



John Salminen

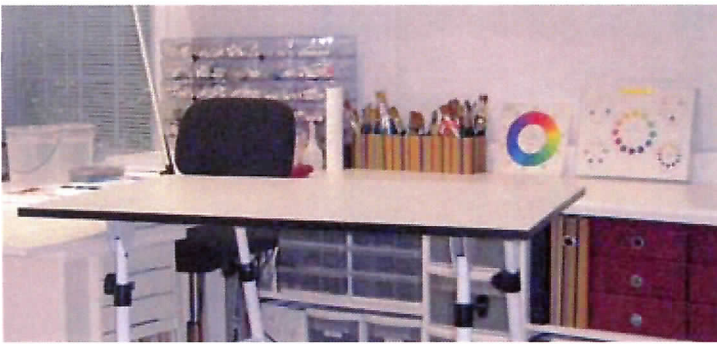
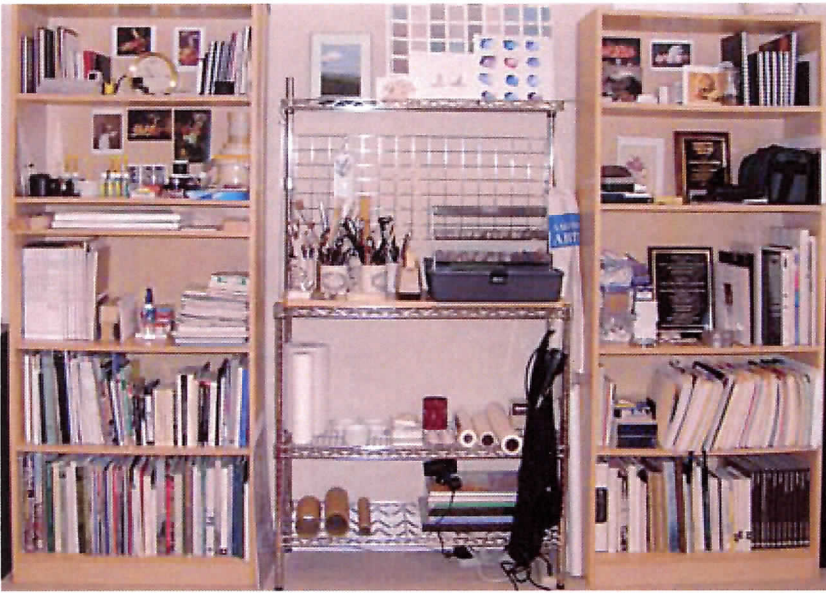
Inside

By Michelle Taute

the Artist's Studio

Take a behind-the-scenes tour of three popular painters' workspaces and learn how to set up a workable studio of your own.

When you think of your favorite painters, it's natural to fantasize about the idyllic studios in which they must work: A converted barn with perfect north light or a warehouse loft with exposed brick walls. But the truth is most artists are more likely to be painting on the kitchen table or in a spare bedroom than within the walls of a custom-built studio. Three artists told us how very different spaces work for them, and offered tips and ideas for making almost any space a great place to paint.



Donna Zagotta



Laurin McCracken

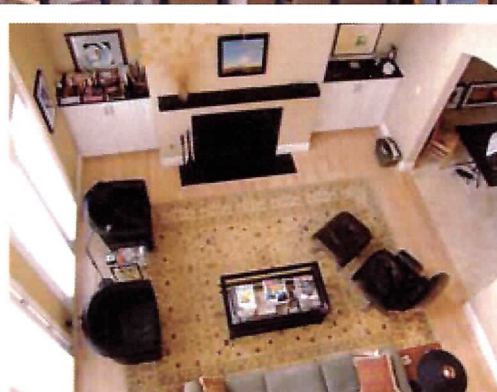


Laurin McCracken's second-floor studio space

Laurin McCracken | ORGANIZED PAINTING

When one of Laurin McCracken's workshop students stopped by to see his studio, she experienced a moment of shock when she reached the top of the stairs. "Oh my God, I couldn't paint here," she said. "It's too clean." But for McCracken, this Martha Stewart-esque level of organization is what makes his studio successful, and he gives credit for these neatnik tendencies to his grandmother, who always advocated, "A place for everything and everything in its place."

You can see this philosophy in action on the second floor of McCracken's Fort Worth, Texas, townhouse, where he turned a third bedroom



View from studio into living room below

into a workspace for creating his breathtakingly realistic watercolors. From behind the simple but sturdy drafting table, he can look out over the two-story vaulted living room and still have everything he needs to paint within arm's reach. "If I'm in the middle of a big, wet painting and all of a sudden I need something, I know right where it is," he says. "I can get it instantly."

To his right, a small kitchen island holds drafting supplies inside and a palette and array of brushes on top. Immediately behind McCracken, a baker's rack and two bookcases create homes for everything from pencils and tracing paper to reference books and masking fluid. He can simply reach back, grab what he needs and keep painting. An Oriental rug underfoot adds inspirational beauty and cushions McCracken's feet as he paints from his perch on a stool. A nearby closet keeps paper, finished paintings, paper towels, water containers and other supplies out of sight.

Think creatively about furniture. It doesn't have to be made for an artist in order to work in the studio. Laurin McCracken uses a small kitchen island as a taboret and stores additional supplies behind him on a baker's rack. Other ideas: TV stands, microwave carts, plastic storage drawers on wheels or small shelves.



The artist's work table and a nearby kitchen island that serves up supplies



Supply closet for extra materials

Detail-Oriented For one of his complex still life paintings, it's not unusual for Laurie McCracken to spend four to six hours on a drawing alone. "One of the great truths about painting realism is that the more detailed the drawing," he says, "the better the painting and the more realistic the appearance of the objects." After creating an initial drawing, he'll spend another few hours sketching it, using a large photo print (typically 13x17 inches) as his guide. "If you want to capture a particular sparkle in silver, for example, it may be in the drawing, or when you get to that spot in the painting, you'll probably mix it," he says.

Even the light in this space shines right where it should. A t-grid placed on the ceiling holds five halogen lights, with three aimed at McCracken's painting surface to reduce shadows. The fourth points toward his palette, so the colors he mixes look the same when they hit the paper's surface, and the final light illuminates a spot on the wall where he sometimes hangs paintings to evaluate them. There's also plenty of eastern light from the windows, but McCracken uses honeycomb blinds to filter out the harsh sunlight as needed.

All this thoughtful placement and storage means McCracken doesn't have to waste time searching for the right brush or a pair of scissors. But creating an environment that supports uninterrupted work time doesn't have to be expensive. McCracken purchased most of his assemble-it-yourself furniture from discount retailers and works out of a fairly average-sized spare bedroom. In this space, it's really the thought—and organization—that counts.



Plymouth Silver Set (watercolor on paper, 27x18)

Don't forget the water. Being near a water source makes it easier to get fresh, clean water for your containers, which McCracken says many of his workshop students don't do often enough. He also recommends using warm water.