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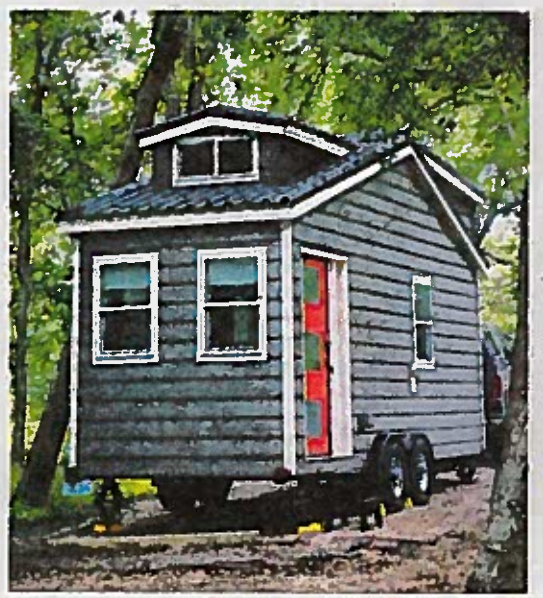
WHAT'S small IS BIG

Meet the folks who traded square footage for a simpler way of life—
AND ARE HAPPY THEY DID



HOW America LIVES

tiny houses ARE BIG

Living small is going mainstream, driven by the desire for a simpler lifestyle, the need for affordable housing and concern for the environment.

BY DIANA REESE

Who hasn't thought about chucking all their belongings and starting over in a smaller or more organized space? A surprising number of people are doing just that—for a variety of fascinating reasons. Meet the folks who traded square footage for a smaller, simpler way of life—and are happy they did.

1

'It's been such a relief'
Brandon Irwin
in Manhattan, Kan.

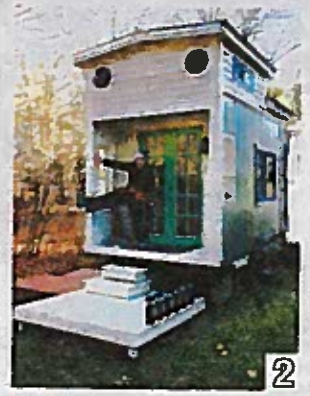
"Living in a tiny house has freed up a lot of physical and mental energy," says Irwin, an assistant professor of kinesiology at Kansas State University. "It's been such a relief."

A self-described minimalist, Irwin, 35, didn't have to get rid of much (a treadmill he ran on twice in 10 years) before moving from a rental to his 360-square-foot tiny home in mid-November. Irwin and a few friends, including one who is an experienced carpenter, built the structure over several months at a cost of $40,000 for the materials.

His bed's in one of the two lofts, and the house has everything he says is "most important," such as an office and a kitchen "where I can cook just about anything."

It takes him only 10 minutes to clean his entire house, and he shares his space with Jimmy, an Australian shepherd.

Irwin's house sits in a mobile home park five miles outside of Manhattan because it's not yet legal within the city limits, a common problem for the tiny house set. He's volunteered as the Kansas state chapter leader for the American Tiny House Association, an advocacy group dedicated to encouraging cities to accept tiny homes. He's also involved in a research project studying the potential health benefits of tiny home communities.



2

'It's all about sustainability'
Vera Struck
in Newbury, Mass.

Solar power. Renewable energy. Water harvesting systems. A composting and urine-diverting toilet. Struck's tiny home, nicknamed the Silver Bullet, is all about sustainability: 75 percent of the healthy, nontoxic materials used are reclaimed, recycled or repurposed. Her Biolite cooking system even recharges her cell phone and computer.

In December 2012, Struck was a cancer survivor who decided to challenge herself by designing, building and then

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COVER PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JEWEL D PEARSON BY GLYN A. STANLEY; PAUL KUIMET/NEWSCOM; BRANDON IRWIN COURTESY BRANDON IRWIN; ALEXIS STEPHENS AND CHRISTIAN PARSONS BY EXPEDITION/REX SHUTTERSTOCK/AP PHOTO; TINY HOUSE NATION; BOURNEMO/RES SHUTTERSTOCK/ZUMA; MORRISON FAMILY COURTESY THE MORRISONS; FEATURE PHOTOS COURTESY BRANDON IRWIN; VERA STRUCK & THE MORRISONS

living in a tiny home. It took two years, and she did most of it by herself, at a cost just under $20,000. The house has a 135-square-foot main floor plus a 65-square-foot bedroom loft and a 40-square-foot storage loft.

"I was scared of power tools," she says. "But I was running a miter saw after a day." She credits Derek Diedricksen, host and designer of HGTV's *Tiny House Builders*, as her mentor.

Since moving in, Struck, 67, has logged more than 15,000 miles traveling the country in her tiny home as a sustainability advocate and educator. She recently won the Best Tiny Home Award from the 2016 Florida Tiny House Festival.

She sees the tiny home movement giving individuals more control over their lifestyles, with no energy or water bills or mortgage.

"Customize your home to your needs," she says. "Feed your soul."

3

'We did it for our family'
Gabriella and Andrew Morrison in Ashland, Ore.

"We had moved into the perfect house that we'd been eyeing for years," Gabriella, 47, recalls. "But six months into the big house, we noticed our family dynamics eroding."

The couple wasn't spending as much time with their two kids, then ages 11 and 14. The time together was "combative and strained," she says. "Everyone scattered to opposite corners of the house."

The financial burden was greater than anticipated for the self-employed couple, with increased stress and more hours spent working. Cleaning and upkeep of the larger house took more time too.

Five years ago they bought five acres in the mountains near Ashland, Ore., and built their own tiny home, spending roughly $8,000 for the trailer and $33,000 for materials, including appliances.

They've lived in it more than three years, with 5 percent of the possessions they used to own. The house is 317 square feet: 207 on the main floor and 110 in the lofts.

For the sake of privacy, they built sleeping cabins for their son, Paiute, now 20 and in college, and their daughter, Terra, 17, who just graduated from high school. Paiute's is a 10-by-16-foot tree house and Terra's space is 10 by 12 overlooking the hills.

"That big beautiful house just didn't make sense anymore," Gabriella says. "We're creating our own definition of what home is for us."

4

'Fill your life with experiences, not things'
Alexis Stephens and Christian Parsons in Winston-Salem, N.C.

The traveling videographers/bloggers Stephens and Parsons, 33 and 41, respectively, are exploring the heart and soul of the tiny home movement

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TINY HOUSE 101

- 10,000 tiny houses in the U.S.
- A tiny house is generally 60 to 400 square feet
- A tiny house on wheels (THOW) cannot exceed 8½ feet wide or 13½ feet tall or 40 feet long
- Cost of DIY tiny house: $20,000 and up, depending on labor and materials
- Number of hours of labor to build tiny house: 400–1,000
- Cost of buying new tiny house: $25,000–$80,000+
- Cost of new Class A motorhome: $50,000–$150,000+
- 50 percent in THOW live in an RV park, a backyard or community setting; 23 percent in tiny house on foundation live on own land

Go to *Parade.com/shelter* to find out how tiny houses are helping homeless veterans.

across the U.S. and Canada. The simple-living advocates (@TinyHouseX on Twitter; @tiny_house_expedition on Instagram) invite curious folks into their 130-square-foot house wherever they park along the way. Their docu-series, *Living Tiny Legally*, outlines what every tiny house dreamer needs to know, and you can watch their adventures at Tiny House Expedition on YouTube.

5

'I'm living a dream'
Jewel D. Pearson in Charlotte, N.C.

She may live in a house with just 360 square feet, but Pearson, 49, has a walk-in closet, a bathroom that's "like a spa," a Juliet balcony off her bedroom and a fold-up screened-in porch.

"You don't have to give up luxuries to live in a tiny house," she says.

Pearson knew she wanted "to live a lighter lifestyle" after her daughter left for college.

A business consultant for Wells Fargo, Pearson says she used her project management skills to spend a year and a half researching and designing her future home, with the help of her sister and a friend, both interior designers, before hiring a general contractor to build it on a 28-foot trailer at a cost of $80,000.

Her tiny home is parked in the large backyard of a property owner she connected with through Craigslist and is hooked up to electricity and water.

Her experience has led her to become a tiny home advocate and consultant (msgypsysoul.com), speaking

FROM LEFT: EXPEDITION/REX SHUTTERSTOCK/AP PHOTOS; GLYN A. STANLEY PHOTOGRAPHY

at workshops around the country.

"This is my dream," Pearson says. "I have all the benefits of a beautiful home."

6

'Just enough off the grid'
Kay Mardis in Spur, Texas

Mardis, who retired in 2009 after a career in banking, wanted to simplify her life. She sold her house, got rid of most of her possessions and lived in an RV for a year and a half while deciding what to do next.

After buying a tiny house with about 400 square feet, vaulted ceilings and extra windows from a builder in Grandview, Texas, she needed a place to put it. That's when Spur, Texas, caught her attention. It had declared itself the country's "first tiny house friendly town" by city proclamation in July 2014. Since then, more than 60 lots have sold and 11 people have moved into tiny homes in town. Mardis, 74, purchased a lot for $500, then spent $5,000 clearing and developing it and getting connections to city water, sewer and electricity.

"There's plenty of room," Mardis says, even when her daughter and granddaughter visit. "I wanted to be off-grid but, ultimately, this was the best option for me," she says. "It's the perfect size for one person."

Interested in building a tiny house? Go to ***Parade.com/construction*** to

JRTESY KAY MARDIS