



AT HOME

Flex Space

An artist balances work with relaxation in a dual-purpose townhome

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For a similar look, choose a sink with built-in workspace



ENTER THROUGH THE original glass door of Blanche Nettles Powers' downtown Taylor Street residence, and you might notice the radiant natural light, or the gentle curves of the home's Victorian-era bannister, or maybe the hypnotizing grayscale floor tiles in one of two perfectly appointed kitchens. Nettles Powers acknowledges such beauty, but quickly points out the sinks. Call it an occupational hazard.

As a contemporary visual artist, Nettles Powers' work centers heavily on experimentation and improvisation. Brushes, oil paints, India ink, raw canvas and even Spanish moss (it creates the airy texture found in some of her most recent pieces) are all likely to make cameos while Nettles Powers works. In a nutshell, things can get messy, and she's palpably excited to have four sinks in the downstairs area of her new studio/residence.

"In my last studio, I had one little bathroom sink I used for everything," she recalls. Now, she can choose from an original cast-iron sink in the studio's front room, a large soaking sink in the kitchen, an additional kitchen sink, or, for old time's sake, the bathroom sink.

A multitude of sinks are one happy adjustment, and the studio's location — just around the corner from Nettles »



Powers' full-time residence on Charlton Street — is another. “The idea of being able to walk to the studio every day was so appealing to me,” says Nettles Powers, whose previous studio wasn’t nearly as close to home. One night, while taking her dog, Two Socks, for a walk, she and her husband, Andy, noticed the property and “made a mental note,” ultimately taking the plunge when a for-sale sign went up in 2018.

The home, built circa 1888, featured a floor plan well suited to creating the ground-floor studio along with a charming upper-level residence, which now includes a kitchen, living room, two bedrooms and bathroom. It also faces north, which Nettles Powers says offers the best working light. “Northern light is great, because it’s just a nice, even, soft light,” Nettles Powers says. “It’s not at all harsh.”

Soon after purchasing the property, Nettles Powers »

Mid-century furnishings and plenty of greenery infuse the 1888 townhome with modern appeal



“I read they use soapstone in science labs a lot because chemicals won’t penetrate it. I figured that would be a good material for an art studio.” —*Blanche Nettles Powers*

got to work with a complete renovation, partnering with Carroll Construction and designer Andrew Carleton, who was particularly helpful with clever tweaks to the floor plan, like creating an open-concept kitchen upstairs. New sheet-rock walls went up (the original plaster simply couldn’t be salvaged), as did heating and cooling systems, wiring and plumbing. Design decisions came after, but Nettles Powers’ artistic eye made the process simple.

“I wanted to use classic, natural materials in a new way,” she says. That meant a deep, rich walnut for the upstairs kitchen cabinets and soapstone countertops downstairs — “I read they use soapstone in science labs a lot because chemicals won’t penetrate it. I figured that would be a good material for an art studio.”

Throughout, the space stays true to its Victorian roots (note the tortoiseshell tile on the original fireplace downstairs) with pops of mid-century flair. There’s an Eames chair tucked into the corner of the living room, and the pared-back bedrooms have a minimalist, Zen quality. And, of course, there’s plenty of artwork.

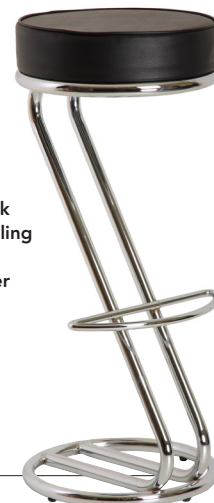
“I have many artist friends and colleagues, so there’s usually some sort of connection with the artist or the work itself,” Nettles Powers says as she points out a series of six saturated, delightfully drippy pieces from local artist Betsy Cain that serve as a focal point in one of the home’s bedrooms. Her own pieces are on display both in the upper-level residence and in the studio below, although the walls are currently a little bare — Nettles Powers, who’s represented by the Kim Foster Gallery in Manhattan, recently had an almost sold-out show.

A walkable studio complete with artist-friendly upgrades like exhaust fans, track lighting and extended-width chair railing to accommodate her canvases has been a great gift professionally, Nettles Powers says, with the added benefit of allowing for her three college-age sons, extended family, friends and even visiting artists to have a place to stay.

“My son, Sam, is at school in Boston, and right away he said, ‘Can I stay at the apartment with some of my friends for spring break?’ I’m excited to be able to offer that to him,” Nettles Powers says. Eventually, she hopes to have occasional »



Open metal-work lends an airy feeling to otherwise industrial counter stools



Nettles Powers opted for simple, streamlined lighting throughout the space







renters and a designated calendar for family and friends. Further afield, one of her sons might even move in. “Or who knows?” she says. “Maybe us. I really tried to design it thinking about how I would want it to be if I lived here.”

Nettles Powers grew up in Savannah, and while she’s “taken stints” living elsewhere, she’s content to remain — and host others — in the Hostess City. There’s a built-in family connection, after all: her children were raised here, and her second-oldest son now attends SCAD, where Nettles Powers received her painting MFA.

“My father was an orthopedic surgeon, but he compared it to carpentry in a way, and I remember seeing him come home with plaster under his fingernails,” she says. “Maybe that came from him, this desire I’ve always had to build and create things with my hands.”

The Taylor Street residence might be her best work to date. ●

Artwork from Betsy Cain appears in both bedrooms



DAVID J. KAMINSKY



Leather chairs add warmth and patina to cool-tone spaces



DETAILS

Owners: Blanche Nettles Powers and Andy Powers

Year built: 1888

Year purchased: 2018

Square footage: 1,668

Number of bedrooms and bathrooms: 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms

Time to complete renovation/remodel: 14 months

RESOURCES

Interior designers: Andrew Carleton, Carroll Construction; Blanche Nettles Powers

Contractor/builder: Carroll Construction

Wood floor refinishing: Davis Hardwood Flooring

Tiles: Savannah Surfaces

Tile installation: M.T. Adams Tile & Stone

Paint/Wallpaper: Vince Csatajszki

Windows/doors: Home South Architectural, a division of Guerry Lumber

Custom cabinetry: AWD of Savannah

Stone counters: Creative Stone Accessories

Lighting design: Pace Lighting, Hive Modern, City Issue Atlanta

Electrician: J Ryle Electric

Carpenter: Carroll Construction

Plumbing supplier: Sandpiper Supply; Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery

Plumber: Henry Plumbing

HVAC: Arctic Air Heating & Cooling

Furniture: Collection of owners; City Issue Atlanta

Appliances: Livingood's Appliances & Bedding; Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery

Window treatments: Savannah Window Fashions

Upholstery: Davis Upholstery

Furniture repair: DeBorde Restorations

Art: Collection of owner, including works by Betsy Cain, Christine Sajecki, Joan Cobitz, Larry Connatser, Ben Venom, David Humphrey, Avantika Bawa, Blanche Nettles Powers, Dan Hernandez, Kim Foster Gallery