



The House Out Back

A Seattle backyard cottage demonstrates lessons in smart small-home design

BY TIM HAMMER

When Kate initially contacted me, her property consisted of a large lot with a 650-sq.-ft. one-bedroom home and a dilapidated shed in the backyard. The home was a bit on the small side for the lot, for the growing neighborhood, and for Kate's changing needs. She often received solicitations from builders wishing to buy her property, tear down the home, and replace it with something much larger. Kate, however, had different ideas for how her property could best be used.

While her small home satisfied most of her needs, she desired an additional space that could serve a variety of uses: an art studio, a place to play music, and a location for working on bicycles. It needed

to have a bathroom and enough polish to pass muster as guest quarters when she had friends or family in town. Rather than add on to the existing home, Kate's initial plan was to renovate the shed and add a small bath to it. It was with this idea that she first approached me. At the same time, though, there was a change underway in Seattle's land-use laws that would allow Kate to elevate her vision of a humble remodeled shed to a new backyard cottage fit for full-time living.

The cottage concept

As Kate and I began discussing her project, the city of Seattle was on the cusp of passing an ordinance that would allow homeowners

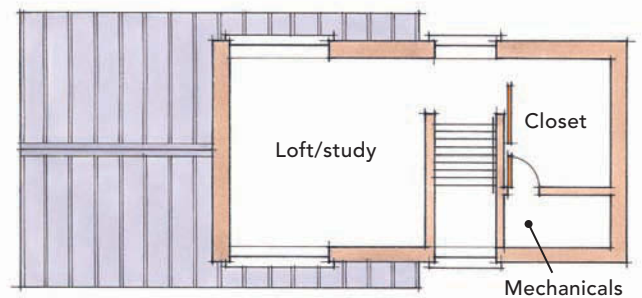
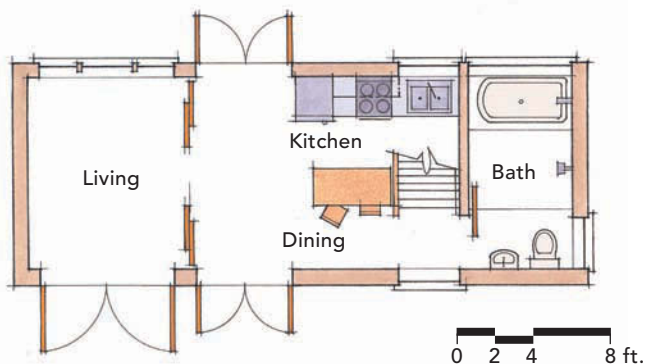




Built to last. The home's simple gable form is intended to give it a traditional quality. At the same time, modern materials such as fiber-cement panels, aluminum-clad windows, and a standing-seam metal roof skew the style toward contemporary and help the home to withstand the weather of the Pacific Northwest.

SPECS

- Bedrooms:** 1
- Bathrooms:** 1
- Size:** 550 sq. ft.
- Cost:** \$290 per sq. ft.
- Completed:** 2013
- Location:** Seattle
- Architect:** Tim Hammer, CAST architecture
- Builder:** Owner



FOUR WAYS TO MAKE THE

This small home lives well through several universally applicable



1 An open floor plan provides clear visual connections throughout the spaces, which keeps it from feeling confined. A small dining area in the center of the home is flanked by French doors on each side to maintain an impression of depth and openness. The living room beyond the dining space has a vaulted ceiling and large rolling doors with etched glass panes that can be closed for privacy.

2 Abundant natural light is a key tenet for helping this modest space feel more expansive. Every opportunity for filling the cottage with light was taken advantage of; floor-to-ceiling windows, glass walls, and a stairway with floating treads all contribute to a sense of airiness and light.

in single-family zones to construct backyard cottages, also known as detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs), on their property. These cottages were to be legally rentable small homes of 800 sq. ft. or less. The hope was that the ordinance would allow existing and potential homeowners a means to offset some of the high costs of property ownership in the city as well as provide the growing population with a much needed boost in available rental housing inventories and typologies.

For Kate, the new ordinance opened up the potential to build a structure that could accommodate her needs and provide a source of income as a rental unit if she wished. This newfound flexibility altered the scope of work. Instead of remodeling

the shed, we removed it from the site and designed a 550-sq.-ft. cottage with an open floor plan. The layout of the first floor is organized to accommodate a range of uses, and a second-story sleeping loft and study, accessed by steep but code-approved stairs, provides guests a place to stay and makes the home viable for a potential tenant.

Siting for privacy

It was important to Kate that the cottage not intrude on the main home or on the neighbors, particularly if in use as a rental. With that in mind, we divided her yard into conceptual zones.

The public areas of the cottage were oriented to the southeast corner of the backyard to be in sync with the location of the kitchen

and dining room in the existing house. This enabled us to create a “public” yard and patio between the two houses that both properties could share.

Separate outdoor areas were established as “private” yards adjacent to private areas of the homes, such as bedrooms.

The cottage also takes advantage of a 4-ft.-high retaining wall that runs along the back property line. This retaining wall and fence above provide a private “pocket yard,” a 5-ft.-wide by 30-ft.-long space that the cottage’s dining room and bathroom open to.

Balancing style

The shape and lines of the new cottage lean toward the more traditional end of the style spectrum, both to be in harmony with the

MOST OF SMALL SPACES

design elements that can enhance the quality of any home of any size.



3 Extra room devoted to areas that can enhance comfort and joy is valuable even in small homes. Although it was a splurge in terms of space, the owner sought a bathroom that was large enough to accommodate a soaking tub. The result is a space suited to winding down and enjoying a moment of solitude.

4 Outdoor access increases the livable footprint of the home in good weather. French doors in the living room and dining area open onto the shared public yard space, while French doors on the opposite side of the home open into a private garden.

existing home and to take advantage of a height bonus that the cottage ordinance grants for gable-roof forms. The arrangement of the spaces and the window selection and placement are on the more contemporary end of the spectrum. The goal was a balance between classic form and new ideas. We wanted the finished home to fit in as comfortably in the old Seattle as it does in the new.

Exterior materials are intended to be simple, honest, and long-lasting with minimal upkeep. Fiber-cement panels wrap the weather-prone base of the home, keeping the clear cedar siding above the splash zone of the region's frequent rains. Aluminum-clad windows and a standing-seam metal roof were selected for superior durability. Gal-

vanized half-round gutters and black trim help tie together the simple palette. All of the elements add up to a home that we believe exudes a humble attractiveness.

In addition to creating additional space for her needs, Kate wanted to do so in a manner that was mindful of resource use and the impact on the environment. Early in the design process, recycled-fir columns, beams, and car decking were sourced from an old warehouse that had been dismantled recently. Plumbing fixtures, sinks, lights, and other materials were culled from the many recycled-building-material warehouses that have sprung up throughout Seattle. The aged timbers and vintage fittings give the space a warmth and sense of time that belie the true age of the cottage.

Taking stock

Small homes force designers and their clients to take a hard look at what is needed and then to separate that from what is wanted. So often we get caught up in the idea that more space or more things will improve our lives and the livability of our homes. When we take the time to consider carefully how we use our homes, particularly in the context of how we spend our time, we find that less really is more. At the same time, I don't believe that small spaces need to be monastic or to deprive their inhabitants of beauty, comfort, or a sense of spaciousness. □

Tim Hammer is a principal at CAST architecture in Seattle. Photos by Stefan Hampden, courtesy of CAST architecture.