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# Divine design

4 HOME-BASED STUDIOS THAT WORK

BY STEPHANIE BOOZER

Think working out of your home will cramp your style? Time for some fresh food for thought. With planning, resourcefulness and creativity, you can run a successful home-based studio without compromising your professionalism. The owners of these four successful home-based studios have found a balance between workplace and home space. If they can do it—even with kids and pets—maybe you can, too.

## JEN THOMPSON PHOTOGRAPHY BEND, ORE.

SQUARE FEET: 2,600,  
AND FIVE ACRES OUTDOORS

Jen Thompson designed her home studio ([jenthompsonphotography.com](http://jenthompsonphotography.com)) to be a purely creative space, one that her family also happens to live in. Downstairs is a bathroom featuring a lounge and fun retro couch, and an open area for shooting. Upstairs is the main living space and another bathroom, a kitchen and a sitting area, all overlooking the Cascade Mountains.

"It's small, but it's perfect and intimate," she says.

Specializing in portraits, Thompson shoots in both natural light and studio lighting, depending on the weather and the nature of the session. Throughout the studio and surrounding grounds Thompson has installed an array of backdrops, including distressed wood doors, brick and galvanized metal walls, and a chalkboard graffiti wall. Sliding barn doors double as room dividers and backdrops. Her extensive collection of funky furniture and vintage accessories is at hand to pull into the setting.

The indoor shooting area is perfect for presentations as well, with its ceiling-mounted projector and retractable screen. Two large workspace islands hold storage baskets, a mounted tissue paper rack, and a stock of gift



wrap, tags and ribbons. The multipurpose laundry room is large enough to house camera gear and equipment when not in use, as well as a digital server.

“When I started working on the sketches for the studio, I wanted something unique,” says Thompson. “I wanted the space to be wide open, but still warm and inviting. And I wanted nooks and corners for potential shooting spots. My clients need to be comfortable here, in a homey way, but they also need to be wowed in a creative way.”

Living in the country gave Thompson the freedom to build without many zoning and permit hassles, though one corner of the studio is a mere 100 feet outside a restricted zone.



Jen Thompson combines living space and studio space, creating a comfortable, fun and homey atmosphere. Her backgrounds are built into the structure, including brick, galvanized metal and chalkboard walls.

## PROFIT CENTER



"The trick is using every square inch to the max," says Monica Burby. She uses a large basement space as the camera room, and a separate office for post production and packaging.

"It demonstrates to our clients how powerful large wall portraits can be in your home, and also opens conversations about our family, which helps clients feel at ease," says Burby.

Though she has a variety of sets at the ready, Burby prefers to keep the lighting setup simple, typically using just three or four lights. For a mere \$50, she built a hanging backdrop system that holds three rolls of seamless paper.

"We get the question all the time, 'Do you actually live here?' which I take as a huge compliment," says Burby, who says she's mindful to subdue cooking odors before clients arrive. "I don't think people expect what they see when they get to the camera room. It's rare that we don't get a surprised 'wow!' out of a first-time client."

### PHOTOUMBRA STUDIOS SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

#### SQUARE FEET: ABOUT 800 OVER FOUR AREAS

Monica Burby ([photoumbra.com](http://photoumbra.com)) works in several areas in her home, which was built in 2003 with that purpose in mind. The front "view and choose room," as Burby refers to it, is for presentations and ordering. Post production and packaging are handled in a separate office, while a large basement houses the camera room, and no fewer than nine sets are ready to use. "The trick is using every square inch to the max," says Burby. Adjacent to the camera room is the dressing area, where Burby swapped a shower and tub for a more useful bench. A basket on the counter holds toiletries, such as face powder and mini bottles of mouthwash. Burby made the space cozy with curtains, throw pillows and moody accent lighting. A border of hats on pegs keeps her popular props on display and close at hand. "We always get compliments on how clever that is," she says.

Clients have to walk through part of the

family's living area to get to the basement camera room, and Burby turns that into an advantage by displaying large, emotional portraits of her daughter, including a 48x62-inch print above the stairway.



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## PROFIT CENTER

### **KATELYN JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY RICHMOND, VA.**

#### **SQUARE FEET: ABOUT 420**

It was love at first sight when newlywed Katelyn James ([katelynjames.com](http://katelynjames.com)) and her husband found a 1980s Cape Cod-style house in the West End of Richmond, Va. The house had enough room upstairs for her studio, where she could meet with clients, and a casual space for her husband, a youth pastor, to provide for the teens he mentors.

The interior was a bit dated, so James had it painted while the couple was away on their honeymoon. In the studio, she had the off-white walls coated in a Sherwin Williams paint called Watercolor, a hue three shades brighter than the teal on her website, and the dark trim painted a crisp white. For furnishings, she combed budget-friendly stores like Target, IKEA, Pottery Barn, HomeGoods, Marshalls and Pier 1, and threw in a few lucky vintage finds.

“One wall is full of empty vintage frames to mirror the design on my website,” says James. “I love this! Branding to the extreme? Yes, maybe a little, but it’s fun and it makes my brand cohesive. Consistency is the key.”

Because James prefers shooting in natural light on location, she doesn’t need a camera room. A well-organized closet is dedicated to branding materials and supplies, and a dedicated bathroom for clients secures the privacy of the living space during consultations. At the end of the workday, James can simply shut the door and leave work upstairs.

“Having a home studio that reflects my brand also allows couples to get a better sense of who I am as a photographer, and they get to see a little into my personal life,” says James. “Because I run my business in a very personal way, I feel this is a huge deciding factor for my clients. They must connect with me, my style and my personality in order to be a great fit.”



Katelyn James designed her studio space to reflect her branding, from the paint shade to the empty vintage frames on the wall that mirror the design of her website.

## PROFIT CENTER



Sarah Ulrich's basement space features ceiling-mounted rolls of seamless paper in the shooting area and a separate sitting area with TV, DVD player, wireless Internet access and magazines for the parents' comfort.

### UNIQUELY YOU PHOTOGRAPHY LINCOLN/OMAHA, NEB.

#### SQUARE FEET: ABOUT 400

When Sarah Ulrich started Uniquely You Photography ([uniquelyyouthphoto.com](http://uniquelyyouthphoto.com)) six years ago, she photographed mainly newborns and expectant parents in their homes, toting lights and backdrops along with her. But as word of mouth boosted her popularity, she needed a dedicated space of her own.

"As my business grew, the prop collection also expanded," says Ulrich. "It became more of a challenge to go on location and produce the type of images I wanted to create."

After looking into retail spaces, Ulrich opted to convert her home basement into a space that worked for her. "I asked a few of my very good clients whose opinions I value how a home studio would be perceived, and

surprisingly, the consensus was that my work speaks for itself, so where my images are created matters very little to them," says

Ulrich. "With that in mind, I tried to create a space that was professional, but also cozy and welcoming."

Ulrich's converted basement houses a shooting area for newborns and maternity clients. (Family and child portraits are still done on location.) Mounted from the ceiling are three rolls of seamless paper, and Ulrich keeps fabric pieces and panels around as well. Closed off by double doors is a storage area; Ulrich's office is upstairs out of sight to clients. In a separate downstairs sitting area, Ulrich placed a TV and DVD player, as well as magazines, wireless Internet access and refreshments to keep everyone comfortable during newborn sessions, which last two to three hours. She made a conscious effort to decorate the space with furnishings that can double as props.

"I've had my space for a little over two years now, and my clients have given nothing but positive feedback," says Ulrich. "Even the dads are impressed." ■

*Look for more home studio examples online at [ppmag.com](http://ppmag.com) in the Current Issue section.*

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