

What does a Giller-winning author's favourite room look like?

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Known for such novels as *The Polished Hoe*, winner of the Giller Prize in 2002, author Austin Clarke has lived in his downtown-Toronto row house for the past 12 years. His favourite room – his study – enjoys this status because it allows him to feel connected to the street while he writes: “It affords me an uninterrupted view of Moss Park Armoury, a softball pitch and a cricket pitch, where West Indians and Africans from various countries lay bat on ball until all hours of the night and into the next morning.”

1. The desk

“It’s an antique, a partners desk with two front sides. I move [into] it every two years when I begin a new novel. Its charm and effectiveness seem to be fading, as my last novel, already revised, is demanding more revision.”

2. The bookcases

“They were custom built by a dear friend, James Clark, now a successful architect. The wonder about these two bookcases is that they follow the leanings and lack of symmetry in the room itself. They were moved from my previous townhouse on McGill [Street].”

3. The books

“These are my pillows, and my pillars. My lack of ‘decentness,’ as my mother would have said, compels me to admit that they are among the best personal collection of books: literary and political biographies, most of Shakespeare, and Derek Walcott, Dylan Thomas and Dionne Brand, as well as favourites like Norman Mailer, Bernard Shaw and James Joyce, plus an old Holy Bible that brings sacredness into the confusing assembly.”

4. The blotter

“I made it. I use it to suck up the ink – always black – when I write letters to friends.”

5. The chairs

“The chair in front of the laptop is hand-rigged to give a firm back, as I tend to work long hours. The chair behind the desk is just an ordinary chair, at which I write letters and notes by hand.”

6. The desk lamp

“This is an old antique given to me by a friend in its present battered state. But the light is strong. And the brass matches its dignity.”

7. The memorabilia on the wall

“I am surrounded by memories: autographs of Betty Friedan and Louise Bennett; a photo of Norman Mailer; a snapshot of my twin brothers, Peter and John; the invitation and menu from a dinner for Nelson and Winnie Mandela; two reviews of *The Polished Hoe*. There’s also a small, indistinct photograph taken of me in 1948, going to receive the silver cup from the headmaster of Combermere School for Boys in Barbados. It’s the only remaining photo of my athletic career at Combermere. I still hold, I think, the record for the 100-yard sprint, with a time of 10 seconds. They tell me that my record has been equalled but not yet beaten.”