



A Room of Her Own

ROBERTS CREEK WRITER FINDS SANCTUARY FOR HER WORK

STORY AND PHOTOS BY HEATHER CONN

VIRGINIA WOOLF WAS RIGHT: Every female writer needs “a room of one’s own.” But a stand-alone writer’s studio is even better. Especially for a professional scribe who lives in a 25.5-square-metre (900-sq. ft.) house, whose spouse becomes a hooligan during televised soccer games.

We built my cedar-shingled studio in the corner of our Roberts Creek property, about five metres from the house, in the summer of 2014. Before that, I worked at an old desk wedged into a 1.4 metre deep corner of our open-concept main room. The back of my office chair butted up against the side of the fridge door. Every time my hubby Frank, foodie and chef extraordinaire, opened it, I usually had to move or get up.

The deciding factor was having no office door. When I’m immersed in writing, especially on deadline, I can’t stand interruptions.

Now I’m blessed with a beautiful cedar door, a knocker, the sanctity of silence, a 15.5-square-metre (12 x 14-foot) office of my own, and a homemade sign that reads “Do Not Disturb.” Ahhhhhhhhhh.

Dragonfly Den, my cherished work sanctuary, is named for my personal symbol of divine wisdom. This inviting retreat, designed by Frank and builder Ian Ridgway, a friend and set carpenter, contains a whimsical array of dragonfly knick-knacks.

Delightfully, my suggestion of a small, simple, covered verandah for the studio morphed into a 4.5-square metre semi-enclosed lounge area outside the office. Besides some dragonfly décor, it features a saltillo terracotta tile floor and recessed tile shelves. I now call this “the blue room,” perfect for tea in morning sun.

Ian poured his love of wood into the whole project. He added character touches like a driftwood log from Roberts Creek Beach and large, chamfered cedar brackets. “Such decorative touches are *de rigueur*,” he says.

Frank and I recycled as much as possible, from the tongue-and-groove fir floor and rolltop desk to the office’s door and windows. ReStore in Sechelt is an excellent option to find quality used products or discarded items never used. ▶



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Writer Heather Conn in her studio, Dragonfly Den.

Inside my studio, clients can unwind in an antique rocker, a family heirloom, or join me at a circular table once owned by Sir John A. Macdonald, a relative on my mother's side. I've filled the room with treasures culled from family and travels: an old

upright globe that fascinated me as a child, fossils and shells, a Buddha head, favourite photos and drawings of loved ones.

I've gathered works by favoured local artists: Peter Sugars' lovely small wooden boxes, a portrait of me by Mudito Drope, paintings by Junco Jan and Rose Ann Janzen, a wooden collage figure by Gigi Hoeller, a hand-painted clay one by Dorie Waters and more.

And this wouldn't be a Creek building without a few quirky (some might say "eccentric") additions: a time capsule of sentimental items buried above a cement footing, and an exterior plaque of gratitude to Frank, Ian and others who worked on the structure.

Ian says he felt inspired by something he once read about Sufi architecture: a builder with a loving heart, deep gratitude and appreciation can add these elements to quality workmanship, combining certain dimensions and spaces, and have people cry or feel overcome with emotion when they enter the structure.

"It [the building] is beloved from start to finish," he says. As the plaque says: "The floor rests on a foundation of love."

ENJOY REFURBISHED FUN

Why not surround yourself with nature symbols that resonate with you? I loved finding dragonfly imagery for my office, from an Etsy pillow and stained glass to a playful floor mat and wall clock.

To transform a home office, try reinventing old furniture in imaginative ways: Revive an old, scratched filing cabinet with sanding and spray paint. Add themed magnets and small framed photos and you've got a tiny art installation. Find an old roll-top desk, sand, and re-stain it. Replace stodgy drawer pulls with new or used ones. If the back of your desk is exposed, cover it with paint, collage or wallpaper. Turn it into a mini art gallery with framed art or photos. ●