When it comes to art, most artists will tell you that the excitement, or the magic, actually happens during the creative process. And that usually happens in the studio.

But deciding what represents an ideal studio space will hinge on several factors. The nature of your work places demands on what type, size, and character of studio space you need, for instance. And while an open-to-the-public studio might bring the twin benefits of exposure and sales, it can also make it difficult to work.

Studio spaces outside the home fit into three categories. A "private studio space" (which means the space does *not* have regular times when it is open to the public) is strictly for experimentation, conceptual and technical development, and physical production of work. A "studio/exhibition space" is similar in its creative nature to a private studio but is regularly open to the public and showcases pieces specifically from the artist who works in that space. A "studio/gallery space" is where an artist creates works in the space *and* features those artworks as well as pieces from artists who produce elsewhere.

While the last two categories seem similar, there is an important distinction between them. The overwhelming majority of the art you see in a studio/exhibition space is made by the artists who work there, and they alone bear the costs for the space.

A studio/gallery space has more of a commercial aspect. It will have one or more artists physically producing work there. But a portion of the space is shared with a larger group of

artists who wish to have a place that sells their artwork. Whoever owns/runs the space offsets costs by charging a commission on all sales. The financial burden of the studio is spread out over a larger pool of artists in exchange for some wall space.

Meet the Artists

Sculptor and glass-artist Mark Fowler has spent several thousand dollars to purchase and install the equipment needed to make his glass forms and to bring the roomy old brick building that houses his private studio space to code (wiring, fire-suppression systems, etc.). The kilns and furnaces he uses ensure a sizable monthly utility bill and also demand that he does not set up shop in an old wooden building.

By comparison, the artists of The doeGallery (Jacki Olson, Helen Boyd, and Emily Christenson), a studio/exhibition space in Bucktown, had modest startup expenses to pay for things such as track lighting, paint, Internet access, and some furnishings. Their utilities are already incorporated into the rent.

A benefit Jacki Olson (who has had experience running eight studio spaces in the past 24 years) mentions is the fact that Bucktown hosts 12 Final Friday open houses and is at ground zero for other events such as Bix weekend and Beaux Arts. This regularity of events serves as a consistent motivator to provide new things for the public to see. "We create new pieces every month," she says. "It makes us more creative by being more productive." This also allows art aficionados/connoisseurs to inspect their progress (on specific pieces) and development (as artists in general).

"People are so happy to actually meet the artists," says Olson. She enjoys the interaction with the public and even feels that the artists of doeGallery benefit because of the public facet of their space. "We are also growing in our artist community because we are setting ourselves out there in the world," she says.

Allowing people to watch how something is made, while it may border on a performance, helps foster familiarity with and understanding of the artists, their process, and their work. That can lead to additional exhibition opportunities, workshops, gallery talks, and sales or commissions for future works.

While Fowler does not maintain regular open-to-the-public business hours, he hosts several public gatherings a year at his Rock Island studio. He says that hosting that kind of party each Gallery Hop costs him roughly $1,000. The cost is not made up that night in direct sales, but is usually covered over the course of the year by people who saw his space and his process and purchased something later. The money becomes an investment - not only for generating future sales, but also in educating the public about what artists make and how they create it.

With the benefits of increased exposure, sales, and commissions, why wouldn't all artists have their studios open to the public? Interruptions.

Sculptor Paul Algueseva III, who operates and creates pieces in the gallery Eclectic Eye (also in Bucktown), is a staunch supporter of having an open and welcoming studio/gallery space yet admits that "working on commissions during business hours is a challenge. The concentration level is not focused."

A place such as Bucktown (for which I served as construction coordinator) was designed and built to contemporary building codes with the needs of artists' work areas in mind. However, many artists rent spaces in buildings that do not meet current building codes. They have poor ventilation, inadequate power supplies, little or no heat, uneven floors, and unsanctioned visitors who scurry across the floor.

What are the benefits to these spaces? Cost, solitude, and space. While a higher-end space in Bucktown runs in the neighborhood of $6 per square foot or more, other spaces - without the amenities and that level of foot traffic - can cost an artist $2.50 to $4 per square foot.

When you are not concerned with the idea of keeping your work space appealing to the public, the music can be louder, the messes can be more frightening, and your tattered painting clothes can cover less. This sounds like a recipe for total artistic freedom, but the isolation can also represent the freedom to starve through a lack of secondary opportunities (generated by public

contact) and the absence of critical feedback with others. Sometimes a visitor to your working space may connect you with a buyer or an opportunity. If you have no studio visitors, those kinds of connections are slow to materialize. Artists working in close proximity tend to help educate each other and share ideas. Without artistic neighbors, you have to educate yourself.

A side benefit to renting space in older, colorful buildings (renovated or not) is the higher ceilings. Although you figure your annual rental costs by the square foot, you physically enjoy *c ubic*
feet. If you have 10- or 12-foot ceilings, that can represent several thousand more cubic feet of space for work and supplies.

Older buildings also tend to have maintenance issues that can be an opportunity for a handy artist to exchange repair services for reduced rent.

Different Needs for Bands

Because many venues already exist for bands to "exhibit their work" to the public, the pressure to maintain something like a studio/exhibition space to bring people in is virtually nonexistent. But do bands rent private studio spaces? Not often.

As Jason Gilliland, the bassist for the band Jim the Mule explains, sometimes a rented space is low on the list of a band's fiscal priorities. "Our main focus financially is continuing to have a cash flow that enables us to travel to shows and record as much as possible," he says. "We also need to make sure that we are able to make repairs to band property such as vehicle, trailer, and PA."

Although it seems that bands only occasionally obtain private studio spaces, that doesn't mean the need and desire for them isn't there. Ellis Kell speaks to some of the benefits of studio spaces: "I know we probably would get together more, if we had a more convenient and accessible space. A band needs a studio space they can just walk into anytime day or night,

good to go, without having to load everything in and out each time, etc. A rehearsal space that could offer some basic sound equipment, and maybe a few shared amplifiers, piano, and drums would be ideal."

Gilliland adds that with a private rented space, "any member of the band could use it to practice when their schedule dictated instead of a home that has people with regular kinds of schedules."

But the volume inherent in band rehearsals makes finding a good studio space difficult. "What is around your studio space such as businesses or apartments that may direct your available time to play at full volume," Gilliland says. "I think it is important to point out that at times musicians need to play at volumes that may seem loud. This includes amplified instruments as well as drums. Amplifiers sound different at different volumes (especially tube amplifiers), and drums feel different and react differently if you play softly."

The sound level is usually the deal-breaker for potential landlords. Many of the older buildings that might have excellent practice spaces (typically on the upper floors) have an anchor business on the ground floor. Few landlords are willing to risk angering a business that pays substantially more per square foot on the ground floor in exchange for the pittance they receive from a band.

"I know musicians are always looking for these spaces," Kell says. "There has been a lot of talk about developing rehearsal and/or studio spaces on both sides of the river for this purpose - not only for musicians, but for the visual artists as well. It seems like there are more than enough empty buildings that could be utilized for this, but there's always the issues of security, insurance, utilities, etc. The basic costs have to be covered, which can make renting rehearsal space too expensive for most local bands."