

Bunny Williams renovated an A-frame home on her property in Falls Village, Connecticut, into her personal creative studio. She found the long table at RT Facts in the nearby town of Kent. "It came out of a library and still has holes where the lamps were," she notes. The Aeron chair is from Herman Miller, the woven bamboo bench is from Pergola, and the magnolia branches are from the designer's garden.

PERSONAL SPACE

With 22 bucolic acres, Bunny Williams was only missing one thing at her legendary Connecticut retreat: an inspiring work studio where she could be her fiercely creative self. No longer.

AS TOLD TO INGRID ABRAMOVITCH · PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARTER BERG



A FEW YEARS AGO, MY HUSBAND, John Rosselli, and I bought some land next to our property in Connecticut and built a new swimming pool and a poolhouse. Unfortunately, whenever I spent time there, I would hear the neighbor's dog barking. That got our dogs to start barking, too—it drove me crazy. I couldn't see the house next door, which was blocked by a thicket of trees and overgrown shrubs. One day I got a letter from its owner, who said she was moving to Florida, and would I be interested in buying the house?

Would I? At 73, I've enjoyed a very fortunate career. I've designed many homes for others, I have a wonderful office in Manhattan, and here in the country, John and I have slowly amassed a property with a 19th-century manor house, a barn, and several gardens. But one thing I've never had was a creative space of my own. I've always dreamed of having an art and writing studio where I could retreat to work without interruption—and without having to clean up after myself, like I do whenever I spread out in our dining room or library.

When I heard from our neighbor, I immediately called my

friend, a real estate agent, to come with me to see the house. It was an A-frame with four small bedrooms and a wooden deck. To be honest, it was quite homely. No matter. My friend pressed me, "Are you sure?" It needed a gut renovation. What convinced me was that extraordinary vista. Our main house was built near the road and has no views. This house was built in the 1980s on top of a granite hill. It has sweeping sight lines that overlook the town of Falls Village, our entire property, and the nearby hills. I was enchanted.

My idea was to move the entrance to the lower level and turn the upper story into a single grand room. The arrangement is like an Italian palazzo, where one ascends from a modest entry to the soaring upper floor known as the "piano nobile," or noble

ABOVE: In a first-floor alcove, a linen sofa from Williams's husband is topped with an antique French silk quilt, and the French chair and English oak tavern table are both from the 19th century; Williams massed a group of 19th-century needlework pieces ("I hung them closely together to create a single graphic image, which looks more contemporary," she says). **OPPOSITE:** Upstairs, the bookshelves are custom; a Japanese vase rests on a zinc-topped table from RT Facts.



floor. I thought the renovation would be easy, but it turned out the entire house required an overhaul. It was reframed and replumbed. Everything needed fixing.

To create a proper entrance hall, we had to jackhammer a sizable granite boulder out of existence. The foyer has a low ceiling and a stone floor. There are adjacent rooms, including one in which I have a home gym. Then you ascend a staircase with a glass railing up to the top level. It's the big reveal: a tall-ceilinged room with a glass wall overlooking the magnificent view at one end and a fireplace and seating area at the other end.

In designing my studio, I wanted a modern look, in part to contrast with our main house, but also because it felt more in keeping with the contemporary architecture. I used materials with an industrial sensibility. The walls are plaster, the windows have metal frames, and the polished-concrete floor is heated. Since the space was never intended to be a single soaring room, we had to reframe the ceiling so it would not collapse; instead of traditional beams, I chose stainless steel cables. The north side of the room is lined with bookcases. This is my library, which is very dear to me. One side holds design and architecture books, and the other my collection of gardening tomes.

I love that I can leave the room in complete chaos. If I am painting a picture or doing a collage or a decoupage, I can make a big mess and just walk away until I return the next day. At the moment, I'm working on my new book. It's about how style, quality, and great design are perennial. I'm trying to get people to realize they cannot do everything online.

I don't invite people to my studio when I'm working. Still, people do drop in. Everybody loves this space. They all say, "This is just what I want." I didn't put in a kitchen, but I did install a refrigerator drawer and a freezer drawer. There is ice for cocktails and, always, a can of Virginia peanuts on hand. In the late afternoon, I'll have friends over for a glass of wine.

To be creative, I think you need to be surrounded by the things that you love. Here, I have everything I need: paper, pencils, art, watercolors, books, fabric swatches, and skeins of every hue. I have a great music system; Schubert and baroque music are among my favorites. Here, I have the time to listen to an entire opera. Last weekend, I put on *Der Rosenkavalier*.

This studio is my laboratory—a magical, ethereal place filled with light and with that essential connection to nature. On a beautiful day, when the clouds are moving and forming, I sit here and stare and think, Maybe I should put up a window shade, because I can't stop looking. This studio feels like the beginning of a romance. ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The drafting table and cart are vintage; the drawers of the printing cabinet originally held metal type and are now used to store drawings and paper. Custom pine pedestals display a ceramic eggplant sculpture that was purchased at Stair Auctioneers & Appraisers in Hudson, New York, and an agave in a terra-cotta pot; the jar on the floor is Japanese. A path through the woodland garden leads to the studio house, which has a new wood-shingle roof and clapboard siding painted in Cabot's Sycamore stain; the granite steps are framed by kousa dogwood. An antique Chinese table from John Rosselli Antiques is topped with a folk-art pelican and dried gourds, and the lamp is by Bunny Williams Home; the 18th-century Italian herbarium is from Michael Trapp. For details, see Resources.

