



Den of Zen

By Sloan Schang

example 5

WRITER AND FILM PRODUCER Katy Kavanaugh arrives at her office building on a flawless summer Friday and unhinges a small wooden gate. As she strolls into a manicured courtyard dotted with blooming hostas and lounge chairs, she exchanges a few words with the caretaker, a burly Rottweiler named Hero, who would be a fierce enforcer of the strict no-shoes policy if he weren't such a sucker for a belly scratch. No need for a last breath of fresh air; inside, the space is awash in natural light and a cool breeze flows through half a dozen open windows. Kavanaugh's arrival at the Writers' Dojo is about as close as she can get to coming home without, well, going home.

"It's apropos that we first furnished the space with stuff from our own living room," says Jeffrey Selin, a writer himself, who founded the Writers' Dojo in January 2008 with his wife, Rachel. The couple discovered the perfect location in St. Johns, next to a 1930s wedding chapel that Jeffrey's brother Michael had recently redeveloped into a martial arts school and fitness studio. Jeffrey knew immediately that the bamboo floors and soothing Zen atmosphere of the adjacent rectory building, which Michael had remodeled as a yoga studio, would provide the ideal place to realize his dream of establishing a relaxed but motivated writers' collective. "We wanted to create the feeling of home here, but we also want people to feel like they've just entered a professional, literary space," he says.



Jeffrey is referring to a small but growing group of writers—poets, published and aspiring novelists, journalists, and all manner of freelance scribes—who visit the Dojo regularly to ply their craft and to share inspiration, find encouragement, and drink eye-poppingly strong coffee.

As at other "co-working" spaces around the world, writers pay a monthly membership fee to use the Dojo's offices. But where traditional workspaces are often one-dimensional fields of cubicles, this is a refreshingly atypical workday retreat that satisfies the sometimes-reclusive, sometimes coffee-shop-butterfly nature of the professional writing community. For \$120 a month, members get unfettered access to a desk, wireless Internet, a printer, and basic office supplies like envelopes for mailing manuscripts—not to mention the use of a kitchen,





▶ **NATURAL LIGHT** abounds in the yoga studio turned co-working space, where writers settle into comfy Herman Miller chairs and spread out on generous farm tables from ECOPdx. Plush oriental rugs from NW Rugs feel great underfoot and also lend comfort to the “conversation pit,” where decorative accents from local stores like Cargo and Antiques & Oddities help round out the space’s simple Zen aesthetic.

▶ **WRITERS ARRIVING** for work at the Writers’ Dojo pass through custom-crafted wood-and-iron gates. A remodeled wedding chapel (*right*) houses the martial arts studio Ecole de Budo Raji. The sounds of classes in session often drift across the landscaped courtyard to the tranquil writers’ room (*left*).



▶ **WRITERS AT THE Dojo** have access to amenities like showers (for freshening up after a long bike commute or a session in the attached martial arts studio), a comfy lounge, and a well-stocked kitchen area.

This Desk for Hire

Monthly or hourly membership fees at these three co-working spaces buy you time at a desk with a comfy chair, use of common areas like kitchens and break rooms, and Internet access. Each space offers a full menu of additional amenities—everything from private voice mail to fax machines to a quiet meeting place—usually for an added cost.



CubeSpace

Southeast Portland's CubeSpace is a buzzing honeycomb of cubicles, often filled with tech-industry freelancers. At first blush, it appears to be a traditional Dilbert-land, but it turns out to be quite a bit more varied—and fun. On the north side of the building are cubicles and private offices with extras like private phone lines with voice mail. Opposite is a quiet zone of phone-free cubicles, in addition to a small, open area where freestanding desks can be arranged at will. The space's centerpiece is an oversized break room that's filled with homey couches and armchairs, equipped with a Nintendo Wii, and decorated with local art and fliers announcing in-house yoga and knitting nights. No wonder co-founders Eva Schweber and David Kaminsky are staunch defenders of the frequent water-cooler break.

www.cubespacepdx.com
622 SE Grand Ave | 503-206-3500
Monthly membership packages range from \$100 to \$450 for phone cubicles, quiet cubicles, private offices, flexspace, and conference rooms.



▼ **THE DOJO'S FOUNDER,** Jeffrey Selin, leans on a table made of reclaimed wood from ECOpdx in the quiet upstairs loft reserved for writers working on deadline. Wicker chairs from Cargo offer a relaxing way to recline.



showers, a communal lounge, and even the airy martial arts and fitness studio next door. "I want members to be conscious of their space and community," Jeffrey explains.

On one side of the Dojo's main floor, writers settle into sturdy Herman Miller Celle office chairs, staring down blinking cursors and nodding in time to the rhythms coursing through their earbuds. Notes are scattered across generous oak farm tables and desks made of tropical wood. The most striking of these desktop slabs is pocked with ancient knots and worm burrows—it was crafted from the wood of a jackfruit tree that was felled by an Indonesian tsunami, recovered and milled by Portland wood reclamation outfit Tropical Salvage, and then shaped into a table by ECOpdx, a local furniture company.

On the other side of the room is a different kind of reclaimed furniture—comfortable leather sofas and plush armchairs taken from Jeffrey's own living room. This is the conversation pit, where writers talk pitch strategy, dish on literary agents, and bemoan the state of American grammar. A steadily expanding library overlooks the area, its shelves stuffed with industry handbooks, literary journals, and literature ranging from Herman Melville to Amy Tan. Nearby, a special shelf holds signed works by local authors like Chelsea Cain and Chuck Palahniuk. These books are referenced often, in reverent conversation and in urgent glances from the Dojo's working writers, who hope to emulate that level of success.



This Desk for Hire cont.



Souk

In an effort to appeal to Portland's creative class (read: small-business entrepreneurs, architects, and advertising whizzes), Julia Duryea founded Souk in 2007 as a cubicle-free zone. With exposed brick walls, wood floors, and a lofted ceiling that arches over an open floor plan of 24 hot desks—many of which are adjustable to accommodate sitting or standing—Souk acts as a modern-day intellectual bazaar that offers the kind of sophistication, inspiration, and community that such professionals thrive in.

www.soukllc.com
322 NW Sixth Ave, Ste 200 | 503-517-6900
Fees range from \$10 per hour to \$499 per month for hot desks, private offices, and conference rooms.



Portland Innovation Center

Steps away from Gov. Tom McCall Waterfront Park and MAX light-rail, the Portland Innovation Center is especially attractive to tech freelancers working for downtown clients. The space blends the traditional office décor of partitioned cubicles with the elegance of an urban loft—walls of exposed brick and large windows lend character to the space.

www.portlandinnovationcenter.com
115 NW First Ave, Ste 400 | 503-972-9313
Monthly membership ranges from \$299 to \$900 for cubicles and spacious "executive offices" with windows.

▼ **ONE-OF-A-KIND**
pieces like this small writing desk from ECOpx mix easily with a wicker chair from Cargo and functional bookshelves from Ikea.



Climb the spiraling, steel-and-wood staircase to enter the Dojo's loft, a world apart from the clatter of the main floor. Up here, phones are off-limits and quiet concentration prevails; desks crafted from locally hewn fir and purpleheart wood furnish the space. Skylights illuminate writers working at their desks, some of whom are on tight deadlines—the dates of which they've likely scrawled onto the communal dry-erase calendar hanging on the wall. "If you add a deadline to it, someone is going to notice and ask you if you met it," Jeffrey says.

The group calendar represents the kind of accountability that the Dojo's writers can't find in their isolated home offices. And that sense of community, blended with a comfortable, amenity-filled workspace that fosters productivity, is a big part of what keeps writers like Kavanaugh coming back. "I love the clear, open, Japanese style here," she says as she adds her deadline to the calendar. But what ultimately sold her on the space was the extra bonus of a martial arts and fitness studio next door. "I'm a writer and a dancer," she says, "so I've dreamt of having a space with wall-to-wall mats where I can write for a while and then throw myself around." ■

➤ See The List, page 137

