



Robbi Eklow's 700-square-foot studio at The Hot Shops Art Center in Omaha, Nebraska.

said something about being an artist who is willing to put in the effort; he was right, so I made the change.

We sometimes borrow tools or supplies from each other. When someone asks me for a scissors, they have to tell me what they are cutting and I pick out the correct implement for them. Other artists have helped me dismantle and repair the longarm.

On the other hand, I'm easily distracted, and it took a while to learn that I can work while someone else visits with me. I can't talk and longarm, but I can talk and bury threads. I even keep sodas in a refrigerator to lure other artists. If I want to take a break, I can wander around and see someone else. In general, though, if I am at my studio, I get quilt work done, and if I'm at home, I get distracted. I don't keep a desktop computer at the studio, but I have a laptop I can bring when I need a computer to create art.

The Hot Shops Art Center is part of a former industrial area that is being revitalized. I have a concrete floor, so I put down area rugs to cover most of it. I have beautiful exposed brick on two walls, and a beautiful wood ceiling. I have hung bulletin boards to create a working wall that is 10 x

12 feet, and another that is 15 feet wide. I use the larger wall to display quilts, but I can clear it for photography or to use the quilts for a lecture. In the winter, my studio can become very warm, as the building's steam pipes pass through it first. I decided on those warm winter days to wear summer clothes and pretend I'm on vacation.

My studio is my second place. I usually go there to work on a quilt, but sometimes I just go to get out of the house, to socialize with other artists, or to let my husband have some space. I also have a small studio in our apartment, where I can watch television and work on small projects. During the pandemic, my Hot Shops space was a saving grace. The building was closed to the public, but artists could go in, work, and socialize a bit too. We usually wore masks and stood far apart. I didn't let very many people in my studio, as I didn't want to wear a mask all day.

At one point during the pandemic, one of the other artists texted me that she was part of a pop-up art gallery that was going to be up only that night. Six artists showed their work and I had a chance to converse with each one. It was a very special evening and there was a brief thunderstorm

in the middle of it. In all the years I lived in Chicago, I'd never been to an opening like this. I wasn't part of the art community in Chicago, but here in Omaha I am part of the community and feel comfortable. The same energy isn't present in my home studio. When I walk into the Hot Shops, a switch turns on in my brain and I am in a more creative mode.

When should you look for studio space outside your home? Here are some suggestions:

- Your quilt stuff won't fit in its allotted space in your home and your family refuses to give up their bedrooms for fabric storage.
- Family members take your scissors to open soup cans.
- You are easily distracted by other activities at home, such as email, loading the dishwasher, checking Facebook, etc.
- The dog/cat/toddler keeps playing with your fat quarters.
- Family members don't respect a closed door.
- Family members think it's funny to sneak up on you while you are listening to music and free-motion quilting.

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