

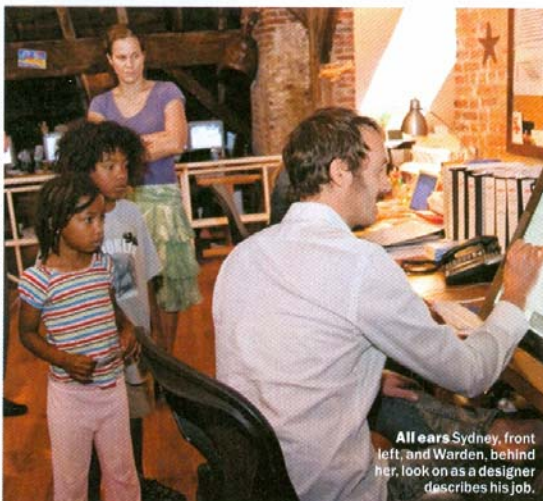
TimeOut
New York

Kids

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO NYC PARENTING

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First look



All ears Sydney, front left, and Warden, behind her, look on as a designer describes his job.

This is how we do it

New York's very own animated-TV studio opens its doors to live audiences. **By Abby West**

Just about every kid has asked at one point or another how a television show (live-action or cartoon) is made—and my two are no different. So when I found out that Little Airplane Productions, the award-winning creator of animated preschool hits like Nick Jr.'s *The Wonder Pets*, was going to be offering interactive tours of its new downtown studio, I knew that Warden, 9, and Sydney, 6, would want to check it out. On a recent afternoon, the four of us, dad included, followed South Street Seaport's cobblestoned streets to a refurbished 200-year-old grain mill. While the building's exterior had an old-world style, the four-storied interior screamed contemporary, with exposed-brick walls, gleaming hardwood floors and dozens of top-of-the-line computers.

One of the first things we noticed upon entering was the massive collection of television memorabilia, which includes a picture of the company's Emmy Award-winning founder and president, Josh Selig, as a child actor on *Sesame Street* some 30 years ago. The tour was inspired by his lifelong fascination with how things are created (he fondly remembers a childhood trip to Amish country, where he got to make his own pretzel and eat it). "It's interesting to show kids how we do

our work," says Selig. "I think any way we can demystify television is a positive, healthy thing."

So do the 73 people working in this tree-house-like office (there are different branches and levels) to produce, in addition to *The Wonder Pets*, Playhouse Disney's *Go, Baby!* and Noggin's *Oobi!* At one of our first stops, we met with "Team Linn" as they worked on the lovable singing guinea pig from *The Wonder Pets*. Designers and producers explained the photopuppetry process that goes into animating Linn's world, allowing the kids to push buttons, and later take a picture of a dollhouse that was used for the show. "It was nice to get to see how they did that. I thought they just drew it all on a piece of paper," said Warden, amazed.

Lucky for us, musical director and Grammy-winning producer Jeffrey Lesser was present the day we visited. Lesser showed off Little Airplane's full recording studio, where an actual orchestra comes in to tape music for *The Wonder Pets* (the kids were very impressed). But the hands-down highlight of our trip was a visit to the recording booth. Warden and Sydney hooted out some owl sounds and then watched a clip of the program with their audio included. I didn't have the heart to tell them it wouldn't actually appear on the show.

207 Front St between Beekman and Fulton Sts (212.965.8999, littleairplane.com). \$10 per person. Reservations are required; tours run Tue and Thu at 11am and 3pm and are limited to groups of ten.

PHOTOGRAPHY: (TOP, MIDDLE) THE LITTLE AIRPLANE; (BOTTOM, LEFT) MICHAEL MCGUIRE