

Tip #114



A Place of Your Own

Who hasn't dreamed of having a space of our own, a studio, a corner where our supplies can remain out and ready for when inspiration strikes, where everything is handy, where we can work without interruption?

Whether you opt to build a separate studio from scratch (tax refund, like mine? Windfall, lottery, inheritance, savings, sell that extra vehicle or family treasure?) or rehab an old building or shed, you may find that it IS doable if you do what it takes to make it happen.

For many years I worked on a corner of the dining room or kitchen table, or in my Jeep. I still do, on occasion! I've carved out a place in my office, as well, which is normally mostly storage, computer workspace, and inventory.

But this past year, due to family problems and an array of interruptions that made work almost impossible (I work out of my home and have made my living doing so for many years), we set about to build a tiny, basic, *separate* shed/studio for me. A place to get away, to work, while still being close to home.

114-1, Shed blog



You can see the story of that project on my blog, *Shed of Reality; a place called sanity*, <http://artists-shed.blogspot.com/>. (The tabs at the top tell about our reasons, plans, designs and construction.)

Don't rush ... the planning and dreaming stage is essential. Do plenty of sketches and floor plans to see what you really need. I went through a number of ideas before I settled on my design and placement (we've got a side yard that had grown too shady for gardening, but close enough I can walk to the bathroom, grab a coffee or sandwich, or have computer access.)

If you choose to build a studio separate from your house, DO make sure to check with your city or town's building codes – you don't want to be partly into it and run into a problem. We kept ours under 120 square feet (it's 10 feet by 10 feet) to try to avoid that, and STILL ran into bureaucratic roadblocks, so research and communication is key!

114-2, Garden Shed

One option for a separate studio is a garden shed—you can buy ready-built or prefab ones for relatively little, and finish them inside as you can afford it. (There are a number of links on my blog for companies that offer nifty little sheds, or check with Lowe's, Home Depot, etc.) Some offer custom options like more or larger windows or skylights. You can add insulation, interior walls, shelves or whatever, once you've got the basic shell in place.



Another option is renting a space. Drive around your town...you may see a tiny house or old tourist cabin that could be rented or leased cheaply for a separate studio, if you don't have enough land near your house or if you live in an apartment.

In my town, there are a number of little stone garages, too small for today's cars (unless you've got a Smart Car!) but plenty big for a basic (and charming!) one-room studio.

Think about what you *actually* need to make a space work for you. A flat space or an easel, good light, comfortable seating, a place for materials and supplies? Those are the REAL basics for most of us. (Big windows are great, but a gooseneck artist's lamp with balanced light is probably easier to come by.)

How about running water or indoor plumbing? (I don't have it in mine—too expensive, and I can walk to a source!) Heat and/or AC to make it usable year 'round? Telephone/internet connection? I opted not to have the latter, but they may be essential for you. Plan a budget and figure what's absolutely necessary for the way you work.

115-3, Close to home

If you build it yourself, alone or with help, you can save a bundle on recycled materials of course. Windows, doors, lumber, even roofing or insulation may be found in garage sales, junk stores, or someplace like the Habitat for Humanity's ReStores, where people donate leftover building supplies, windows and doors, paint, insulation, electrical fixtures and wiring, and even appliances. You can often pick them up for a song.

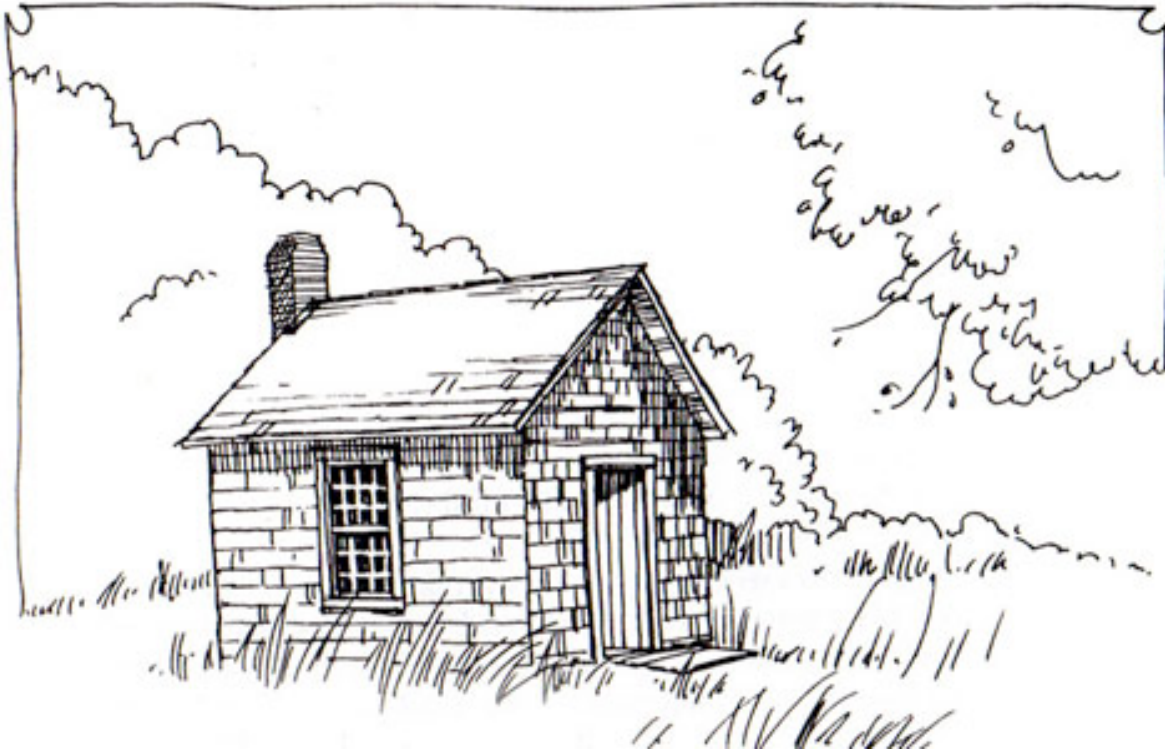
Do be prepared to do a fair amount of the work yourself, to save. I can't build from the ground up any more, but I'm good at insulating, trimming, sanding, and painting, and my husband builds great bookshelves and work tables!



There are any number of books and other resources to help you come up with a solution (some of my favorites are listed on the shed blog, too.) Let your imagination run free! Free-associate. Brainstorm. Check books out of the library, or look online. (The Tiny House Blog, <http://tinyhouseblog.com/>, is a goldmine of inspiration for unusual solutions, as is Shedworking, <http://www.shedworking.co.uk/>.)

Some creative people have utilized shipping containers, old cabooses, rooftops, yurts, chicken houses, enclosed gazebos, even tiny travel trailers. If you've got a bit of yard space - or someone who will let you put your new "studio" on theirs - you may be able to come up with a workable solution.

114-4, Walden



As Thoreau said, “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

And of course when he built his little cabin at Walden Pond, he did exactly that.

The line drawings in this tip are from my book, *A Naturalist's Path, Constructing a Dream*, <http://astore.amazon.com/httpcathyjohi-20/detail/0452266483>, about the cabin I built 22 years ago with the help of a young carpenter.

Please drop by my artists blog, <http://katequicksilvr.livejournal.com/>, my fine arts gallery blog, located at <http://cathyjohnsonart.blogspot.com/>, where I often offer mini-demos, my CafePress store, located at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson, where you can find instructional CDs for artists, or drop by for a visit on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/cathy.johnson1>!