A stepping-stone pathway under an arch of hemlock and hydrangea leads the visitor through a living tunnel, opening onto an expansive, beautifully landscaped backyard. Also in the back, just out of view, are two immaculate chicken coops for Jan’s white-crested black Polish bantoms.

Jan Brett on Creating an Artist’s Retreat

* Find a space where you can close the door, especially if you have a young family. I like to get away from the chatter of TV and other people, though I often listen to classical music while I paint.
* Pay attention to lighting. If you work a lot at night, as I do, full-spectrum lights can help keep you more alert. They can also help with your mood, especially during winter. During the day, good natural light and a view are ideal; my studio looks out onto my backyard and a bird feeder.
* Surround yourself with items that inspire you. My great-uncle, Harold Brett, was a well-known artist. He did a drawing of me when I was 5 years old that I keep in my studio. After he completed my portrait, I knew that I wanted to be an artist, too.
* I use large, flat drawers to keep items I need close at hand, such as reference photos and brushes. I also use a big bulletin board to tack up book ideas and artwork.
* Create an artist’s space for your kids, too! It can be as simple as reserving a part of the kitchen table and supplying them with three essentials: a ream of inexpensive paper, colored pencils, and an electric pencil sharpener. Don’t be too ambitious with materials—I didn’t use watercolor until I was an adult. Colored pencils are more nuanced than crayons or markers. Most important, give kids the time they need to do art. Let them use their imaginations, and don’t focus on the finished product. If your child wants to draw nothing but bricks, brick after brick, let him or her do just that.

Jan Brett is a lively woman with blue eyes and shoulder-length blond hair. She is an avid collector, and her home reflects her passion for animals: Wooden lions roar from bookends; ducks paddle in artwork; painted herons guard her fireplace. An extensive collection of majolica ceramics (shaped into ducks, lily pads, and a porcupine) is on display throughout the house, as well as Grenfell hooked silk mats depicting various animals.

Even Jan’s silver and turquoise bracelet is etched with feathers. There are boxes fashioned from porcupine quills, spotted clay eggs from Africa, and woven blankets depicting polar bears. And, of course, a seemingly infinite population of hedgehogs—stuffed, ceramic, wooden, crystalline—many given by fans in honor of Jan’s iconic animal, represented frequently in her books.

What astonishes the visitor is that despite an endless array of art objects from around the world, Jan and Joe’s house does not feel at all cluttered—instead, it pulses with interior life. As with Jan’s drawings, an observer sees something new every time she looks. “Jan has an ornate but orderly way of doing things,” Joe explains. “There’s tons of detail, both in her books and in our home, but there’s a cleanliness to it.”

Their architect agrees. “We gave Jan the palette to work with in the house design,” Jim says. “Her touches are what make the house fun to be in.”

Jan’s home also reflects her passion for family. “I’m inspired by [them],” she says. “They’ve been living in nearby Hingham—where I grew up—