

# Could a “Tiny Home” Be the Home for You?



Maybe you think that your bedroom is too small for all of your clothes, books, and toys. But some people are now choosing to get rid of a lot of their possessions and live in houses no bigger than the average bedroom.

To save money, some people are moving into “tiny” houses, some of which are about 100 square feet in size. Even though the houses are small, many of them still include a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. Some “tiny home” owners climb a ladder to get to the bedroom on the second floor of their home.

When business slowed down for Bill Kastrinos, he and his wife, Sharon, moved into a tiny house. The house cost only \$15,000 to build and the Kastrinos’s pay \$15 a month for utilities. Their home also has wheels so they can take it with them if they decide to move.

## NEWS WORD BOX

possessions	business
conserve	average
square feet	utilities

Jay Shafer owns Tumbleweed Tiny House Company. He builds tiny houses, and he lives in one too. His home is 8 feet wide and 12 feet long. Shafer said he built a tiny house because he did not want to clean a lot of rooms and he wanted to conserve energy. He gave away a lot of his things when he moved into his tiny house. He says he doesn’t miss the extra books or the clothes that he never wore.

Shafer knows that tiny houses will not work for everyone. He recently got married and there is not enough room in his house for his wife. That’s why he is building her a tiny house right near his home.

## MORE ABOUT TINY HOUSES

- Bill Kastrinos used to build large homes, but now he is building tiny homes to sell. He has sold 11 tiny homes in the past six months.

## THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

Think about all of the “stuff” in your bedroom.  
Make a list of the items in your room that you really need  
*and* the items you could live without.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

<http://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/20081103/news/811030302>

## All the comforts of a teeny-tiny home

**Sebastopol man designs, builds fully functional, livable houses that are smaller than a bedroom**



SCOTT MANCHESTER/ PD

Jay Shafer sits on the porch of his Sebastopol home, which he designed and built, with another mini-home in the background. Shafer's home measures only 8 feet wide and 12 feet long, and he spends just \$60 worth of propane a year to heat it.

<http://www.tumbleweedhouses.com/> Tumbleweed Tiny House company

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

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You may think the house you live in is small, but can you push it a few feet to keep it in sunshine a bit longer as the afternoon shadows grow?

Can you s-t-r-e-t-c-h from your shower stall and grab the Ajax from beneath the kitchen sink?

Can you tell your in-laws you'd love to have them stay with you, but there's no place for them to sleep and, come to think of it, they may have to take turns coming inside at all?

Jay Shafer can.

"I could never live in this county if it weren't for tiny houses," said the Sebastopol resident, who lives in a high-quality, hand-built dollhouse he keeps on wheels in his landlord's backyard.

Shafer's home is 8 feet wide and 12 feet long. That's smaller, almost certainly, than any bedroom in your house. Shafer's floor space is nearly identical in size to the truckbed of a 14-foot U-Haul economy van that rents for \$19.95 a day.

Step through his front door and there are two comfy, upholstered seats on the left wall, and a cool little wall heater that keeps Shafer warm with just \$60 worth of propane per year.

There's a slim desk/work space on the right wall, and straight ahead a bulkhead of handsome shelves and storage spaces. The kitchen just beyond boasts a sink, counter, stovetop, dorm fridge and storage enough for pots and pans and such.

"It has everything a normal kitchen would have, but smaller," Shafer said during a quick tour.

Off the kitchen to the left is his camper-style shower and toilet. Up the ladder is the loft for his double bed and more smartly designed storage.

At 42, Shafer is a pioneer in a small-house movement. He built his home-ette -- \$18,000 in materials, 500 hours of labor -- and he earns a living by designing and occasionally building homes through his two-person Tumbleweed Tiny House Co.

"We're getting a lot more orders these days," he said.

That makes sense. With the conventional home market in chaos, millions of people feeling financially pinched and millions more yearning to reduce the size of their ecological footprint, more people are now thinking small.

Gregory Paul Johnson of Iowa co-founded the Small House Society with Shafer and lives in a 140-square-foot house that Shafer designed. He said daily hits on the society's Web site ([www.resourcesforlife.com](http://www.resourcesforlife.com)) averaged about 100 five years ago and these days average more than 1,000.

"There are people from 90 different countries regularly visiting the Web site," Johnson said. "It's global."

Johnson believes modern technology -- along with tight finances, high energy costs and concerns about global warming -- is prompting people to consider moving into much smaller houses.

Thanks to compact computers and personal entertainment technology, there's no longer a need to create space in a house for storing so many documents, movies, photographs, CDs and such.

"My house is similar to what an Amish person would live in, but my life is very high-tech," Johnson said in a phone interview from Iowa.

In a vision he shares with Shafer, clusters of small houses are built around a communal building designed for activities that require a bit more space -- dinner parties, doing the laundry, book-club meetings.

Obstacles to the creation of such affordable, efficient, eco-friendly villages of mini-homes are numerous. Among them: the high cost of land, especially in California, high per-unit fees charged to anyone who builds a home, and construction-permit regulations that may not recognize the concept of an entire house perhaps the size of a typical kitchen or family room.

"There are issues, but there definitely is interest," said Kenyon Webster, Sebastopol's planning director.

Clare Hartman, a senior planner for Santa Rosa, pondered the concept of a small-house village and said that because the state seeks more choices for affordable housing, "I don't think it's pie in the sky."

As much as Shafer loves living in his not quite 100-square-foot house, he's aware that many people -- certainly anyone with a family -- needs more space than that. In fact, he married recently and there's not much room at home for his wife, so he plans to build her a tiny house of her own.

Shafer draws and sells construction plans for homes ranging from a 65-square-foot micro pad to a three-bedroom, nearly 800-square-foot mini-mansion.

Ask him when he first aspired to live small and he thinks back to growing up in a rambling, 4,000-square-foot house in Iowa.

"I always envied kids with smaller houses," he said. "They were warmer -- and you didn't have to do as much housework."

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/wayoflife/10/22/tiny.houses/index>

## **Downsizing to 100 square feet of bliss**

Story Highlights

Californians have begun building 100-square-foot homes for minimalists

Couple says you don't need to keep up with the Joneses to be happy

One designer's home is so tiny, there's no space for his wife

"I like the idea of showing people how little a person could need"

From Thelma Gutierrez and Traci Tamura

CNN [American Morning](#)


**CALISTOGA, California (CNN)** -- Bill and Sharon Kastrinos practice the ultimate in minimalism. They've squeezed into a 154-square-foot home that looks more like a kid's playhouse than their previous 1,800-square-foot home.

With the economy crashing, the Kastrinos traded in their spacious kitchen for one that stretches barely an arm's length.

It hasn't been without its challenges, but Sharon Kastrinos says it's exhilarating to no longer feel compelled to keep up with the Joneses. "There's a tremendous burden that's off your shoulders," she says. "Small is OK, and it might even be better."

Her husband adds that most Americans "want to be seen in their big house with a big car." But not them, not anymore.

"I don't think bigger is better," he says.

Bill Kastrinos had been in the construction business in Southern California. But when the real estate market went bust, it forced the couple to reconsider their lifestyle.  [Watch what life is like in a home the size of a shed »](#)

Now, they live in a place so small, he and his wife use a ladder to climb into their bed every night. The downstairs has a sitting area, tiny kitchen and bathroom in a space that's 98 square feet. The upstairs loft has a bed in 56 square feet of space. They keep extra clothes in their car.

"It's a very simple lifestyle," he says. "The downside of it is it takes a readjustment. You can't have 100 pairs of shoes in the closet or 50 outfits."

The upside?

The house cost them \$15,000, and the utilities are a mere \$15 a month. The couple now live on property owned by their daughter in California wine country, where the average home in 2007 cost \$725,000. If they want to leave, the home has wheels and can be pulled behind their vehicle and plugged into any RV park in the nation.

The family still has their 1,800-square-foot home, but they will probably sell it. The house is too expensive, they say, costing them about \$1,500 a month in mortgage payments, plus another \$160 in utilities.

The change to their shed-like home has been so dramatic that Bill Kastrinos is now building the tiny homes to sell. He's sold 11 in six months, most of them in the range of \$15,000 to \$20,000. Clients range from people on welfare to retirees on fixed income, he says. Inquiries about the homes are on the rise, he adds.

The Kastrinoses might be extreme in their shedding the traditional American dream, but others are trying it too. [iReport: Do you live in a small space? Show us how you make it work](#)

In nearby Sebastopol, California, Jay Shafer designs tiny homes and has even started a blog about living on less. His homes have a designer feel -- interior wood paneling, stainless steel kitchens, built-in bookcases -- packed into a space about the size of walk-in closets of upscale homes. His smallest home has 65 square feet; his biggest (a three-bedroom place) has 774 square feet.

"I look around and I do see a lot of people who seem they're slaves to their homes," he says. "I didn't want to pay rent or a mortgage forever. So my plan was to escape the rat race."

Is he trying to make a political statement, or is his new way of life about being practical?

"It's both," he says, his head touching the vaulted ceiling from his bed. "It's a very practical thing for me. If I didn't have a 100-square-foot house, I probably wouldn't be able to afford to live in this county. Aside from that, politically speaking, I like the idea of showing people how little a person could need."

By sizing down, he says he's living on a total of \$15,000 a year. He doesn't have to worry about not making a mortgage payment and gets to work a job that he enjoys.

"Living in a small house has allowed me to do what I love doing, which is designing more small houses," he says.

He, too, has purged junk and other items, donating most of it to the Salvation Army and to friends. "It does feel good," he says. "I don't miss the extra books, the extra clothes I never wore."

He's married, but there's not enough space for his spouse in his place. He's designing her a nearby place that's about triple the size of his: 280 square feet.

He admits a tiny house isn't for everybody. But with the economy in a tailspin, he says, he doesn't worry one bit about it, thanks to his newfound lifestyle. It's peace of mind you can't put a price on.

"I don't think I have anything to worry about," he says. "I've made more money, and I can save all of it and still go out to eat."