

Here & There

DESIGN DISCOVERIES FROM AROUND NEW ENGLAND

Fueled by Passion

A Berkshires-based designer reinvents an old filling station to serve as a bespoke workspace.

BY ERIKA AYN FINCH



Jess Cooney and her dogs, Roxie and Frankie, on the front steps of Jess Cooney Interiors.

In more than fifteen years as an interior designer in the Berkshires, Jess Cooney has outgrown her share of office spaces. When she decided it was time to expand for a fourth time, she told herself she would only do so if she found a building she could purchase. In April 2018, she found it in an unlikely location.

The onetime gas station at the entrance to the town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, on the Housatonic River, had been vacant for three years when Cooney came across it. The dilapidated,



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Art by Berkshires artist Charles Thomas O'Neil adorns the conference room wall. The fabric library, with cabinetry made by Sheffield, Massachusetts-based Erik O.F. Schutz, doubles as an intern workspace. Each designer has a worktable, where materials for current projects are laid out.



3,200-square-foot space required a complete gut renovation, but that wasn't Cooney's biggest challenge. "I wanted to create an envelope that was timeless, yet fresh and on trend on the inside," she says. "And I wanted an interior design that I could change up easily."

She achieved the flexibility she sought by investing in certain aspects of the studio, such as the reclaimed wood flooring, while taking a less permanent approach to other areas. The kitchen backsplash, for example, is a mural rather than tile, because a mural can be repainted easily in a few years.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Farrow & Ball's All White paint offsets rows of ceramic tiles. Artist Joel Haynes painted the kitchen mural; chunky walnut shelving and custom walnut knobs by Erik O.F. Schutz complete the look. The concrete facing of the main showroom's fireplace was custom designed by Jean Claude Minier. Cooney customized cast-iron plumbing pipes to hold fabric and rug swatches in the design library.



Cooney also needed an environment that allowed her six-person team—and their clients—to peruse fabric swatches and paint samples without visual distractions. That meant opting for white paint and brightly lit working areas, while letting color and whimsy shine in smaller spots such as the bathroom with its green grasscloth wallpaper and concrete floor. To keep the client meeting space interesting, Cooney designed a gallery wall with art that rotates seasonally.

After a year of renovations, the new digs welcomed the team last spring. Everyone's favorite aspect: each designer has

her own worktable crafted from reclaimed kitchen islands fitted with Caesarstone countertops.

As someone who's passionate about supporting the makers in her community (the studio's furniture, cabinetry, artwork, and pottery all come from Berkshires craftspeople), Cooney's favorite compliment came shortly after she opened what was once an eyesore. "I had someone tell me that I'd given the town a gift by renovating it," the designer says. "That was the nicest thing for me to hear." *Jess Cooney Interiors, Great Barrington, Mass., jesscooney.com*

EDITOR'S NOTE: For details about this space, see Resources.