



A Room of Her Own: Women's Personal Spaces

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"In speaking with many women across the country," explains best-selling author Chris Casson Madden in the introduction to her new book, *A Room of Her Own: Women's Personal Spaces*, "I have discovered that as much as we revel in the hard-won victories that have given us new freedoms in pursuing careers and in creating loving relationships, many of us long to find the time in a busy schedule to relax and refresh ourselves, body and spirit. I firmly believe that in order to give back to our relationships, careers, families, and passions, we must pull in for short moments to take care of ourselves, then we can return to the people and places of our lives renewed, refreshed, and ready to continue the drama of our days with all the joys, sorrows, pleasures, and stresses that go with it."

Throughout America Chris has found women from all walks of life who have created for themselves a diversity of personal spaces that provide them the quiet and solitude needed to restore their souls each day. These range from Ali MacGraw's studio in northern New Mexico, its incredible mountain views provide the silence and tranquillity she needs, to designer Sherri Donghia's fabric-filled loft in her Long Island country home, where she can stop, think, relax, and be really honest and creative, to television commentator Chantal Westerman's home, where, amid a collection of altars, crosses, and other religious icons, she has created a peaceful and serene sanctuary.

With over 200 beautiful, full-color photographs and an intimate, engaging text, *A Room of Her Own: Women's Personal Spaces* brings to life the special places that women have created as retreats from their busy everyday routines. Within the seven chapters, *Celebrating Color*, *Sacred Places*, *Working Sanctuaries*, *Natural Retreats*, *Serene Spaces*, *Evoking Memories*, and *Garden Rooms*, innovative and stylish ideas for creating a room of one's own abound. Ella King Torrey, President of the San Francisco Art Institute, explains in *Celebrating Color* why she gravitates toward her sitting room in her home in San Francisco. "I just relax and think in this room," Ella explains. "This room really feeds my soul and reminds me of life's wonderful possibilities. Every object in this room is connected to a personal place or experience, and so sitting in this room keeps me whole."

Carol Anthony, Chantal Westerman, Sally Quinn, Sister Mary Joaquin, and Ali MacGraw all share a passion for the spirit within, for altars, rituals, and the silent, reverent spaces that are profiled in *Sacred Places*. Artist Carol Anthony has a "sanctuario," or shrine. It is a thatched-dome adobe structure surrounded by sage brush and aspen trees where she retreats to rekindle the strength she derives from her beloved New Mexico landscape and finds the muse that is necessary for her career as a highly acclaimed artist.

Ali MacGraw shares a need for a space filled with personal belongings with all of the women featured in *A Room of Her Own*. "There are lots of photographs of my son, my friends, our animals, mementos from my

travels, wildflowers, found rocks and bits from my walks in the arroyo. I think that all of us, men and women, need a tiny spot of total privacy, of stillness, to reconnect with our own souls. I know that the ability to regenerate, to get away a bit, enhances not only my mental health but my ability to work and create and, probably, to navigate the complicated relationships that make up the rest of my life."

An avid spokesperson for the outdoor life and one of the country's most notable mountain climbers, Sandy Hill finds that a rainbow-colored Tibetan tent pitched on the lawn of her Connecticut home fulfills her need for a private space. The tent, featured in *Working Sanctuaries*, was purchased en route to Mount Everest. It is filled with a myriad of pieces that she values emotionally and spiritually. "Everything in this space is necessary to my well-being," she explains.

Designer Victoria MacKenzie-Childs, who, along with her husband, Richard Childs, employs more than three hundred craftspeople, finds her sanctuary in her office, where she can be alone to catch up on correspondence and work. "But my real personal space," explains MacKenzie-Childs, "is a place in consciousness that cannot be taken from or added to. It is truly heaven on earth."

Martha Baker, the mother of four children, a wife, homemaker, career woman, gardener, sports enthusiast, and entertainer, finds that her bedroom offers her a personal space and realizes that it is "as essential to my life as is oxygen." Explains Baker, "I desperately needed sanctuary. My antique-filled bedroom is a place where I feel safe not to think to wander or to tune out. Its a place where I feel I can pull together my thoughts, have a private phone conversation, or just pause in my day."

In *Garden Rooms*, Pat Mason, Bunny Williams, Jessica McClintock, Antonia Bellanca-Mahoney and Lynn von Kersting find their solace surrounded with lush flowers, beloved plants, and an abundance of light pouring in through windows.

For Antonia Bellanca-Mahoney, her sanctuary is her pavilion, a twenty-five-square-foot room with creamy white walls and a slate floor, as well as a glass-fronted garage door that allows her to keep an eye on the world. "Men have always understood the need for a personal space, their hunting cabin, fishing boat, favorite car, woodworking shop, their little shack by the pond, or even their reclining chair in the den," muses Antonia. "Women have such constant demands between work and family that time and space to recharge is a must to maintain equilibrium."

Chris Madden sought out the places women create as retreats from the demands around them. "The connective thread, she concludes, for all of these personal spaces, is that each one, in dazzlingly different ways, brings its owner the sense of solitude, of the sanctuary they need in their rich and engaged lives. Amid the diversity, there were some elements that I found repeated often such things as glorious fabric and pillows,

baskets and bird nests, stones, altars, photographs, and row upon row of hats, boats, books, and shells. Music, scented candles, and views of nature were important elements in these zones of privacy, and help to form the creation of each of these personal spaces."

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