



A Florist's Paradise

One designer's vision blossoms into a budding family garden studio.

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Photography by Dan Muro,
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Shelby Sutcliffe O'Donnell of Hearthstone Kitchen Design, LLC in Weare, New Hampshire designed this garden studio for her most easy-to-please client—her mother. At the same time, O'Donnell was challenged to design a functional and spacious workspace for a gardener and her expanding floral design business, which required her to incorporate some very creative solutions.

"The design vision stemmed from bringing the outside in," O'Donnell stated. "My mother previously had no specified space for making floral arrangements, and she wanted a room that was pleasant and efficient in which to work and grow her business. My father also liked the idea of giving my mother a separate work area, which would keep her business together in one convenient location."

The garden studio was one component of O'Donnell's redesign of her parents' Bernardsville, New Jersey home. Her parents' kitchen and bar area were remodeled simultaneously, revamping the entire downstairs for business and entertaining. The garden studio had been previously used as a laundry and mudroom. "Everything my mom initially wanted to do was too much for the space," O'Donnell added. "I needed to borrow space by enclosing a porch, which doubled the size of the room. I also had to move a door into the kitchen, which led down to the basement. This instantly made the studio space more efficient."

"The garden studio was completely different than anything I had designed previously," said O'Donnell. "However, all of my designs focus on work zones and the functionality of the space. So, although the garden design was something I had never done before, the design process itself was similar."

The garden studio was unique on multiple levels. "I installed wall cabinets higher than in a kitchen, since more room was needed to place tall vases with flowers on the countertops," O'Donnell continued. "New Pella windows, a glass door, and glass cabinetry doors were installed to further reflect the light, in keeping with the theme

of bringing the outside in. The stained glass antique doors gave a greater sense of separation and privacy from the kitchen space, and these doors have stayed with my parents through several homes."

To infuse more of the garden/outdoors theme into the space, O'Donnell incorporated various floral and forest aspects. "The cabinetry was specified to be sage green with a mocha glaze," said O'Donnell. "We chose floral vine wallpaper, which brings out the cabinetry's color, along with yellow shades from the kitchen. Twig-shaped Rocky Mountain hardware was also chosen for the cabinets, doors, and windows, which make the whole space look more natural. The ceiling is white beadboard with a Casa Blanca ceiling fan, giving the room the feel of an outdoor porch."

To add to this gardener's paradise, O'Donnell included a shallow Kohler sink, which is ideal for cutting and prepping flowers, as well as for holding vases and supplies. A Grohe pull-out faucet allows a far reach for filling multiple vases around the room.

"My mother uses natural means for growing her flowers as much as possible," added O'Donnell. "She is also a member of the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers." To allow for easier composting and recycling, a double bin pullout was created beneath the sink. One of the cabinets contains pullouts for a laptop and printer/fax, which allows the client's business to be easily conducted, but quickly stored away from water and supplies whenever needed.

Knowing that her mother would need plenty of counter space to design arrangements, O'Donnell created a countertop with honed caesarstone that wraps along the walls. "It looks like old-fashioned marble, but it isn't porous and is very durable," said O'Donnell.

One aspect that was important to O'Donnell was making the space easy to clean. To allow for this, a pantry cabinet was designed. "Muddy shoes can be stored in a lower drawer with garden gloves above. There is also an open hooked space for overalls or gardening shirts to hang," O'Donnell said. ►►



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Bookshelves provide space for inspiration and easy storage. “In keeping with the idea of having all of my mother’s gardening materials in one space, I wanted to create shelves to hold all of her books. Now, everything fits neatly into the room and is only an arm’s length away whenever she needs to reference something,” continued O’Donnell.

The refrigerator drawers and florist refrigerator allow space for the client to expand her business. “My mother wants to grow herbs and edibles for restaurants, and these spaces allow her to do that,” said O’Donnell. “I also created dividers within

drawers, which allows storage for water vials and florist tape. This allows for even greater organization of the space.”

Above the florist refrigerator and at the very top of the pantry cabinet, there are additional pullouts. “Everything in the room is easily accessible,” O’Donnell added. “I wanted the room to be friendly and offer easy access for someone who may be shorter. It’s inconvenient having to grab a stepstool to reach a top shelf, and the pullouts take away that issue.”

One challenge that presented itself was avoiding venting and plumbing in the

kitchen. “The wall for the commercial florist refrigerator is neatly tucked back, which allowed me to avoid a conflict with plumbing and ventilation,” O’Donnell said.

In keeping with her father’s wishes to have the mother’s business completely separate from the rest of the home, O’Donnell included a Bosch dishwasher, which can accommodate tall vases. O’Donnell added, “This again allows for easy access; you never have to leave the room.”

The garden studio was also designed with easy access to the outdoors in mind. Located

on the first floor, the glass door opens up to ten acres of gardens and woods, which allows the client to enter the room without walking through other areas of the home while carrying flowers or other plants.

O'Donnell has been in the kitchen and bath industry for more than seven years and has owned her own business for just over two years. "My liberal arts degree focused on the creative process, but was geared toward television production," O'Donnell stated. "Once I got engaged, I moved to New Hampshire and wanted to find something that was extremely creative and would consistently bring new challenges. I love this business because I believe that I can improve my clients' relationships. Through proper lifestyle design, they want to invite friends over more often and gather with the whole family. Even the kids tend to hang out rather than shutting themselves away in their bedrooms."

Prior to the garden studio, O'Donnell's mother initially used the aging kitchen for her business. "The kitchen hadn't been touched since the 1960s and was comprised of rusting metal cabinetry and gray laminate with a metal edge," O'Donnell added. "It had been designed as an eat-in kitchen with a peninsula breaking the room in two, but since my parents lived there, my mother had been using it as her office space and storage area for her business, making it very unpleasant for entertaining. When she did floral arrangements, my mother would spread an old packing quilt out on the floor to gather the leaves, stems, and debris. She would cut her flowers in the kitchen sink and squat down on the floor to do her arrangements. Her business literally took over the entire kitchen, and my parents didn't entertain as often as they would have liked as a result. Now they entertain all of the time and even host monthly political committee meetings."

"The inspiration for the kitchen was my mother's vast collection of antiques (in a past business, she owned an antique shop

in Washington, DC), and the desire to keep the simple roots of the home in mind," O'Donnell continued. "The original part of the house is a circa 1850 coach stop. We opened up a wall between the kitchen and bar area as a pass-through, which joins the bar to the kitchen. Like the vases in the floral studio, the glasses in the bar-beverage center can now stay in their proper location. A single drawer dishwasher makes cleaning easy. Refrigerator drawers hold beverages, while the space also features an icemaker, wine refrigerator, red wine tall storage, pullout cutting board, and pullout trash, as well as a separate sink, all in a very concise space."

While two distinct and separate spaces, O'Donnell wanted the kitchen and garden

studio to complement each other. "The colors of the floral studio, kitchen, and bar are harmonious with one another. The bar is a medium-toned knotty alder that's carried through to the kitchen's island, and is reflected by the glaze on both the yellow kitchen and green floral studio. Although the rest of the kitchen countertops are golden-toned granite or wood (on the raised seating), the honed caesarstone of the floral studio is carried over to the baking nook in the kitchen."

When asked about the process of redesigning rooms with her mother, O'Donnell replied, "It was very collaborative and great having her input—and I was able to be a little pushier with her than the average customer!" 

