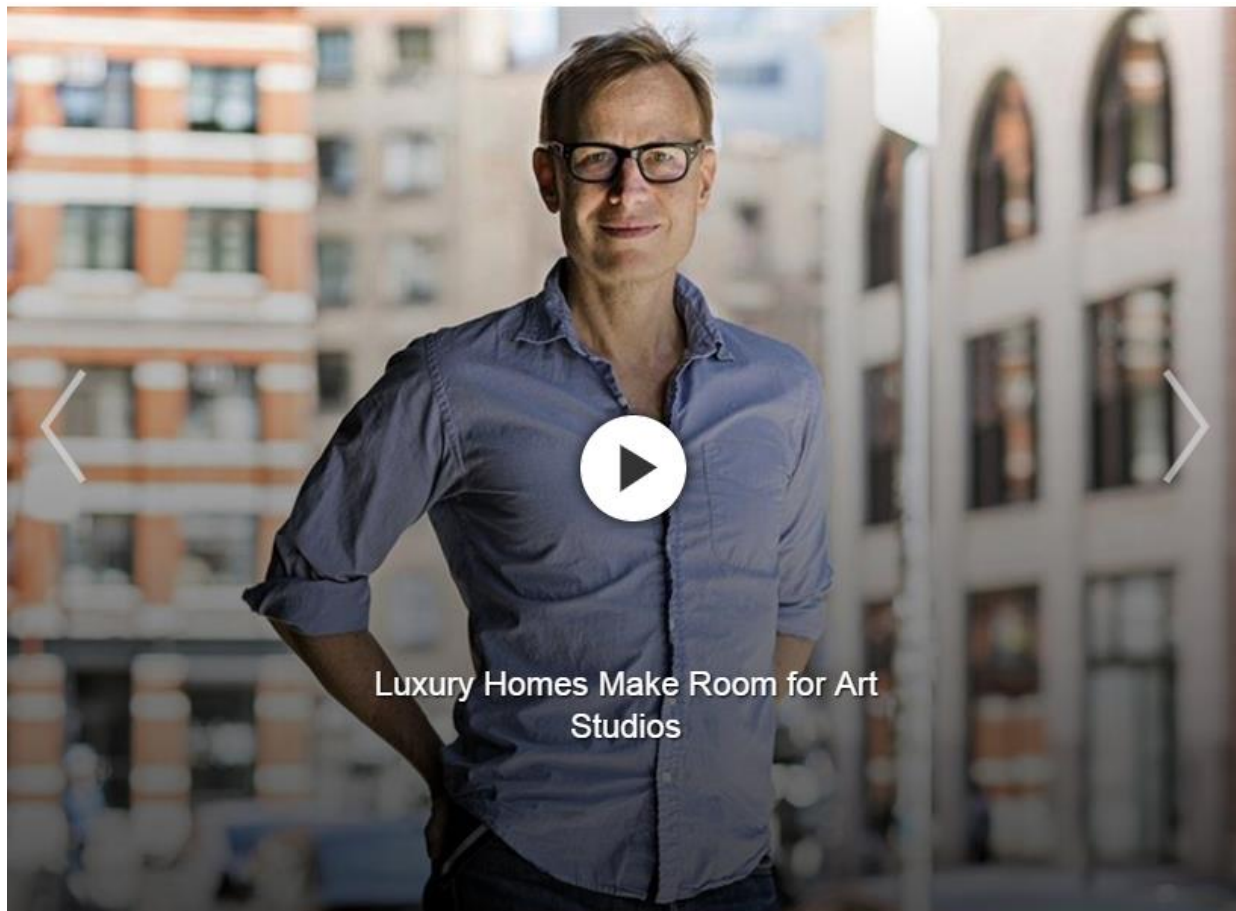


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The Iconoclastic Homes of Top Artists

Homes of painters and sculptors often boast high ceilings and lots of light. But selling a place with no living room can be a challenge at resale.



Luxury Homes Make Room for Art Studios

*Artists upend real estate norms to create ideal spaces for life and work, including areas for painting, drawing and sculpting.
Photo: Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal
WSJ VIDEO*

When New York painter and sculptor Will Cotton and his girlfriend, art researcher Rose Dergan, bought a 3,200-square-foot Tribeca loft in 2010, they spent about \$150,000 on renovations. They ripped out bedroom walls and tore off drywall to expose steel and wood ceiling beams. Then they devoted a chunk of the budget to installing a commercial grade vent fan on a chimney, to suck out fumes caused by oil paint, turpentine and varnishes.

“I wanted to empty it out and make it pretty much as it had been in the 19th century,” said Mr. Cotton, 52, whose work is in museums including the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. Today, the couple lives in one large, open space with various corners devoted to painting, art-supply storage, dining, and sleeping.

Artists as a group can have a salubrious impact on real-estate markets, pioneering gentrification and turning gritty urban landscapes into creative neighborhoods. But on an individual level, they often design their homes in direct opposition to what the rest of the real-estate market craves. Instead of giant kitchens and master bedrooms, they devote square footage to ample space for making art. Rather than high-end hardwood flooring, they favor practical surfaces like concrete that can be spattered with paint or shock-absorbing floors that provide back support while they sculpt for long hours. Many artists dedicate what might have been a cozy family living room to private galleries and event spaces.

Once a home has been modified by an artist, it can become more difficult to market. Even in Santa Fe, N.M., where approximately 20% of buyers have “artist studio” on their wish list, some professional studios are resale liabilities, said Chuck McKinley, sales manager for Santa Fe Properties. Mr. McKinley said the company tried—and failed—to sell a \$1.5 million property with a 2,200-square-foot main house and a 1,000-square-foot detached studio with 30 foot ceilings.

“Buyers couldn’t make it into a guesthouse because of the massive ceilings, which wouldn’t have been cozy,” Mr. McKinley said. “It was going to take an artist, and there are a lot of artists who don’t have that kind of money.” The property, which has been on and off the market for about two years, remains unsold, Mr. McKinley said.

Abstract painter Joe Goode said his roughly 2,000-square-foot studio behind his home in Mar Vista, a Westside Los Angeles neighborhood, is his ideal workspace. Mr. Goode, 80, is considered “the quintessential West Coast artist of the late 20th century,” said Michael Kohn, owner of an eponymous Los Angeles gallery where Mr. Goode shows his work.

Soaring 20-foot-high ceilings with numerous large windows pour natural light onto his work—“so you can really see it,” Mr. Goode said. On the ground floor, he has a workspace, where he splatters paint on the concrete floors and tables, and a gallery-like space where he receives guests and hosts events. Upstairs, there is an office for his studio manager and her assistant, and a mezzanine from which he can look down on paintings in progress—“so I can see how they’ll look when they’re dry,” Mr. Goode said.

Having his studio steps away from his home is useful because “if I get an idea at 11 o’clock at night, I can go work on it,” he said.

Mr. Goode’s perfect space came at a high personal cost. In 2005, he sensed something was wrong when his dog, an Australian Shepherd-Akita mix named Pollock, wouldn’t stop barking in the middle of the night. Mr. Goode and his wife got up to discover his previous

studio on fire. Mr. Goode lost 200 works of art and spent about \$250,000 to rebuild the studio in 2007.

The fire was caused when rags covered in linseed oil, used for oil painting, spontaneously combusted, Mr. Goode said. Because of the hazard, he switched to acrylic paint. He also distributes his work among various spaces today, so that he can never again lose everything in the event of a disaster, he said.

Mr. Goode's studio adds some value to the home, but not enough to cover the construction costs. Tami Pardee, founder of Halton Pardee + Partners, a Los Angeles brokerage, estimated the value of Mr. Goode's property at \$1.8 to \$1.9 million, saying the studio likely adds 5% to 7% to the value.

Mr. Cotton and Ms. Dergan's loft, which they purchased for \$2.14 million, according to public records, would likely sell today for roughly \$4.5 million to \$5 million, said Jim St. Andre, a Tribeca and downtown specialist at CORE. If it were made into a conventional home, with bedroom walls and top-of-the-line finishes that would appeal to the typical "financial guy" buyers in the area, it would sell closer to \$6.5 million, Mr. St. Andre said.

It is increasingly difficult to find studio space in some of the cities that have attracted artists for generations, including New York and San Francisco. Amid soaring real-estate values, artists also face competition from non-artists who have come to embrace loft living and industrial style—as long as it is renovated to provide traditional comforts.

"The conversion of industrial spaces to great residences has never been more popular," said Mr. St. Andre. In New York's Tribeca neighborhood, one building that for many years consisted mainly of commercial lofts used by artists, photographers and architects is now mostly condos; a penthouse is currently on the market for \$45 million, Mr. St. Andre said. The loss of workspace in cities around the country has given rise to a number of activist groups, such as the Artist Studio Affordability Project in New York, that protest real-estate developments that compete with artists' needs.

In San Francisco, Sotheby's International Realty agent Wendy Storch is marketing a \$4.5 million, 4,800-square-foot house in the Mission District that has primarily been used as a live/workspace for artists since the 1960s. To prepare it for sale, the current owners added a driveway, roof deck and garage door to the studio space and staged it with lounge furniture and motorcycles.

The buyer "could have classic cars, motorcycles or a fantastic rumpus room, but with a rustic, industrial feel," Ms. Storch suggested.

Colin and Kristine Poole, a married couple of sculptors in Santa Fe, dispensed with nearly every convention when renovating their 2,700-square foot house. They devoted 700 square feet to a work studio, where they regularly receive nude models, work on life-size clay figures, create molds, pour wax and assemble bronze sculpture. Mr. Poole, 52, also paints. Another 1,200-square-foot area of the house serves as a gallery space, where they

receive clients and host art-oriented events. Because they work seven days a week, often for 14 hours a day, they decided to forgo a living room. Instead, non-art space is limited to a small kitchen and bedroom.

Mr. Poole bought the house in 1997 for \$200,000 from a cousin who had inherited it from their grandmother Una Hanbury, also a well-known sculptor, Mr. Poole said. Ms. Poole, 47, moved in nine years ago and the couple spent more than \$200,000 renovating, doing most of the work themselves.

They prioritized features that would serve their work. They laid the studio with a floating hardwood floor, typically used for dance floors, so that standing on the surface for many hours a day wouldn't cause back pain. Four large skylights provide natural light; at night, track lighting fitted with full spectrum bulbs from Germany imitates day light, Mr. Poole said.

Living amid their output isn't stressful, the artists said; instead, Mr. Cotton, Mr. Goode and the Pooles said they don't want a clear line between life and art.

"If something is giving me a lot of trouble, I just turn it to face the wall," to get a break, said Mr. Cotton, who is known for his images of costumes and landscapes made of sweets. Still, it is surprisingly hard to escape his subject matter. Soon after moving in to his loft, he noticed a faint, hand-painted sign from the 19th century on the exterior of the building, reading "Almond Paste—H. Heide—Confectionery."

"How crazy is that? It turns out I live in a converted candy factory," Mr. Cotton said.