

STYLE MAGAZINE

Farm to studio

Outside of Toronto, artists Nadia Belerique and Tony Romano build a creative space for a collaborative practice

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Artists Tony Romano and Nadia Belerique have been slowly redeveloping the 26-acre farm in Warkworth, Ont. they bought in 2018.

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Growing up, Nadia Belerique wanted to be an architect. “But I’m not that good at math, and I like to break rules,” she says. “So I became an artist.” Today, the photographer and sculptor exhibits globally, but, occasionally, she also dabbles in designing buildings. With her husband, fellow artist Tony Romano, Belerique has been slowly redeveloping a 26-acre farm in Warkworth, Ont. It’s a project that almost never was.

“We bought the farm in 2018,” Belerique says. “Tony loves to garden. He’s a sort of farmer. But we never thought we would live here full time.”

“Then COVID hit and we didn’t like the idea of paying crazy Toronto rents,” Romano says. “So, we decided to try to make it work here full time. Now our daughter goes to school here.”

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The 1,500-square-foot pavilion that houses the artists' studios is clad in board-and-batten, silvering cedar, a nod to the barns in the area.

The couple spent their first year or two on the farm renovating a small house, knocking down walls to create an open-concept living space with exposed rafters, barn-board floors and a loft-style bedroom overlooking the main floor. Unfortunately, the house didn't provide a pandemic essential: a place to work, which led to a bigger project.

"We needed studios," Belerique says. "Neither of us had a great studio before. We thought, 'Here's a chance for each of us to make the perfect one.'" What constitutes the perfect studio was the subject of debate, down to the details. "Nadia wanted lots of big windows," Romano says. "I didn't."

"We had philosophical discussions about what the windows should do," Belerique says. "Should they frame views like a camera or simply let in light? I wanted larger windows overlooking the surrounding fields. Tony wanted windows higher up on the walls." In the end, they did both, with a mix of square and strip apertures at different heights. "It creates very cinematic lighting," Belerique says.

Any tension about the design is not evident in the resulting space, which balances workhorse practicality with gallery-like minimalism. "The building has to serve many functions," Belerique says. "There was also no way I was going to make an ugly building."



The space balances the practicality of a busy workshop with gallery-like minimalism.

The 1,500-square-foot pavilion is clad in board-and-batten, silvering cedar, a nod to the barns in the area. Inside, it’s packed with amenities, including a kitchen, gym and office that doubles as a guest bedroom. There are also twin studios, one for each artist, separated by a central lounge where the couple sits, talks and reads during breaks.

The space is where the couple, who married in 2017, completed their first professional collaboration together (other than the farm itself). For the Lassonde Art Trail, an open-air gallery in downtown Toronto that launched in June, they created *Homing*, a cast-aluminum sculpture. The form resembles a mythical creature – perhaps a six-legged horse with a bird for a head. Composed of objects commonly found in a home, including a dining table, wash basin, plates and cutlery, it also evokes the energy of bustling family dinners, the kind of gathering that makes people feel at home.

“In a way, the studio is a homing place for us,” Belerique says. “That’s why the title worked.” The name also reflects how the couple made the piece. “We are often very busy, often away,” Belerique says. “But we kept coming back to the sculpture in the studio, returning to it, trying to see it in different lights. When we were apart, we would leave each other notes, exchanging thoughts between us about how to make it better.”

Get the look



Purple Magazine

In the lounge, Romano designed and built the wall-mounted bookcases that house the couple’s collection of books on art and philosophy. “I also love culture magazines,” Belerique says. “We have a lot of Purple magazines.”

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MÅLA easel

Romano and Belerique’s five-year-old daughter, Isola, has her own space in the studio, an easel in the lounge with both a whiteboard and chalkboard.

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Arbor Garden Solutions worktable

The couple custom-built their worktables. Similar versions are available through U.K.-based Arbor Garden Solutions, with ample shelving for tools and casters for easy relocation.

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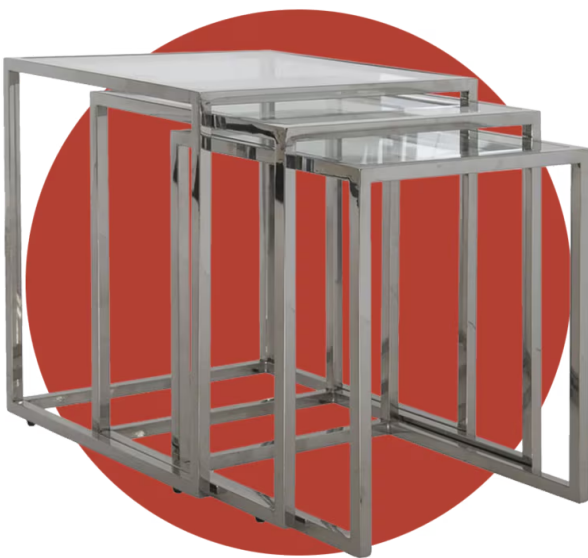
Sojourner Truth Parsons artwork



The studio features artwork collected by the couple. The piece behind the sofa in the lounge is by longtime friend and internationally celebrated artist Sojourner Truth Parsons.

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Giulia tables



Most of the furniture is vintage, including the three cubic nesting tables in the lounge. New versions are available, such as the Giulia tables, which feature tempered-glass tops and chrome legs.

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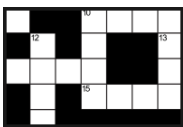
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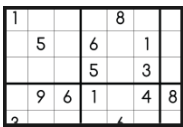
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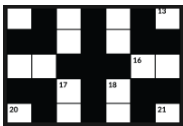
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