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October 7-13, 2004

## CITYSPACE

### Open Studio Sessions



**labor of love: Studios like Ed Bronstein's, located on Naudine Street near 22nd and South, will be visitor-friendly.** Photo By: Michael

T. Regan

### Tours will showcase artists and their buildings for two weekends.

*by Joanne Aitken*

Louis Kahn, one of the 20th century's most esteemed architects, moved to Philadelphia as a toddler and lived here for the rest of his life. A great teacher, he is still known for enigmatic but thought-provoking statements such as, "A city is a place where a small boy when he walks through it may see something that will tell him what he wants to do with his whole life" and "I think a city is measured by the character of its availabilities."

Kahn's words describe the sensation that anyone who loves cities feels when walking the sidewalks of a great one: that back-of-the-mind awareness that on street after street, behind row after row of building facades, there are thousands of others pursuing their passionate interests. It doesn't matter whether their intent is to develop a better computer program, find a cure for cancer, translate a Latin text or make new music. The buzz of activity gives off a hint of possibility that affects us all.

Philadelphia, the place that inspired Kahn's notions about urban life, is a city that tends to keep its availabilities under close wraps. For whatever reason, we make it difficult for residents—let alone visitors—to learn about and appreciate what goes on here.

But for the next two weekends, you can glimpse some of it when more than 140 of Philadelphia's visual artists invite you into their studios during the fifth annual Philadelphia Open Studio Tours (POST). This is a rare opportunity to see the creative work that goes on behind closed doors all over the city.

Who knew there were so many good painters, printmakers, sculptors, potters, photographers and craftsmen in our midst? You may not like everything you see, but the serendipity of finding work that delights you will more than make up for the time spent looking at the rest. Take a chance and try something new. Never thought you were interested in portraits? Abstract work? Maybe not. But then, maybe you just haven't seen that one piece that will open the door to a new horizon.

Philadelphia architects, designers and artists—many of whom will have work on display—are available to discuss their work during the event. It may seem intimidating to speak with the artists, but don't let it stop you. (If you're shy, listen while they talk to someone else.) Once you know a bit about the artist's intent, the work may take on new meaning. On the other hand, if something instantly strikes you as ravishing, the chance to meet the artist face-to-face is a thrill in itself.

One great offshoot of POST is that the first weekend includes studios west of Broad Street and the second weekend includes those to the east. Along the way, you'll be able to examine public art and urban design in various areas of the city. Philadelphia is a big place but there are artists working everywhere. You'll almost certainly travel down streets that are new to you and catch a glimpse of community life you didn't know existed. Discovering a lively neighborhood you've never before explored is a great way to feel good about the city and its future.

You may also meet new neighbors. It's a happy surprise to find that a few blocks from your own front door is the studio of an artist with a local—or even national—reputation. Or that the woman you see at the dog park every morning is an emerging photographer.

As Philadelphians, we're rooted in our neighborhoods, and this will give you one more reason to be especially proud of yours. A city may be measured by the character of its availabilities, but those availabilities can't exist unless they're supported by a broader constituency. After all, isn't this sort of opportunity the reason we're all living here in the first place? It's a two-way street—go do your part.

*Joanne Aitken, AIA, is an architect and a steering committee member of Philadelphia's Design Advocacy [Group](#). For more information on POST, see [www.philaopenstudios.com](http://www.philaopenstudios.com).*



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