

# Alternative Space

## Turning Your Home Into a Gallery

by Dan Zamudio with Julie Sulzen

Sometimes artists become so focused on searching for galleries to exhibit their artwork that they are often blind to the most obvious showcase location: their own home.

Alternative spaces that showcase artwork abound in our city. Recently my wife and I have attended openings at a restaurant, a coffeehouse, the hallway of a 1960s office building, a library, an antique store, a bookstore, a bar, a mechanic's garage, an old abandoned warehouse, and a condo. We believe that some of the best work of the city is often not represented within the Gallery District but is found in other "outsider" locations.

This article shares the process of creating, promoting and transforming an artist's home into an elegant gallery. By opening our home/studio as an alternative space for exhibitions, my wife Julie Sulzen and I have become instrumental in creating a community of Chicago-based artists working together to establish a life, and living, in the arts. For the past three years, my wife and I have been curators for a series of art exhibitions at our own home and studio.

When we first moved into our home/studio, the area was a seedy neighborhood because of 20 years of neglect. My wife, who had been teaching art classes in the living room of her "nice neighborhood" apartment, was concerned that her students wouldn't want to continue classes at the new space.

Although we had originally intended to separate the work space from the home and living areas, we decided that the best way for her students to become comfortable with the new location would be to use the entire space for a one-night-only art exhibition showcasing their



*More than 300 people attended a recent Zamudio/Sulzen opening*

best work, along with our own pieces. The show would be non-juried and have no entry fee. To make it even easier for the students we offered to frame their pieces and wire them for hanging. (What were we thinking!) We made a postcard on the computer announcing the show and listing all the participating students. The cards were given to the participating artists who sent them (as we did) to friends and family.

One hour before the start time, my wife was on the ladder duct-taping wire to keep the work straight ... I was frantically typing up titles and prices on labels inside a room piled high with furniture ... and the phone kept ringing with people asking for directions. Shouts of "We're not going to make it!!!" echoed through our home. We

changed from work clothes to fancy attire during the one minute between the ladder being put away and the first guest arriving.

The result was overwhelming. My wife's students were thrilled with showing their work in a real Art Show. Some students highlighted their names on the postcard they sent out to their friends and family. They brought food and wine, although we told them we would be providing all the refreshments. We sold a number of pieces. More than 50 names were added to our mailing list. Many people commented on what a wonderful time they had at our Party and insisted that we do another real soon. And, to revisit the original concern that prompted us to host a show in the first place: my wife had a 100% student return rate.

This one-night show to keep students has become a tradition, with next April being the Fourth Annual Sulzen Fine Art Studio Art Exhibition. Last April, more than 300 people attended the one-night affair. We have been highlighted in various local newspapers and even referred to as an "an elegant gallery." The local alderman and other politicians have attended. We have been asked to join a small business group in the neighborhood.

Local businesses have asked if they could donate coffee, flowers, or treats in exchange for a little sign promoting their business.

The student work submitted has improved in quality each year.

Our shows have encouraged