market that boast astonishing home offices. Both residences are priced in the mid-\$4 million range. One home, built out of 200 tons of stone, has a 182-square-foot exterior glass cube office that looks out onto the Bridger Mountains. "The idea that you could conduct business all over the world from this gorgeous setting is incredible," Bridaham says.

The home office of another estate in Bridaham's portfolio has vaulted wrought-iron trusses, skylights, a large picture window and built-in cabinetry hand-constructed out of aged distillery wood.

"Most people coming here are in their 40s, 50s and 60s. They're still working and they want to be able to work out of their house. And do it in an amazing environment," says Bridaham. "This setting is their reward."

Blending Form and Function

For architects, the challenge is tailoring a workspace to the needs of the task and the comforts of the homeowner. Fernando Brave, founder of Brave/Architecture in Houston, Tex., was commissioned to design a 4,200-square foot building to house a photographic art gallery, working studio and private living quarters.

The test for Brave was to construct the building — known as the De Santos Gallery — with a clear separation between the gallery, studio and living space so the public sections could be leased to a tenant, if necessary. Brave segregated the function areas of the property both structurally and aesthetically. The first floor houses the gallery, the second floor a studio and the third is a loft-like sleeping area that opens onto a large terrace. The building is clad in two different materials. "The materials were chosen for simplicity of use and to express the two interlocking parts of the building. The private areas are expressed in galvanized metal while the public areas are in white cement stucco," he says.

Argentina-born Brave maintains a small office in Buenos Aires, as well, where he says live-work spaces are prevalent. "Artists, professionals, architecture firms, design firms, shops, little factories and all kinds of food services. It's common to see families living upstairs."

Adding Flexibility and Value

While the De Santos Gallery overlooks downtown Houston, the transformed workspace of Justine Wetherington in Gainesville, Fla., overlooks 11.5 acres of oaks, sago palms, blooming agave plants and yellow peanut flowers. Wetherington bought the property last year, smitten by both the landscape and the unconventional bermed home, earth covering its windowless walls up to the roof. "When you find the perfect house, it will tell you," she says.

Architect William Morgan, who also designed the Florida State Museum of Natural History, named it The Forest House for its lush setting when he built it in 1979. As part of the renovation of her house, Wetherington transformed a 2 1/2-car garage, connected to the home via a 30-foot breezeway, into a jewelry design and fabrication studio for her company, Enamelation. "I knew whatever house I was going to buy was going to have to have an extra chunk of space that I could turn into a workspace with elbow room and more in the way of aesthetics," she says.

The sloping garage floor was leveled off with concrete. The garage door was replaced with 16 feet of windows. The ceiling was plastered, outlets were added and the floor was painted a dark green in keeping with the property's forest setting.

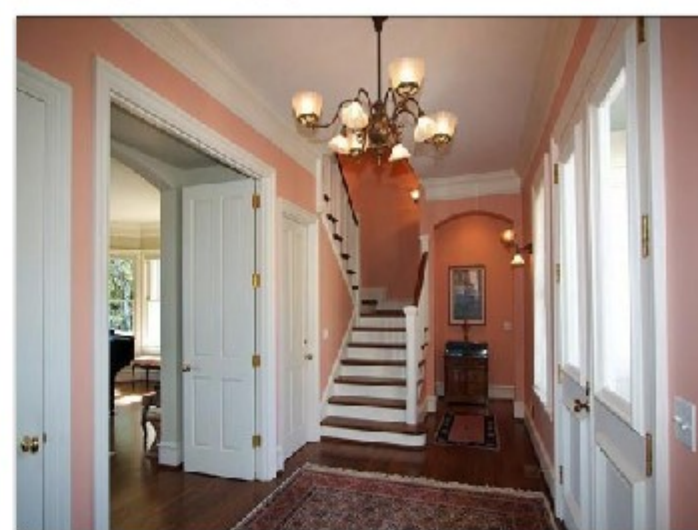
Although Wetherington has no plans to sell, enhancing her real estate investment was on her mind during the overhaul of the 625-square-foot space. "The space is not defined as a studio," she says. Empty it out, and it is flexispace that can be converted into a den, billiards room, woodworking shop or a home theater.

But for now, Wetherington has made it uniquely and joyfully her own. "It's so lovely that it does not feel like a work place. I stare out the window for a while. The ideas percolate through. Looking out there, it's so beautiful one would feel somewhat ashamed not working on coming up with something equally beautiful."

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