



Welcome to my WORKROOM

Wombats have the right idea – they carve out perfect spaces for themselves underground. So, too HAYLEY CROUSE, who opens her basement-studio doors to her children, friends and cat (and they're all enthusiastic crafters!). By Janai Velez

Think 'basement' and you're just a step or two away from a dark, dank dungeon, right? Bleak, airless, under-house afterthought. Well, not if you're crafty Hayley Crouse, who made her subterranean studio a picture of light and creativity. She did have the advantage of interior-design experience and therefore an innate understanding of form, function and well-considered organisation, but she topped it up beautifully with personal styling, creating a space that meets the needs of her fabric/pattern/clothing-designer business. What makes it notable, however, is the decorative flavour she's added. "I wouldn't say the studio has a specific

style, per se, but more of a feel. It's a cheerful, fun and creative space, with good energy," Hayley says.

The craft basement is on the bottom floor of the family home, which is 45 minutes west of Philadelphia and two hours south-west of New York City. While family life with husband Garrett and their two children rolls along nicely above ground, Hayley can generally be found working on her crafts a few feet below, tuning into the happy noises going on around her, but not allowing herself to be too distracted by them.

But despite the need for professional isolation, Hayley also likes her studio space to be open to visitors. The muffled





sounds of giggles and games sometimes gets the better of her, so she invites family and friends in for company. There's a lovely sitting area in the studio created for guests, with a chair she upcycled with fresh paint and fabric. "The positives are that I get to share my room with others. It's fun to have them in here and see how much they love the room. The only negative is that I end up talking so much with my visitors that my work doesn't get finished!" she says.

Along with visitors and children, another regular guest is Talullah, her curious cat. "Talullah is obsessed with sewing pins for some reason, and as soon as she hears me working, she runs into the room and will stalk the ground for dropped pins and try to run away with

them. Or she'll try to sneak a pin off my magnetic pin tray. I constantly have to chase after her," Hayley says.

The 400-square-foot space was designed to cater for Hayley's work needs – she currently makes clothing patterns (under the name Mouse House Creations), has a fabric line with Michael Miller Fabrics called 'Color Me' (material that can be coloured in with fabric markers) and is in the process of starting up a clothing line, where she'll sell finished items (called Lulah Clothing Co.).

When designing the room, Hayley carefully considered practicalities, such as the location of power outlets and lighting so she could take advantage of every square inch of available space. The floors are vinyl planks, which she



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PUT A LITTLE THOUGHT INTO IT!

Hayley has created a mini sewing space for her daughter, which includes a little table and chair, pink baby sewing machine and accessories. "My biggest piece of advice for those wanting to set up a junior studio area is to make sure you get a table that is their size. You want their foot to be able to reach the pedal without them having to stretch," she says. You'll find more tips on Hayley's Little Stitchers! series on her site (www.welcometothemousehouse.com/category/little-stitchers-2), where she covers choosing the correct sewing machine, ideas for creating a comfortable work area and sewing projects for children, including a fat-quarter skirt and a basic pillowcase.



A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS

BLUE FABRIC HUTCH – The turquoise hutch was bought on Craigslist. It was originally a dining room hutch with glass doors. I removed the doors, painted the wood and added fabric lining to the back. I now store my woven fabrics in it. I love it because it's a one of a kind and holds all my lovely fabrics.

BOWL FULL OF FAT QUARTERS – A large fish bowl I found at a thrift store is the perfect place to stash all of my fat quarters. I love how whimsical it is.

BRIGHT PINK PEGBOARD – We were given a ton of pegboard years ago, and I love using it in unexpected spots around the house. I cut out a rectangle, spray painted it a raspberry pink and now use it to store all of my threads ... in rainbow order, of course.

SMALL TEAL SHELF – Found at a thrift store, the cute little multi-shelf unit is where I store my overlocker threads.

WHITE CORNER CHAIR – A thrifted chair that I re-covered with fabric. Originally, it was in my daughter's room, but it now makes a great spot for my visitors to sit while I work.

MY DAUGHTER'S SEWING TABLE – My daughter, Ainsley, has her own little sewing area. The little table is actually a side table from Ikea, so it's the perfect height for her.



One of Hayley's favourite pieces in the room is an oak china cabinet, which she spray painted blue, fitted with new hardware and lined with fabric. "I love classic pieces, but I also love pairing them with unexpected colours or items." Other than some upcycled pieces, the majority of her furniture consists of plain but practical Ikea staples.

She's reached a point now where she's happy with the way things are in terms of decorating and design. And that's something of a milestone for Hayley, who is teased by friends and family for constantly changing things around. But she reckons that's all part of her DNA. "I was around eight years old when I really became intrigued with interior design, and luckily my parents indulged me and allowed me to change my bedroom frequently. My mum would sew up new curtains, my dad would build shelves and I would paint art for the walls. Every year for Christmas, I dreamt of which art supplies I could ask Santa for. Stitching and crafting has always been a part of my life, and I can't imagine it any other way." And the knowledge and know-how acquired over the years all show in her beloved basement studio space.

To find out more about Hayley Crouse, of Mouse House Creations, visit her website (www.welcometothemousehouse.com), like her Facebook page (www.facebook.com/mousehousecreations) or email her at hayley@welcometothemousehouse.com.



specifically chose to ensure easy sweep-ups of threads and fabric scraps. Walls are bright white to reflect available light and enhance the pops of colour from accessories and furnishings.

In every nook and cranny there's something pretty to look at and some clever storage idea – from the adhesive chalkboard labels on the drawers to the jars and baskets filled with trims that double as bookends. Every detail has been carefully thought through. "I feel that whatever I create is a reflection of who I am, whether it's the concept or the colours or the overall look. I'm always evolving, and perhaps my styles change along with that, too," she says.