Come As You Are, As You Were

Words By Allegra Salvadori Loni | Photography by Michael Pelzer

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Before you reach the door of the **Shanna Gatanis Design Studio**, you're already inside the story. A mural painted across the entrance reads ***"come as you are, as you were,"*** a line borrowed from Nirvana, and you pass through a circular door that gives no hint of what a normal office looks like, because this isn't one.


Nina Simone
PEOPLE



The building sits in **Winter Park's Palmetto Grove, the Florida district** where Gatanis started her firm twenty years ago. ***"It felt like the right place, energetically and intentionally, to put down new roots,"*** she says. What was once three separate businesses is now 2,000 square feet run as a sequence of rooms, Drawing Room, Record Lounge, Kaleidoscope Conference Room, Furniture Gallery, built, she says, on the belief that ***"design is best understood through experience rather than presentation."***

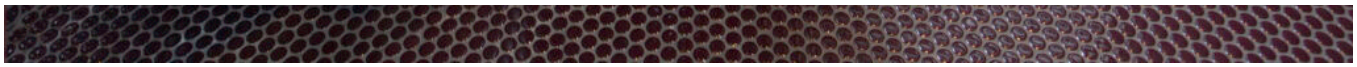






The Record Lounge carries that idea furthest: a Technics turntable, Steinway speakers, a curved seating pit low enough that clients take their shoes off unasked, records running from The Clash to Nina Simone to Tupac. The instinct traces back to Gatanis's early years as a roadie for John Mellencamp. ***"No matter someone's background, beliefs, or circumstances, everyone came together through music,"*** she says. ***"It creates a pause, shifts energy, and allows people to feel more human and more themselves."*** Past the entry fireplace sits a 1957-Chevy-pink piano under a neon sign reading *"Only When I'm Dancing Can I Feel This Free"*, the moment, she says, where architecture, nature, music and emotion collide at once.


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Curved breezeblock walls, warm oak, lacquered millwork and a palette of blues and burgundy hold the rooms together without flattening them. Her own office, the Drawing Room, is the space she calls closest to her point of view, built, in her words, ***“from a raw creative process, pen to paper.”***


GABBA
GABBA
HEY

The build took fourteen months. Balancing a 1950s shell against sculptural new interventions was, she admits, ***“the greatest challenge.”*** What she landed on in the end: ***“a highly personal, experiential world for clients to engage with design.”*** Take your shoes off. The record’s already spinning.



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