

Domestic Conversions

The perfect studio may already be available in your home.

Every artist dreams of a large, well-lit space wholly dedicated to the making of art. Rather than rent or buy such a place, many artists find that domestic spaces offer an attractive alternative. An existing garage is a popular option—a large, open space that can often be converted for quite a modest sum into a highly functional, loftlike environment. Other domestic spaces also beckon as possible studios; attics and basements are easy targets, and some artists find that they are willing to sacrifice traditional living space for a comfortable and well-lit workroom. Finally, for the most adventurous, a home can be built as a studio right from the beginning, an approach that allows for the optimum mix of living and workspace. We asked five artists who undertook such projects what the experience was actually like, what difficulties they faced, what considerations were paramount, and how the results turned out.

by John A. Parks

OPPOSITE PAGE

The interior of Daniel Pinkham's studio along the Pacific Coast in Southern California.





Daniel Pinkham: A Major Conversion

DANIEL PINKHAM HAS SPENT more than 12 years rebuilding a derelict and condemned building—transforming an abandoned, sagging hulk into a magnificent showplace. The building's origins are

unusual. Situated on the Pacific Coast at Portuguese Bend, in Southern California, it once formed part of an ambitious development at the beginning of the 20th century.

"The New York financier Frank

Vanderlip came out here in 1915," explains Pinkham. "He bought 16,000 acres and employed the Olmstead Brothers to design an Italian-style community. They were going to develop a whole Italian Riviera, with fishing villages, churches, fountains, and plazas. Our house was one of the 15 or 20 structures that got built before the crash of 1929, after which the project was abandoned."

Over the years the building fell into ruin and further suffered from



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Conversion Timeline

1. Pinkham and his wife bought property along the Pacific Coast and have spent the past 12 years completing the unfinished construction.
2. In order to preserve the original plaster walls of the studio/chapel, Pinkham and a nephew framed them and made them thicker.
3. Once the walls were reinforced, a roof had to be added.
4. Frames were built for the entrance door and surrounding molding.
5. Plaster was applied to the framed walls.
6. The plastered walls and stairway were finally painted.
7. A fountain was restored based on the original Italian design.
8. The artist at work.
9. A workman mixing plaster.
10. Daniel Pinkham and his wife taking a much-needed break.



The original building's design was based on a chapel outside the vatican.

a landslide. When Pinkham bought it, all that remained were the plaster walls and a leaning floor. The roof had been missing for years, and the structure was almost beyond repair. Pinkham found a photograph in an architectural

magazine showing the original building, which turned out to have been based on the design of a chapel outside the Vatican in which Michelangelo lived during his work on the Sistine Chapel. Pinkham decided to remake the building and

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Although Pinkham admits he may never completely finish his studio, it is now finished enough for creating and exhibiting paintings.

Plein air sketches are displayed on a board near the artist's easel.

The artist relaxes near some of his recent oil landscapes.



use the chapel space as a painting studio.

Working with a nephew in the construction trade, the artist jacked up and leveled the floor before pulling the walls straight using chains and heavy equipment. There followed major construction work, building a frame around the plaster walls and then a further frame to ensure that the outer walls achieved the great thickness of the original design. A new roof was



THIS PAGE
Pinkham can enjoy
a peaceful view into
the garden and
surround his
painting area with
sketches and plein
air studies.

Conversions: **Pinkham**



LEFT

Pinkham can display works in progress as well as completed oil landscapes in the studio that has 19-foot walls covered with the original plaster.

BELOW LEFT

A peaceful view into the garden belies the 12 years of work that it took Pinkham to renovate his home and studio.



framed out and will be covered with the type of Italian tiles used in the original design. "The tapered shape of the tiles is achieved by bending the clay squares over the thighs of the artisans," says Pinkham, who relishes the learning experiences and challenges that have come with the project. Discovering that the original windows were all custom sizes, he undertook to build new ones himself. Another large project involved restoring the main door of the house, a much-damaged artifact made of Cuban mahogany, a rare and expensive wood.

Pinkham has now moved into the house and enjoys the main studio/chapel space with its soaring 19-foot ceilings with exposed hand-hewn beams. "I haven't touched the original plaster of the walls," he says. "Everybody who sees it loves the aged effect of multiple exposed layers." The artist still has work to do, researching and making the moldings in the interior and making copies of various Michelangelo images in fresco at the top of the walls. Outside he is at work restoring a large fountain based on the original Italian design. Major stonework for perimeter walls and pathways have also occupied the artist. "Really it will probably take a lifetime to finish," he says, "but there is always a new challenge, something new to learn."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT
WWW.DANIELPINKHAM.COM.**