

# in her studio

SPACES AND STORIES OF CREATIVE WOMEN

20+  
INSPIRING  
STUDIOS

A FAIRY-TALE  
CREATURE  
Workshop in the  
Heart of Tuscany

HARNESSING  
NATURE'S COLORS  
in a Greenhouse  
Studio

A WIDE-OPEN SPACE  
for Larger-Than-  
Life Paintings







# Finding Peace

## IN THE SEASON

BY SARAH BOURNE RAFFERTY

I grew up in the marshlands of Maryland's eastern shore, around water and farmland and rural life. Through planting flowers and tending a vegetable garden, my parents taught me to use my hands to create the life I wanted to live, one small decision at a time. Each little moment of being outside and getting dirt under my fingernails added up to a deep appreciation for what only nature could provide. It is home to me. It is freedom to me.

I have always painted and drawn. I studied art in school (it was the only thing that really made sense to me) and later went on to earn my MFA in book arts and printmaking. I've always been a creative, but it wasn't until I married my husband that I started my business, Atwater Designs. My husband encouraged me to listen to myself and was the first voice in my life to say, "Stop thinking about it and just do it!" I took those words of his and flew. Starting my art business propelled me into the amazing season of life I find myself enjoying right now. Growing this business has helped me know myself more fully, has helped me find consistency in a steady art practice as I pursue my vision, and, more than anything else, has connected me to people all over the globe who share my passion for discovering and sharing the wonder of art and our natural world. ▸









The idea of a studio is something I find exhilarating because much of my environment acts as studio. A studio is a place where I create, where I'm inspired, and where I can think about the internal message I want to externalize to the world. *A huge part of my process is starting with a walk in the woods or a beautiful open field, which reminds me that nature is indeed my studio.* I find both inspiration and the subject for my work in the natural world, and then use the specimens I collect to create my cyanotypes. Because cyanotypes are created by exposure to the sun, I create my work outside in my garden, which makes our tiny backyard oasis part of my studio as well.

My indoor studio, as I like to call it, is the top-most floor of our modest home in West Chester, Pennsylvania. When I turn the corner to head up the flight of stairs, I am met by the creak of each step. Standing on the landing places me at eye level with the studio floor, which always makes me smile. I always wanted a painted checkered wooden floor, and when we moved in my husband said, "You have to do it; you'll regret it if you don't!" So five days later, after lots of measuring, masking tape, and deep breaths, I finished the checkered pattern. I love every inch of that studio floor.







From my childhood bedroom to my teeniest rooms during college, I've always prioritized the carving out of creative space. Whether a tiny table in my bedroom or a larger desk in my living room, creating a place where I can show up to be present for work that requires my heart and my hands is a priority. So when we bought our first house four years ago, carving out and customizing the space where my work could flourish was essential. Showing up daily to that space has changed everything. >

## 10 BOOKS THAT ARE VITAL TO *My Studio Practice*

"Essentialism"

by Greg McKeown  
(Currency, 2014)

"Becoming"

by Michelle Obama  
(Crown Publishing Group, 2018)

"Big Magic"

by Elizabeth Gilbert  
(Riverhead Books, 2016)

"Braving the Wilderness"

by Brené Brown  
(Random House, 2017)

"Hashtag Authentic"

by Sara Tasker  
(White Lion Publishing, 2017)

"Brand Brilliance"

by Fiona Humberstone  
(Copper Beech Press, 2017)

"Present Over Perfect"

by Shauna Niequist  
(Zondervan, 2016)

"Bird by Bird"

by Anne Lamont  
(Anchor, 1995)

"The Road Back to You"

by Ian Morgan Cron  
(IVP Books, 2016)

"Atomic Habits"

by James Clear  
(Avery, 2018)



So much of being an artist and running a business is about understanding myself well enough to function at my best every day, which is why my studio practice starts with interval exercises and eating well. *Knowing what my mind and body require to be sustainable has to come first, otherwise I cannot maintain the studio practice I love.* By working out consistently, eating well, and making choices I feel good about, I am creating so much more room for clarity and productivity when I am in the studio; this intentionality has led to a growing business about which I feel endlessly proud.







Sarah Bourne Rafferty is the owner of Atwater Designs, a cyanotype design studio in West Chester, Pennsylvania. She creates blue-and-white botanical prints using cyanotype, the oldest photographic process. She shares this magical life with her husband, John, dog, Tallie, and cat, Tigger. You can find her online at [atwaterdesigns.com](http://atwaterdesigns.com) and on Instagram and Facebook (@atwaterdesigns).

Photography by Traci Delisser (@tracielanie).