

# living

lifestyle | design | home

Having recently bought a new—but smaller—home in Santa Fe, author Douglas Preston needed a place where he could write his acclaimed suspense thrillers and nonfiction books. After an extensive search, he found a worn-down office space on Palace Avenue that designer Kris Lajeskie, of Kris Lajeskie Design Group, transformed into the ultimate writing studio. On the next few pages, Preston offers an inside look into the space, which serves as both a refuge and an inspiration.

# a room of one's own

bestselling author Douglas Preston's "writer's lair"

by Amy Hegarty



Above: The warm and welcoming front room of Preston's studio—which features travertine floors, Venetian plaster walls, a custom hair-on-hide rug, custom walnut coffee table, and velvet-clad butler's chair—has a salon-like quality; previous page: two Navajo rugs, which were purchased in Santa Fe in the 1920s by Preston's great aunt, hang above a sofa in the writer's office, which takes up the back room of the studio.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, DOUGLAS PRESTON made what he calls “one of those crazy, spur-of-the-moment decisions” that led him to quit his job as publications manager for the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and move to Santa Fe—despite the fact that he had been here only once, as a child, and had no memory of that visit. “Desperately poor” and “practically starving to death” for his first few years in the City Different, Preston nevertheless embraced his new life and surroundings and eventually hit it big as a *New York Times* bestselling author who's become well-known for the suspense thrillers he co-writes with Lincoln Child as well as for his 2008 nonfiction book *The Monster of Florence* (which is being made into a movie starring George Clooney as Preston). Since his fateful move in 1986—in addition to seeing his writing career take off, Preston met his wife, Christine, at a local art gallery—the author has divided his time primarily between the Southwest and the Northeast. “We sold our house in Santa Fe in 2004 and moved to Maine, then bought another house here in 2009,” Preston says. “It's a really small space, though, so I needed an office.”

That need for an office eventually led Preston to an old medical center in the Kruger building on

Palace Avenue. “The gentleman who owned it was retiring so the price was good, but the space was absolutely horrible as a writing studio,” he says. “It was a tiny warren of dark rooms with old carpet but I thought, boy, there are really big windows here and they’re really nice.” Another plus was the office’s location. “I really liked that it was downtown,” Preston says. “I lived for a while in Florence, Italy, and when I would get stuck with my writing I loved being able to go out into the bustle of the city, get an espresso or something to eat, then go back to my retreat. While nature inspires me a lot, I love getting out among people, and downtown Santa Fe provides that opportunity.”

Before signing on the dotted line for the Kruger studio, however, Preston asked Kris Lajeskie, a family friend and founder and CEO of Kris Lajeskie Design Group, to look at the space. “It was in bad shape,” she says, “but I could see through everything at once.” Encouraged by Lajeskie’s shared faith in the studio, which she refers to as Preston’s “writer’s lair” (“Doug’s a suspense thriller writer—of course it has to be a lair!” she jokes.), the author bought it and handed control of both the remodeling and design aspects over to Lajeskie. “It’s



Douglas Preston



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Vinyl lettering on the studio's kitchenette mirror displays the titles of Preston's bestselling books.

very important to me to create a very high level of trust with my clients," she says of her process. "I'm very careful up front about understanding the nature of the job and the client's priorities and preferences, and then I run with it."

Lajeskie approached the transformation of Preston's studio by first considering the functionality of the environment. "Doug is a very dedicated writer and needs to be in a secure space that doesn't have a lot of distractions," she says. "I'd seen many of his other writing studios and knew that he needed to be inspired, but in a small and intimate setting," she adds.

Having always thought of Preston as "a renaissance man," Lajeskie wanted to ensure that his studio reflected "the many passions in his life," she says. A salon-like parlor fronts the now two-room studio and is ideal for entertaining friends and meeting with business associates. Eye-catching details throughout include an old Union Jack Flag used (in honor of Preston's English heritage) to upholster the couch; a rare, antique, New Mexico butter maker that passes as a small sofa table; and florilegium prints by Joseph Banks made during an 18th-century visit to Tierra del Fuego with Captain Cook. Preston sent the prints to Lajeskie and she used them to make "a major statement on the focal wall when entering the studio," she says.

The most meaningful items in the "lair," however, are the two Navajo rugs that hang over a sitting area near the

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desk in the rear room, which is Preston's actual office. "Those rugs are really important to me," Preston says. "My great aunt Aletheia, who was an artist, purchased them when she was visiting Santa Fe in the 1920s. She bought a lot of great stuff here, like Maria Martinez pots, that's been passed down to the family. The rugs represent a sort of connection between my family and this area."

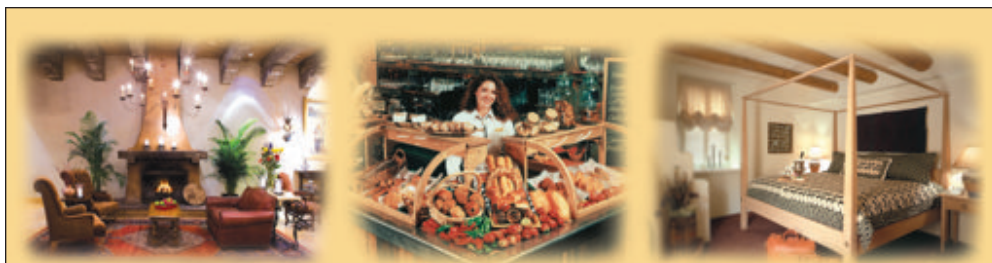
Having finished the project in what Lajeskie describes as record time, she then arranged for Preston to come by for an official unveiling, which, the designer says, she always "makes a bit of a fanfare out of." Indeed, when Preston walked into the



A "host" table, with a custom iron sculpture and a colored-glass pendant above it, serves as a bar as well as an eating or working space in the studio's front room.

studio for the first time, "Kris put a blind-fold on me," he recalls. "When I saw what she had done I was staggered," he adds. "I couldn't believe how beautiful it was."

With his latest book, *Gideon's Corpse* (much of which is set in Santa Fe and Los Alamos), due to hit bookshelves in January, and with a number of other projects in the works, Preston plans to take full advantage of his functional—and fabulous—new office. "I'm pretty much a 40-hours-a-week writer," he says, "so I'll be using this space every day of the week and possibly on week-ends. It's a wonderfully inspirational place to work." **SF**



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