

Holly Gagne at
her design studio

NATURAL SETTING

INTERIOR DESIGNER HOLLY GAGNE'S CALM DEMEANOR MANIFESTS IN HER WORKSPACE, A BEAUTIFUL HISTORICAL BARN DEEP IN THE COUNTRYSIDE WHERE EMPLOYEES AND CLIENTS ALIKE FEEL AT EASE.

By Courtney Goodrich
Photographs by Eric Roth



THE WAY INTERIOR DESIGNER HOLLY GAGNE TALKS about home design makes you forget about the sometimes tedious details of paint chips and color palettes and throw pillows. She talks about people—how clients, designers, contractors, and other valuable professionals uniquely unite for each and every project to create a space that becomes a home. She brings her calm thoughtfulness to the process. And she really enjoys it.

“Home is the one place where we can be our authentic selves,” says Gagne. “It’s where we can do whatever we need to do to recharge, and to just be with our families and those we love.” Whatever the project, she guides her clients by first asking them “to go inward and consider what will feel best to them.”

Gagne, who earned a master’s degree in interior architecture from the Boston Architectural College after working for seven years in human resources and professional services in Boston, founded Holly Gagne Interior Design in 2007. She has worked out of a 3,000-square-foot barn studio attached to her house in Rowley since 2011. The enticing combination of a quiet neighborhood and an in-home studio motivated her and her husband, Jeff Gagne, to put an offer on the house when their son, Jack, was one year old. (They welcomed their daughter, Isla, 4 years later.)

“It’s very hard to balance the needs of your children

with work,” says Gagne. “I knew I could have a more balanced experience with them if I was close by with the ability to manage my own schedule.” She adds, “When the offer was accepted, I said, ‘I have to make this work. People have to work here and clients have to enjoy this.’” Also, having a large physical space “really helped me grow my mind around my business,” she says.

Since the previous owner had used the space, which dates to 1906, as an art studio and gallery, it already had creative energy. Gagne made some cosmetic changes to personalize it and then got right to work.

No matter what project she’s working on, Gagne says it’s so important for clients to think about and articulate how they live, what’s important to them, and why they like what they like. Over the last 11 years, she’s completed many designs on the North Shore and

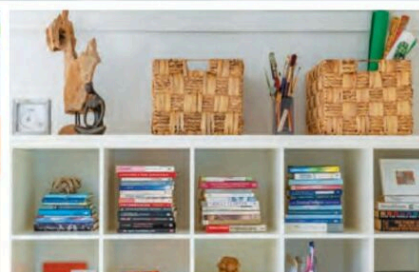
Left, Lynn Steeve’s uses part of the studio to create her floral designs. Above, Clients feel at ease in this welcoming space.

beyond, and she currently serves as a member of the Rowley Historic District Commission and Rowley Historical Commission. Her main focus is to help contractors get the decisions they need when they need them and to help her clients make decisions with confidence. “We are a champion for both contractors and clients because we know that will help the construction process run smoothly for everyone,” she says.

Being organized and allocating time well mean decisions don’t have to be made on the fly. Also, Gagne pays significant attention to the technical aspect of her job. “We draw and render everything in 3D, down to plumbing and lighting fixtures, cabinet hardware, and materials, so clients and contractors can visualize the end product before anything gets built.”

Helping Gagne hold it all together is the studio itself—a workspace that has become a special place for her and her team. Originally part of a farm for a nearby mansion (which is now a nursing and rehabilitation center), the structure was converted in the 1950s, but elements such as the original pulley system for hay, built-in scale, cattle feed trays, and beautiful barn doors remain. Between the computers are drawings, fabric samples, styling accessories, and large tables where the designers gather and work together. Light shines in from the quiet countryside—a reminder for them to appreciate the nature that’s just outside and incorporate it into their designs.

“We are passionate about the positive benefits being in and around nature can bring to our inner well-being,” she says. “I’m from Maine, so being in this type of rural



environment is very grounding for me.” Also, when clients visit, “we want them to know we are designing from a place filled with energy and inspiration, and that it is not just an office,” says Gagne. Walking into the studio, clients feel comfortable, welcome, and inspired.

“The barn is more of a lab where we can be playful and experiment with design,” says lead designer Tina Sanchez, adding that “it is constantly evolving.” Gagne’s team also includes associate designer Kimberlee Knott, studio manager Meg Manion, and a part-time stylist, Ashley Courtney. Lynn Steeves, a floral designer, also uses a section of the studio, often creating custom designs for Holly’s interior styling projects. “Working in the barn and being surrounded by like-minded, creative, hardworking women is so rewarding and inspiring,” says Steeves.

In summarizing her design philosophy, Gagne says, “We want to visit a project 10 years from now and find that the client does not want to change anything. Nothing feels tired because the decisions they made were authentic rather than on-trend.”

Gagne is true to herself, her family, and her team. She’s dedicated to serving clients and contractors...and she does love those paint chips and color palettes and throw pillows. If you need her, she’ll be breathing in the fresh Rowley air that surrounds her barn, toiling away inside creating another home that truly makes others happy. ■

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Original elements in the barn remain such as the barn doors and cattle feed trays. Gagne keeps the space well organized.

