

# Art House

In this home the art studio is in the kitchen, the laundry room, the bedroom—you get the picture.

BY AMY SUTHERLAND

On a rainy afternoon, 8-year-old Nonie Thomas hunches over a piece of paper at the kitchen table drawing a portrait of Sugar Cube, the family's white cat. The moment Nate and Henry, her 5-year-old twin brothers, burst through the door, they too go to work. Henry grabs a pencil and paper, and tow-headed Nate reaches for some tape, pink feathers, and a pompom, though he abandons this project in an artistic pique when the tape won't cooperate.

A plate on the kitchen counter brims with the three-

some's handiwork, including brightly painted clothespins and a bunny head made of pompoms with pipe cleaners cleverly bent to make floppy ears, a collaboration between Nonie and Henry. "We don't have a craft room, but we put out a lot of stuff for the kids," says mom Carrie, who previously taught and worked as a developmental psychologist. She set out to make arts and crafts a spontaneous part of her family's everyday life, something her kids can do on their own, with a simple, portable plan.

Her children tote around individual art kits: tackle boxes Carrie stuffs with materials the kids can use wherever and whenever they like. They also have paper, bound art journals, and minicanvases stashed around the house. Creating art "gives each child's personality an outlet," she says.

Nonie likes to spread out on the floor with pens, paper, and scissors. "I like paper cutting a lot," she says. Henry prefers drawing—he begins to work on his own portrait of Sugar Cube at the kitchen ►

"It's like having books out," says mom Carrie of her three kids' portable art kits. "They just learn." That's Nate, above, with his kit.



“Every child is an artist.” —Pablo Picasso



Nate draws from a well of pompom possibilities; a kid-curated collection perches around the windows in the boys' bedroom; if you could peek at the pages of Nonie's journal, you'd find that Sugar Cube is artistic muse as well as family cat.

table. Henry says that Nate, who has slipped off to work at the train table in the boys' room, “likes to make *things*.” A recent example: Nate shaped letters out of pipe cleaners and popsicle sticks to spell “I Love You Mom and Dad,” and laid them out on a chest at the foot of his parents' bed.

“Instead of me always initiating a project, it's just there,” says Carrie. “The kits promote the idea of art without it being more work for me.” Once, she opened Nonie's art book to find her daughter had created a pictorial diary, filling every page with colorful drawings that documented her kindergarten year.

### No Worries

So the children can play independently, the kits are stuffed with tools and supplies Carrie feels they can use safely and relatively neatly, on their own or with friends. Each child has blunt-nose scissors, tape, and glue. Second-grader Nonie has a stapler. Carrie has a very large tackle box filled with permanent markers, the better paints, and the expensive brushes, which she gets out for occasional family sessions.

### Fully Loaded

Carrie fills the art boxes with what she describes as open-ended items, such as feathers,

clothespins, and popsicle sticks, inexpensive raw materials that inspire the kids. She also looks for materials beyond the toy store, where she finds most craft supplies are pricey—and intended for girls. Twist ties, small rocks and pine cones, even office supplies such as blank labels work well. Nonie's kit has grown with her, now including sophisticated items such as sparkle glue, watercolor paints, and pastel crayons. Down the road Carrie may add some balsa wood for building.

### Have Kit, Will Travel

Though the kids are happy to draw and color on the floor, ►

## Home Front



Nonie's enviable art kit; Henry's interests range from drawing to sculpture—he even created a diorama in a rotisserie-chicken container; the kids' dad built this rolling table with an art-drying shelf underneath.

*For more on art tables and stocking art kits, go to [wondertime.com](http://wondertime.com).*



it's also nice to have some table space. Their dad, Bob, made Nonie a low plywood art table on wheels, which works especially well for having friends over to draw and paint. Pictures can dry on the table's lower shelf. When not in use, the 2-foot-by-3-foot table rolls under

Nonie's bed. [We've found that those clear plastic under-the-bed bins with flat lids—a good drawing surface—work well too.]

Carrie needed a spot for backup materials and things, such as oversized pieces of paper, that don't fit into a totable box. A small yellow

chest of architect-style drawers in Nonie's room holds paper, googly eyes, beads, and stickers. Should the kids run out of something they need, there's a ready spot to go for extras. Because when the creative spirit strikes, you don't want to find you're out of pompoms. 🍌



Amy Sutherland's latest book is *Kicked, Bitten, and Scratched: Life and Lessons at the World's Premier School for Exotic Animal Trainers*. Her exotics, above, are Penny and Dixie.

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