

Focus

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Unique Live/Work Spaces



ATA Chicago

Unique, Live/Work Spaces



The studio in the Baker/Kent residence has a large bookcase to hold the couple's huge collection of architectural magazines.

By Mary Beth Klatt

It's becoming more common to construct residences with home offices as more Americans start their own businesses. AIA Chicago members aren't any different: more than a few have designed their own home studios. What's more, some have created unique live/work spaces for clients here in Chicago, elsewhere in the country — even in Mexico.

Catherine Baker, AIA has lived in Bucktown for the past 10 years in a former candy store attached to a 1894 house, a typical set up in that neighborhood. "It was a real disaster," she recalls. The studio was dark and foreboding, its original windows covered with wood and filled with debris. She and her architect husband, Timothy Kent, AIA decided in 2003 to turn the buildings into their dream home.

They transformed the storefront into a home office/studio with a kitchenette and bathroom, making this area a handy second bedroom when guests visit. First, they ripped off the storefront façade which had been altered significantly in the 1960s with a faux stone veneer. They rebuilt the front with stucco and added a new window and hallway linking the studio and the house. Inside the studio they designed a built-in bookcase. Within the house, they designed a combined living/dining room and a kitchen on the first floor with an upstairs bedroom and a TV room. The couple built out the attic and added skylights. Since they no longer have an attic, Baker and Kent created a huge storage unit along the

north wall in the house, hiding the area with massive doors.

As an architect specializing in historic structures, Jim Bayley, AIA gets more than a few calls from potential clients who want to create a unique live/work space inside a landmark historic building. Three years ago, a client, a retired Art Institute of Chicago curator suffering from multiple sclerosis, wanted to reconfigure her longtime residence in the landmark Mies van der Rohe building at 900 N. Lake Shore Drive. She had lived there for more than 20 years, but since her condition was worsening and she depended on a motorized scooter for mobility, she wanted to redo her home. Bayley added shallow ramps, widened doorways, and created a roll-in shower. In the kitchen he lowered the counters and made the counters reachable. He reconfigured his client's office, adding track lighting and creating a u-shaped desk with customized cabinetry. A library filled with the woman's favorite reference books is within easy reach so she can continue to write freelance articles in her area of expertise.

Bayley likewise used his expertise to create an unusual work/live environment for a client living in an 1805 house on the famous Tradd St. in historic Charleston, S.C. Bayley had to work closely with preservation officials to ensure that the exterior met their specifications. "Because there was a federal easement on the property, the façade had to go to the Historic Charleston Foundation for approval, the same way it would with Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois here," he

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—Zoka Zola, AIA**

says. These officials allowed Bayley to tear down a poorly constructed 1930s-era addition that linked the main house to a carriage house. Bayley built a new addition, and turned the top floor of the carriage house into a large office for the client, a management consultant. The downstairs became a combination office/laundry room for the consultant's wife.

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Timothy Kent, AIA



Jim Barry, AIA

Catherine Baker, AIA and her husband, Timothy Kent, AIA rebuilt the front of their Bucktown storefront, removing the 1960s-era stone veneer. They created a new façade with stucco. Jim Bayley, AIA decided to use paneling to line this home office.

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Federico Vidargas, AIA designed a new residence for his brother Ricardo in the historic district of San Miguel de Allende in Guanajuato, Mexico, which is most well-known as the town where artist Frida Kahlo lived. Ricardo and his wife Joan moved from New York City to San Miguel de Allende, where both Federico and Ricardo grew up. Vidargas had to work closely with local officials to ensure that the new building blended in seamlessly with others in the area.

Federico Vidargas found that a challenge. "I was recreating rather than building on," he says. Ricardo and his wife, a former Lord & Taylor display director turned jewelry designer, wanted a home that accommodated both of their businesses. Inside, Vidargas created a modern interior, something that the couple might have had at their former New York City home. He designed a darkroom for his brother and a studio for his sister-in-law. "I think he got a good deal," he laughs, noting that he charged his brother a minimum for his services. Outside, a stucco façade had to look like it had been there for 200 years. He was able to salvage a vintage door and frame from his father, who kept it in his yard with other architectural artifacts. Federico Vidargas even included a shrine to the Virgin Mary in a nook facing the cobbled streets, not an uncommon sight in Catholic Mexico.

Closer to home in Chicago's Ukrainian Village neighborhood, Zola Zola, AIA has the architect's ideal dream: create a live/work space for herself and her family. Transplanted from London, Zola and her husband Peter Pfanner bought a narrow lot in this trendy neighborhood. Zola had to rebuild her career; she had to learn zoning codes and ordinances. This home was her first project in the U.S. "There was a learning curve, it was quite interesting," she recalls. The only thing that was least foreign to her were contracts.



Federico Vidargas, AIA helped design his brother's residence on a small budget. He gave the interior a modern look reminiscent of the couple's former New York City home.

After mastering the city's quirky zoning codes Zola set out to create her masterpiece. Visitors enter the two-story home through a sunken studio where Zola has a few Mac computers, architectural models and a stash of bikes tucked back into a nook. A massive, 14-foot window floods the subterranean space with light. "It works well, I would rather work here than anywhere else," says Zola, whose young son Yara plays



quietly with his toys as she works on the computer. "Here I can mix work and private life." When she's ready to turn off the computer for the day, she simply walks up a winding stairway that takes her upstairs into the living quarters. First, she walks through a study for Pfanner, a designer at Motorola. Books related to Pfanner's passion fill one wall. Further upstairs, there are three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a laundry. A contemporary kitchen surrounded with huge windows faces what must be an urban dweller's dream: an outdoor patio with a fireplace.

Zola's not finished yet: there's still an unbuilt space behind the house which she plans to turn into a multi-level garden space. Her home has also brought her new business: she's working on a green single-family home and a mixed-use building on Chicago's Grand Avenue, allowing her to continue to work and live in a space she adores. Vidargas is working on other homes in San Miguel de Allende, and Bayley's still receiving accolades for his work in Charleston and the Mies van der Rohe conversion. Baker



Doug Ferguson



Doug Ferguson

Zola Zola, AIA designed a contemporary residence in Chicago's Ukrainian Village neighborhood. A massive window overlooks Zola's workspace. Stairs lead upstairs to her private residence.

and her husband like to think they've brought new life to the candy store that languished buried in debris for decades. And the guests who sleep in the room have sweet dreams indeed. ■