

What's On My Desk: Monica Adair of Acre Architects

Jun 15, 2017 by [Cherise Letson](#)



Monica Adair and Stephen Kopp. Image: Cherise Letson/Huddle

Monica Adair and Stephen Kopp have become New Brunswick's rock-star architects.

The [founding partners of Acre Architects](#) recently won the [Lieutenant-Governor's Award of Excellence in Architecture](#), awarded only every three years, for their design home design [Into the Wild](#) in Saint John's North end. They also received an Award of Merit for their design of the [Tinker Apple Orchard](#) on the Kingstone Peninsula.

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"We're in a place that has a really strong history and a really strong past. I think these [projects] were steps into looking at how we can be true to place, but also look to our future," says Adair. "Looking at how contemporary architecture can also be part of our identity and represent who we are as New Brunswickers and how we live. For us, it was a really great step for that."

This week we decided to pay Acre Architects a visit at their uptown Saint John office to see where these award-winning designs get created. We chatted with Adair in her office to find out what gets her inspired.



Image: Cherise Letson/Huddle

Where is your workspace?

We are on Canterbury Street and we're on the third floor. We have no elevator, so you might have felt it coming in the door. This used to be an old box factory, so it's kind of funny, being a place that's supposed to think out of the box and here we are in a box factory.

We used the old windows here to make our offices. It's a big brick building with lots of sun-filled light ... We had our baby here, so this is where he was kind of growing up, in a place where he could sleep and cry and not the bug the rest of the office. Now it's a place where everyone can just get away, do a little bit of private work and I kind of get stuck in the corner here.

Can you describe the effort you put in to make this space the way it is?

As you can see, it's full of stuff. It's ever-changing. I think it's a place that we can collect and curate things of meaning. I just like to be surrounded by things that remind me of things that I love or that inspire me or things of beauty. They are just small, tactile things. It looks like people would be like, "Oh my goodness when is she going to clean her desk?" But it's full of things that take me to far away places or ground me in things that really matter and that I'm like, "Oh yeah, that was really exciting." They are little tinges of excitement. They are like a photo album in a way of your memories. They remind me of projects that we worked on in the past ... Just things you find along the way in your journeys that connect you to those people. It's really just about connecting with things that matter to me and Stephen.

What's the kind of work that you do here?

We have a practice of storied architecture where we inspire people to live great stories. In a way, I think our desk is an extension of all those stories or elements of stories that we've lived or that we've lived with our clients or that we want to live. Just surrounding ourselves with reminders that we want to live a great life.



Image: Cherise Letson/Huddle

What are some of the things that your surround yourself with to stay productive?

Things that I love. If you look around there are a lot of [Darren Emenau](#) pieces, a lot of his earthenware. They hold my paper clips, they hold my business cards, they hold my pens, scissors, Exacto knives. Those are everywhere. I think they are all through the office, everyone has them. They connect me to New Brunswick, they connect me to the [kiln] firings we were a part of for some of these. That spirit of adventure and collaboration is something that we love. He recently did tiles for us in one of our houses. They were really beautiful. I think had I maybe not been around them all the time, he may not have come to mind.

We have an hour glass. We use it a lot here in the office. We have little design charrettes. We try to figure out whatever the design challenge is in the amount of time. I love the hourglass because I love time. I love the idea that great ideas can take years, but they can also take seconds. Every day is the possibility of something great happening. There's no time limit on creating. Great ideas can come quickly too, which is kind of fun. So we're always playing with time. Space and time for me are things I really love.

Is there anything you can't have around while you're working?

I don't think so. Sometimes I like things really loud and feed off the energy of our whole team and work out in the open office. Then sometimes I just put on headphones and listen to music and get into a zone, especially when I'm writing. I need to listen to music full blast.

What inspired you to have a workspace like this?

It's more organic, coming up with a vision for it. It's kind of the opposite of our projects, not a lot of planning. It's more letting it come to life. As we collect art and find pieces, then we start to add to the collection and it starts to enrich our life ... We're kind of adding these little pieces to our life along the way. I think it's just more organic and letting it build like a patina. As we age, we take on these memories.

Also, we're uncovering things. This floor was all covered in plywood and then we lifted it up and found this great floor and we wanted to keep it. So it's a bit of mining for great things and building on to this. Then I think it's finding out what inspires us, so we're just surrounding ourselves by that.

What would you say is the most important thing on your desk?

It's funny, I love being around things, but I'm not bound by objects ... I love to have these things but I love the freedom of not having to need those things. They're beautiful and I love them, but I don't need them ... except for my motorcycle helmet.

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