

# Tiny Texas Houses

## Brad Kittel

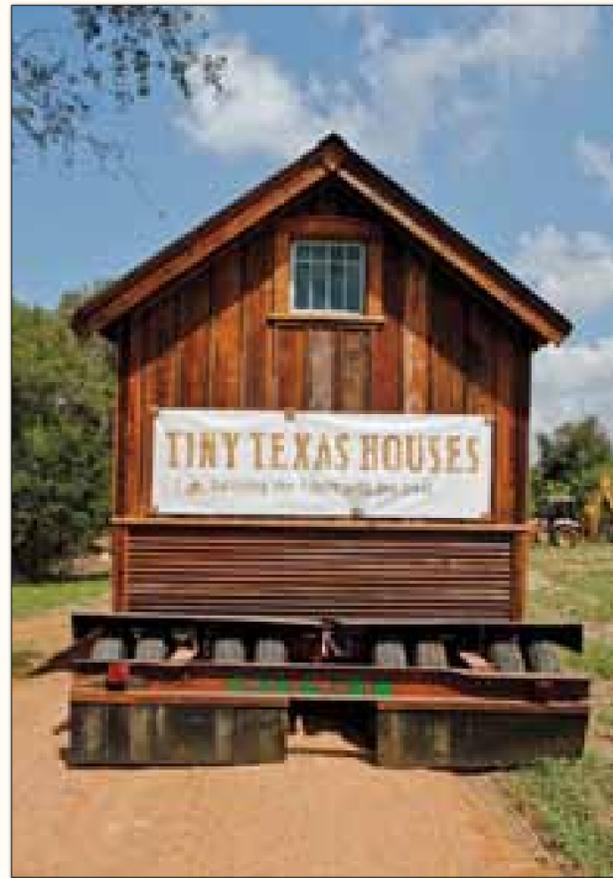
*These recycled buildings, offered for sale out of Luling, Texas (between San Antonio and Houston), are built of recycled materials, based on traditional designs. They have instant soul. This is a wonderful body of work by builder Brad Kittel.*

**O**UR BUILDINGS ARE 99% Pure Salvage. Everything: doors, floors, windows, lumber, porch posts, glass, door hardware, and even the siding has been saved and re-used to create houses that we hope will last for a century or more. I believe that there are presently enough building materials sitting on the ground in the U.S.A. to build much of the next generation of housing. All it takes is pure human energy, spirit, and the desire to build something that will last for several lifetimes. . . .

My goal is to show people what can be done with a concept I call Salvage Building. I believe used material is far superior to nearly anything being used today. It's crazy that 51% of our landfills are building materials, yet we ravage the world looking for more building materials. A huge amount of wood, hardware, glass, even roofing is available today for little more than the human energy it takes to salvage it. No materials today will cost us less fuel or energy to make ready for building than the materials we have already harvested.

There is a trillion dollars of great building materials sitting in this country, forming the largest untapped and undervalued resource available for construction. It is possible to create jobs in Salvage Mining that cannot be exported to other countries. . . .

Tiny Texas Houses are each built to be one-of-a-kind creations. As a consequence, there are not set prices or models. We build to the customers' desires. Pricing is based on size, style, and the various amenities. To date, the range has been from \$38,000 to \$90,000. Our sizes range from 10' x 16' to 12' x 20' so far, and we can build them to be joined together if desired. Our goal is to build houses that will last 100 years and more, just like our ancestors did. We



*Koehler house (see p. 46) on the road*

use the best of old world building techniques combined with the best that new technology has to offer for insulation and energy savings. We ship our houses with an insured mover whose costs will vary depending on the length of time it takes to get to the destination, but it tends to run about \$2,500 for a day's trip out and back.



*Chapel #3, 12' x 20' with eight 7' tall pieces of stained glass and full wall of glass at end along with wooden vestibule at entry. With steeple removed, it is headed off to a ranch in West Texas.*

## The Kaye House



*The Kaye house is a 12' x 28' tiny house with full-length front porch and fully screened-in back porch. Note rock skirting.*

**“No materials today will cost us less fuel or energy to make ready for building than the materials we have already harvested.”**



**“Our buildings are 99% Pure Salvage.”**

 [www.tinytexashouses.com](http://www.tinytexashouses.com)

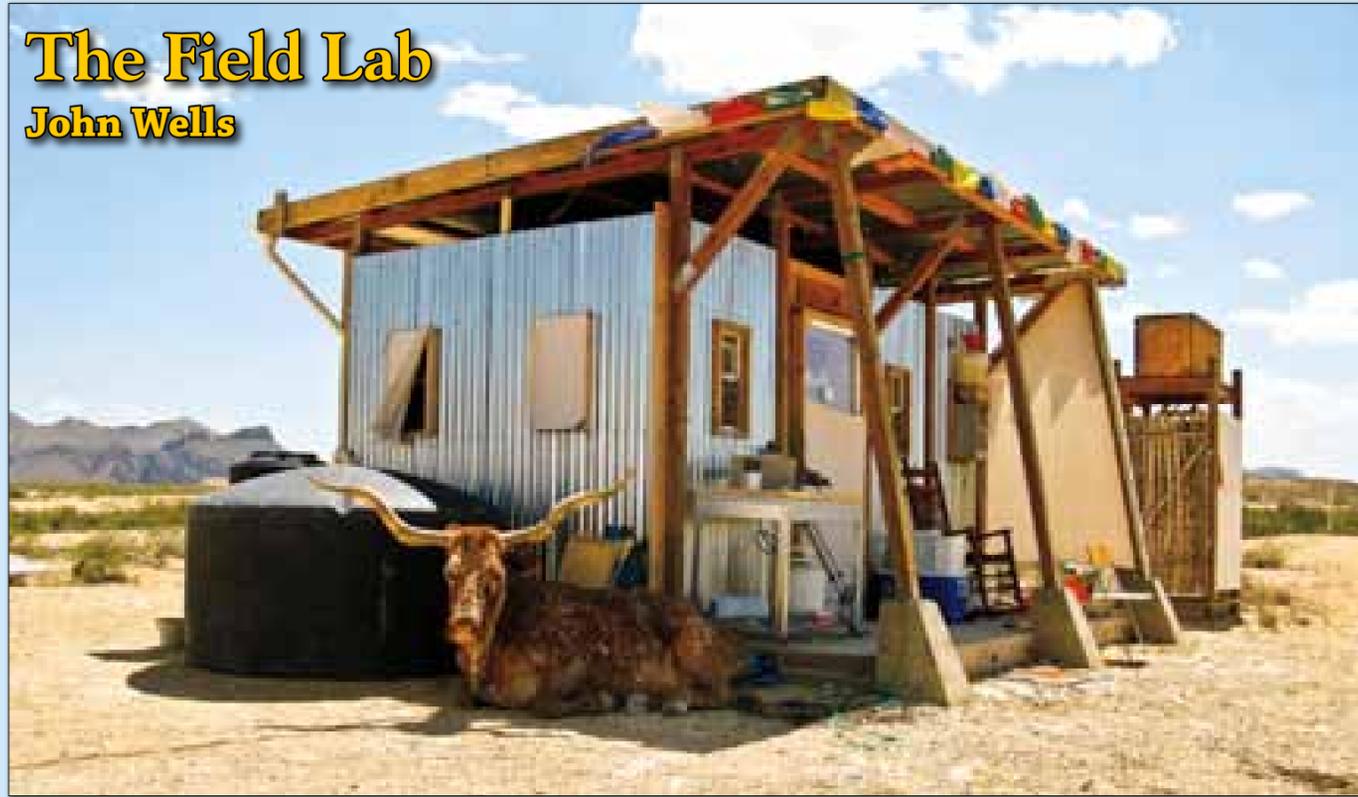




*Time-lapse triple-exposure with Mike airborne at night: 12-minute exposure in cabin at rear, 1½ min. headlights from snowcat at left, flash in hand activated by Mike in mid-air.*

# The Field Lab

John Wells



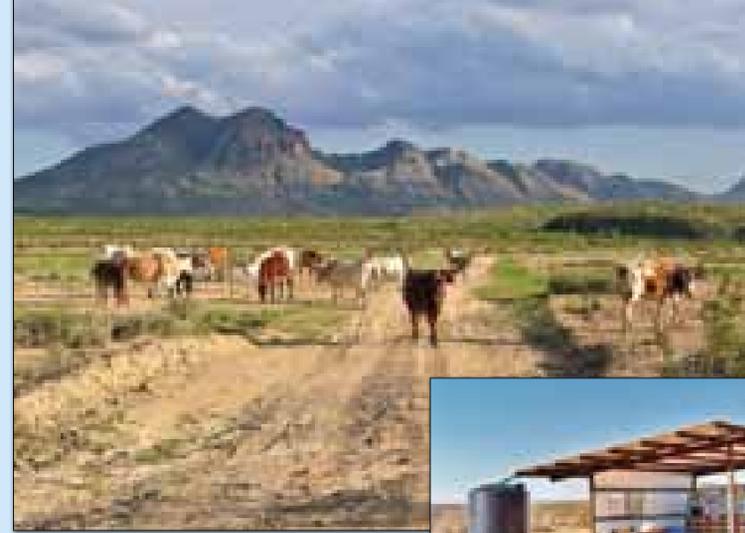
There are 70 longhorn cattle roaming around in John's vicinity. One day John noticed a sickly cow, whose calf had just died. "She was covered with flies." John started feeding her and giving her water, and she recovered and started hanging out with him. He calls her Benita. The local rancher who owned the cow eventually gave her to John, as well as her grandson.

**W**HEN PEOPLE VISIT JOHN WELLS AT HIS TINY HOME IN the Texas desert, he tells them: "I sold my 2800 sq. ft. house and built my 128 sq. ft. house."

John worked as a photographer, then a set and prop builder, in New York City and Brooklyn for 20 years. Tiring of city life, he bought a large farmhouse in upstate New York. He soon realized that: "... the mortgage was killing me." Plus his property taxes were \$1,000 a month. He decided he'd rent out his house during summer months, and built a "camp" in the woods for himself. He found that he liked the simpler life, and started researching off-the-grid living.

In a 2006 issue of *Make* magazine, he saw an article on wind turbines by Abe and Josie Connally, and he eventually went to Texas to visit them. While there, he decided he liked the open spaces, so in April, 2007, he sold his New York home, bought 40 acres of land, and moved to Texas.

"My house is my own design, using skills I learned as a set builder in NYC. 128 sq. ft. (8' x 16'). The basic box was assembled in one day after six days of constructing the panels. I moved in ten days after coming to the desert. It took another three months to do all the finish work (extended roof, siding, porch, catchment system, interior details). Total cost of building materials was \$3,000.



"All my water comes from the sky."



"Main power, located on the south side of my house, is provided by 15 solar panels for a total of 225 watts. The panels charge two battery banks that run interior lighting, fans, and my computer. A 12-volt swamp cooler that I designed provides cooling during the hot summer months. For refrigeration, I use a homemade ice box that requires three 10 lb. blocks of ice per week. Four months of the year (during winter), my ice box stays outside on the porch and requires no ice due to low overnight temperatures. I cook using a

small propane grill and a solar oven. Hot water is provided by a solar water heater.

"All my water comes from the sky. The area where I live has annual rainfall of 9-11 inches. I have 21,000 gallons of storage capacity. My property has enough catchment area (roof surfaces and creek beds) to fill all my tanks with only 6 inches of rain."

<http://thefieldlab.blogspot.com>  
Flickr pix: [www.shltr.net/FieldlabFlickr](http://www.shltr.net/FieldlabFlickr)



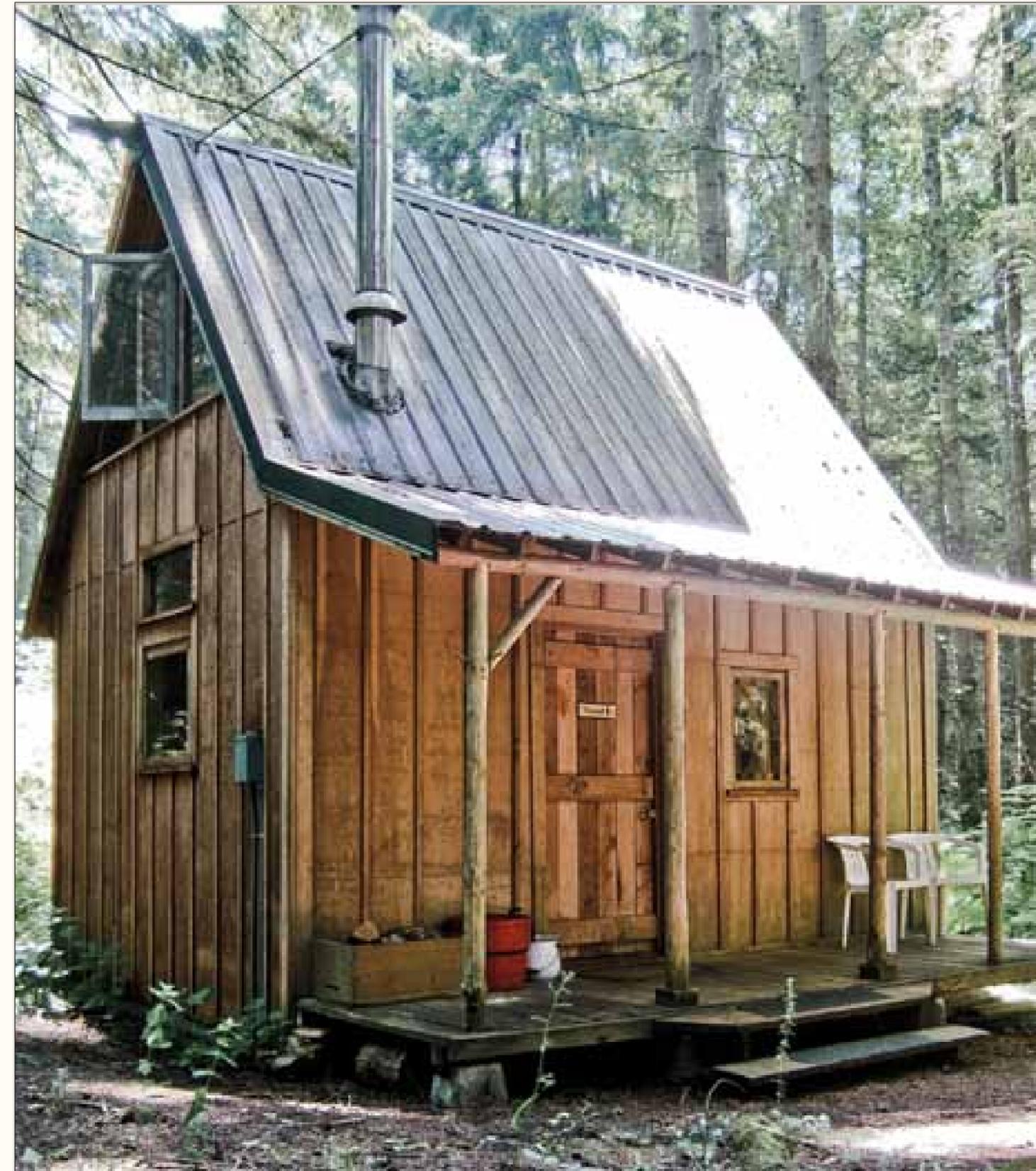
Lots of folks assume that the horned ones are steers or bulls... but both sexes of long-horn cattle have horns.



# Small Structures



*Vic Marks sent me this photo of a little cabin under construction in British Columbia several years ago.*



*Photo by Jay Shafer, Tumbleweed Tiny House Company*

# Jalopy Cabins

## Wolf Brooks & Lyle Congdon

**Pagosa Springs, Colorado**  
**Size range:** 140 sq. ft. and up  
**Price range:** \$10,000–\$20,000  
**Website:** www.jalopycabins.com  
(970) 903-3298

**J**ALOPY CABINS WAS AN IDEA that quickly became a reality. For us, combining the idea of building small, efficient housing and using reclaimed materials went hand in hand with our goal of being environmentally friendly and providing unique, one-of-a-kind homes.

We do not have a catalog or floor plans. Our cabins are formed from a creative vision and then assembled with reclaimed materials (minimum 90% reclaimed).

Builder Wolf Brooks has lived in small spaces his entire life and been building homes for the past 13 years. We will only produce a few cabins each year, which gives us adequate time to find reclaimed materials, and gives each cabin its own unique characteristics.

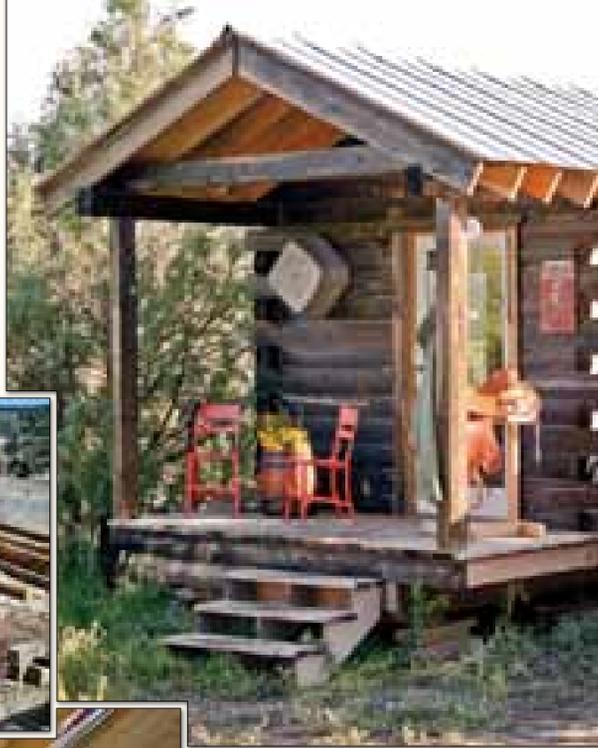
The Santa Fe cabin was built specifically for a gentleman, Pierr, who wanted a tiny house to put on his property south of Santa Fe, NM. He spends a lot of weekends there exploring and hiking and wanted a place to relax in after a long day of being outside. The small cabin also offers great shelter from bad weather.

Since Pierr is 6½ feet tall, we built a custom door and a custom cabinet that is about 40" tall (standard vanity height is 32"). We worked with him to ensure that window placement was just right, so he would have great views from the site he had already prepared.

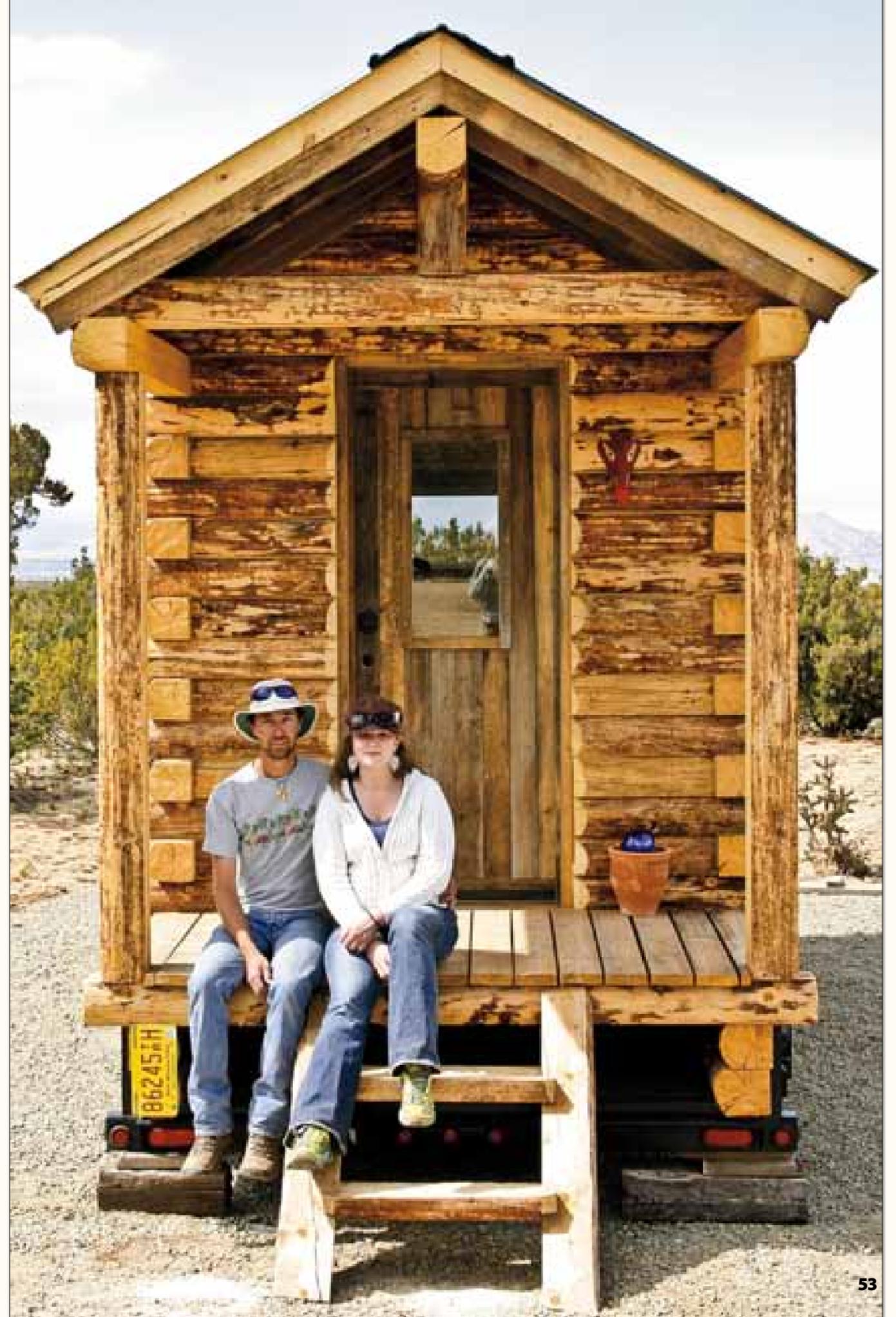
Pierr provided us with the lumber for the cabinet as well as the sink, and hardware for the front door. All items were purchased for his main home years ago and never used. We love to recycle or repurpose things, so that worked out perfectly!

The cabin is wired for electricity even though there is currently no power at the site. A solar electric system is planned for the future.

The cabin was built on a trailer and hauled from our location in Colorado to New Mexico. If Pierr ever decides he wants a different view on his property, he can move the cabin!

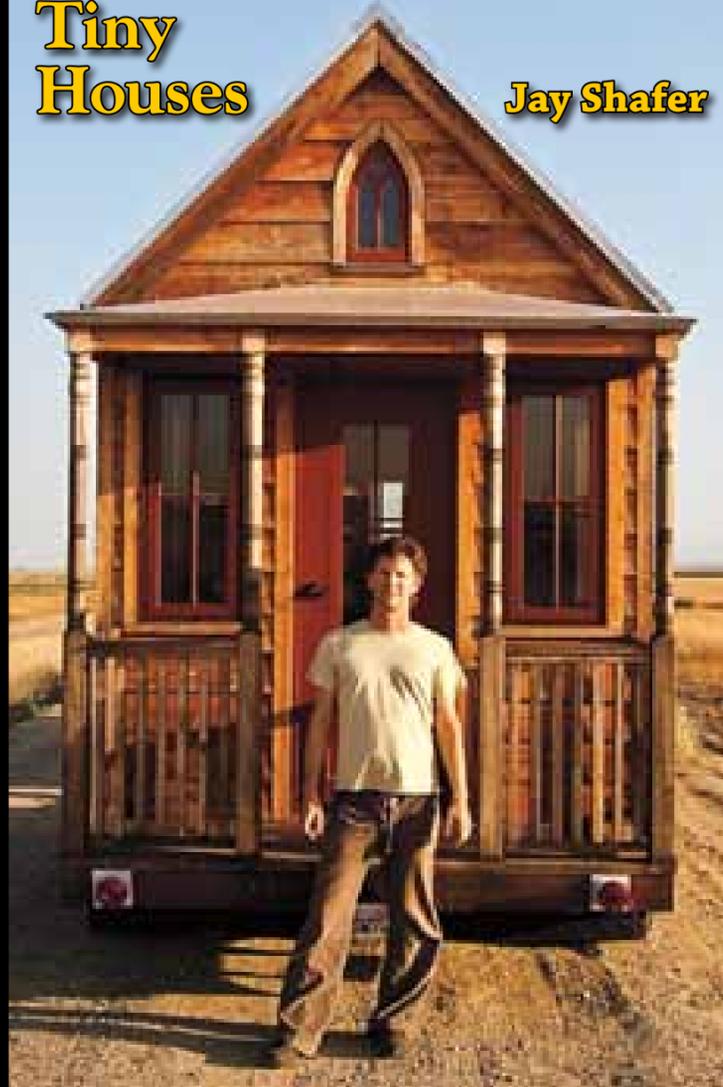


*“Builder Wolf Brooks has lived in small spaces his entire life and been building homes for the past 13 years.”*



# Tumbleweed Tiny Houses

Jay Shafer



Jay Shafer seems to be about the most visible person on the tiny house circuit these days. He's been interviewed by the *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *NPR*, and *Oprah*. He's written *The Small House Book*, and he's got a great website called *Tumbleweed Houses* (see below). Moreover, he manufactures tiny houses — many on wheels — that are elegant and intelligent. Here, in his book, he describes building his first tiny house:

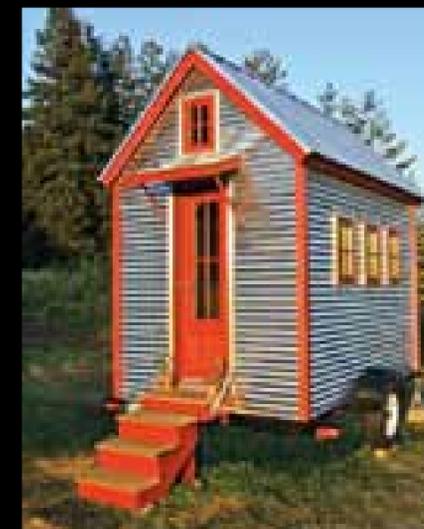
"I resolved to side-step the well-intentioned codes by putting my house on wheels. At about 8' x 12' plus a porch, loft, and four wheels, the resulting house looked a bit like American Gothic meets the Winnebago Vectra. A steep, metal roof was supported by cedar-clad walls and turned cedar porch posts. In the tradition of the formal plan, everything was symmetrical, with the door at exterior, front center. Inside, knotty pine walls and Douglas fir flooring were contrasted by stainless steel hardware. There was a 7' x 7' great room, a closet-sized kitchen, an even smaller bathroom, and a 3'9"-tall bedroom upstairs. A cast-iron heater presided like an altar at the center of the space downstairs. In fact, the whole house looked a bit like a tiny cathedral on two 3500-pound axles.

The key to designing my happy home really was designing a happy life, and the key to that lay not so much in deciding what I needed as in recognizing all the things I could do without. What was left over read like a list I might make before packing my bags for a long trip. I am sure any hardcore minimalist would be as appalled by the length of my inventory as any materialist would be by its brevity."

On the following pages are three of Jay's tiny houses. Note: All three of these are mainly one-person homes.



*"The key to designing my happy home really was designing a happy life, and the key to that lay not so much in deciding what I needed as in recognizing all the things I could do without."*



## The XS House

The XS-House is the smallest Tumbleweed home. It is light and easy to tow (built on a 7' x 10' utility trailer), and works for one person. Tumbleweed founder Jay Shafer built his own XS-House and lived in it for one year. Jay says it's a little small for two people.

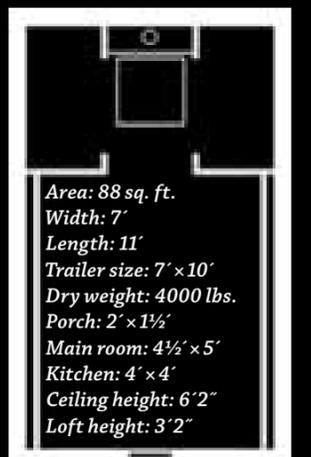
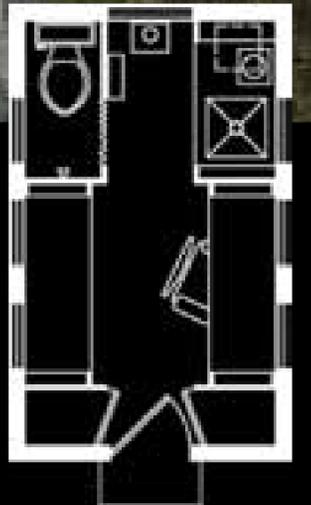
The "living room" comes with a built-in desk and built-in couch. Underneath the couch is extra storage. In between the front door and living room, there are two full-size closets for hanging clothes.

The kitchenette has a simple stainless steel counter with a sink, and is surrounded by shelves. Under the sink are a small water heater, refrigerator, and hot plate for cooking.

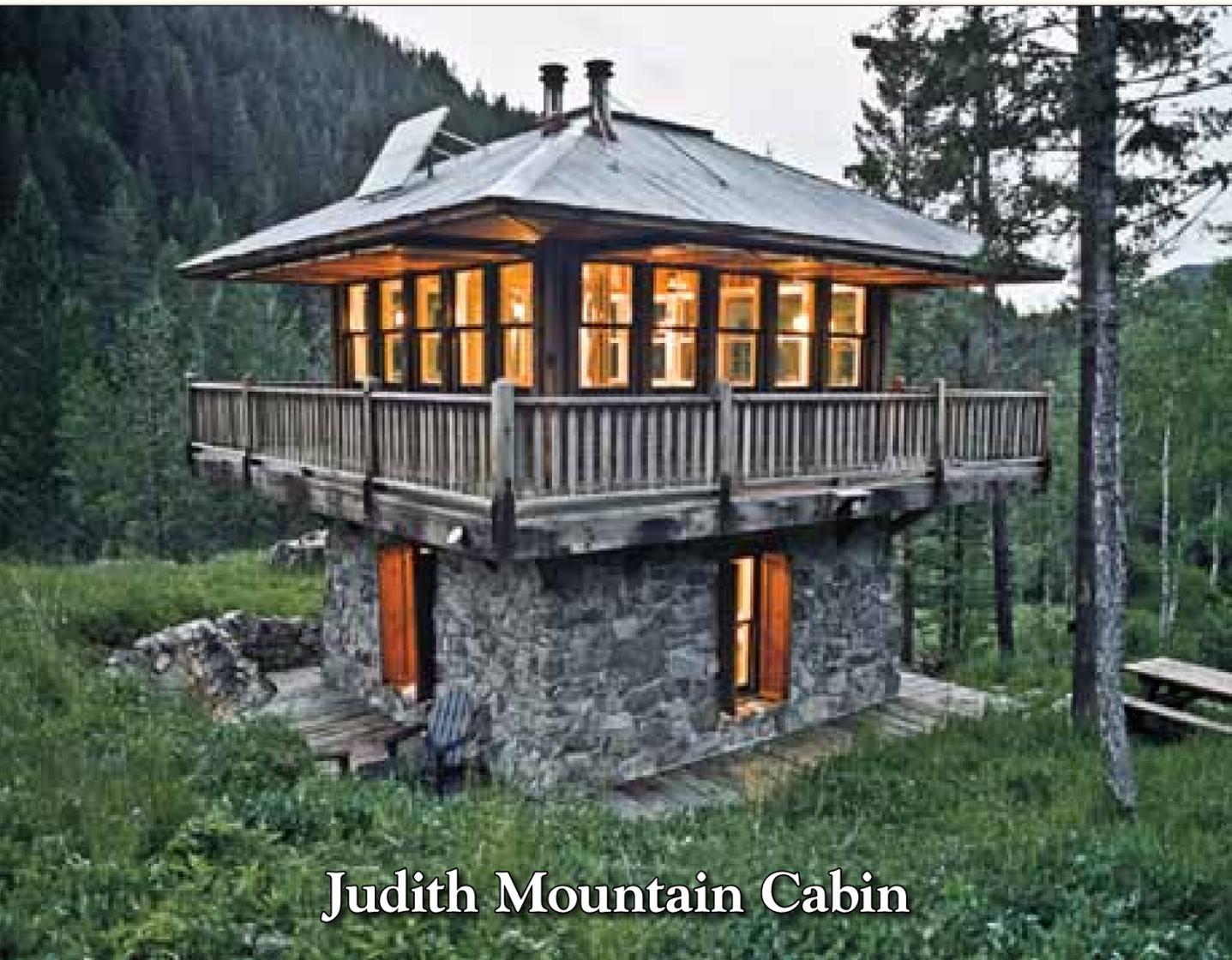
The bedroom is in the loft which, at its peak, is 3'2" tall. As on many boats, the bathroom is the shower. The walls are finished with metal diamond plate finishing.

The toilet is a low-flush RV toilet designed to conserve water, but a composting toilet can be substituted.

There is a stainless steel fireplace, which keeps the house warm in temperatures down to -35° F. Because of its small size, the R-16 insulation keeps the house warm in the harshest of climates.



Area: 88 sq. ft.  
Width: 7'  
Length: 11'  
Trailer size: 7' x 10'  
Dry weight: 4000 lbs.  
Porch: 2' x 1½'  
Main room: 4½' x 5'  
Kitchen: 4' x 4'  
Ceiling height: 6'2"  
Loft height: 3'2"



## Judith Mountain Cabin

**Jeff Shelden**

**I**T WAS LIKE “BEING HIT BY LIGHTNING” according to the clients. Given 113 acres in Alpine Gulch in the Judith Mountains of central Montana, it was a dream come true for them, after searching for years for acreage like this. The land already had a small log cabin on it. Located at the very bottom of the canyon, in a grove of old firs, it was always dark, cold, and claustrophobic. The clients wanted something else — light, sun and expansiveness. A forest fire that burned across part of the land in 1989 exposed just such a spot.

Sited about 70 feet above the valley floor, on the edge of a limestone ledge, the site has long views up and down the valley, seemingly hanging in space. But, it also has the intimacy of an aspen grove, and a meadow of wildflowers in the other direction. The cabin had to do a couple of other things for the clients. It had to relate to their cultural landscape, as well as the physical one. One of the clients, a third-generation Montanan, and the son of a forester who graduated from the

University of Montana in 1949, was raised with both the myth and the reality of the great western forests. The fire towers that guarded these lands represented a romantic ideal of life to his family as he grew up. Lookouts were always in the most inaccessible, most spectacular locations. They were a place where life and relationships were condensed to their essential elements, where nature overwhelmed and embraced those lives.

The cabin had to become part of those landscapes. Not just in form and material, but in time, as well. It had to look old from the moment it was finished. It had to look like 1939, like the CCC had built it. A lot of recycled material was used to accomplish this. Corrugated metal roofing came from a barn being demolished down the road. Beams, flooring and decking were recycled from an 80-year-old trestle, recently dismantled. The stone came from the site, and rock flooring was quarried in Idaho. In contrast to the exterior, the interiors are

archaic, but light, and anything but rustic. The ground level provides cooking, washing and storage, with sleeping for two. The upper level provides the connection to the views, with windows in every direction, and a six-foot square skylight at the peak of the roof to insure even more light. On the second level, there is also sleeping for two, and storage between the floor beams and in the furniture.

The cabin is powered by two fifty-watt photovoltaic panels that provide 12-volt direct current power to outlets, lights, and the well pump. That power lets the client have a stereo, a TV/VCR, running water in the sink, and water to fill a wood-fired hot tub (see photo on next page, bottom left). A composting toilet provides sanitation.

The cabin has proven itself to the family and friends of the clients in the year since its completion. It’s become an icon in the canyon, and a gathering place, rapidly filling with memories.



*“... it was always dark, cold, and claustrophobic. The clients wanted something else — light, sun and expansiveness.”*



# Shack at Hinkle Farm

Jeffery Broadhurst



**A**RCHITECT JEFFERY BROADHURST BUILT THIS ONE-ROOM retreat on a 27-acre mountaintop property in West Virginia. It's a few hours from his home in suburban Washington, DC, and is accessible only with a four-wheel-drive vehicle. It is perched at 2,600 feet above sea level, and serves sometimes as a solitary retreat, at other times as a place to hang out with up to half a dozen friends.

Most building materials were from the shelves of a home-improvement retailer, and friends and neighbors helped in the construction process on weekends over a two-year period. It is clad in locally milled pine board-and-batt pine siding and a terne, standing-seam metal roof. It sits on a platform supported by four pressure-treated pine posts, with rodent barriers like those used to protect local corn cribs.

Entry is by a ladder that swings down to the ground. A brilliant feature here is the folding glass-paned garage door, which slides up overhead and opens one entire wall to the grassy slopes and distant ridge. Jeffery says this feature "... blurs the distinction between sleeping inside and sleeping outside." There's no electricity at The Shack; oil lanterns provide lighting, and heating and cooking is accomplished on a cylindrical wood stove. A hand-powered bilge pump draws water from a water tank suspended below the floor (reachable through a trap door) to a smaller tank suspended from the ceiling, where it gravity-feeds to a faucet in the tiny kitchen. Water can be heated by routing it through a reservoir on the wood stove. Additionally, a propane-fired water heater that Jeff designed from an aluminum milk can heats rainwater collected from the roof for showers below the deck.



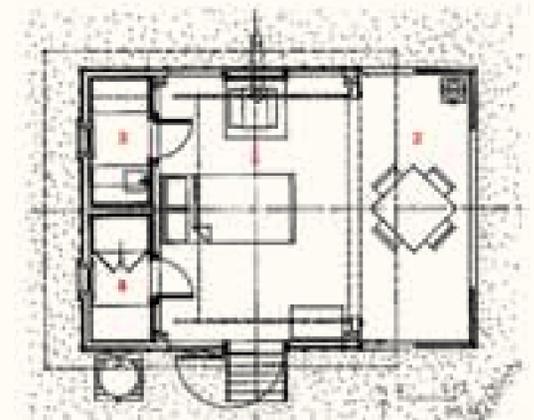
*A brilliant feature here is the folding glass-paned garage door, which slides up overhead and opens one entire wall to the grassy slopes and distant ridge.*



Photos by Anice Hoachlander

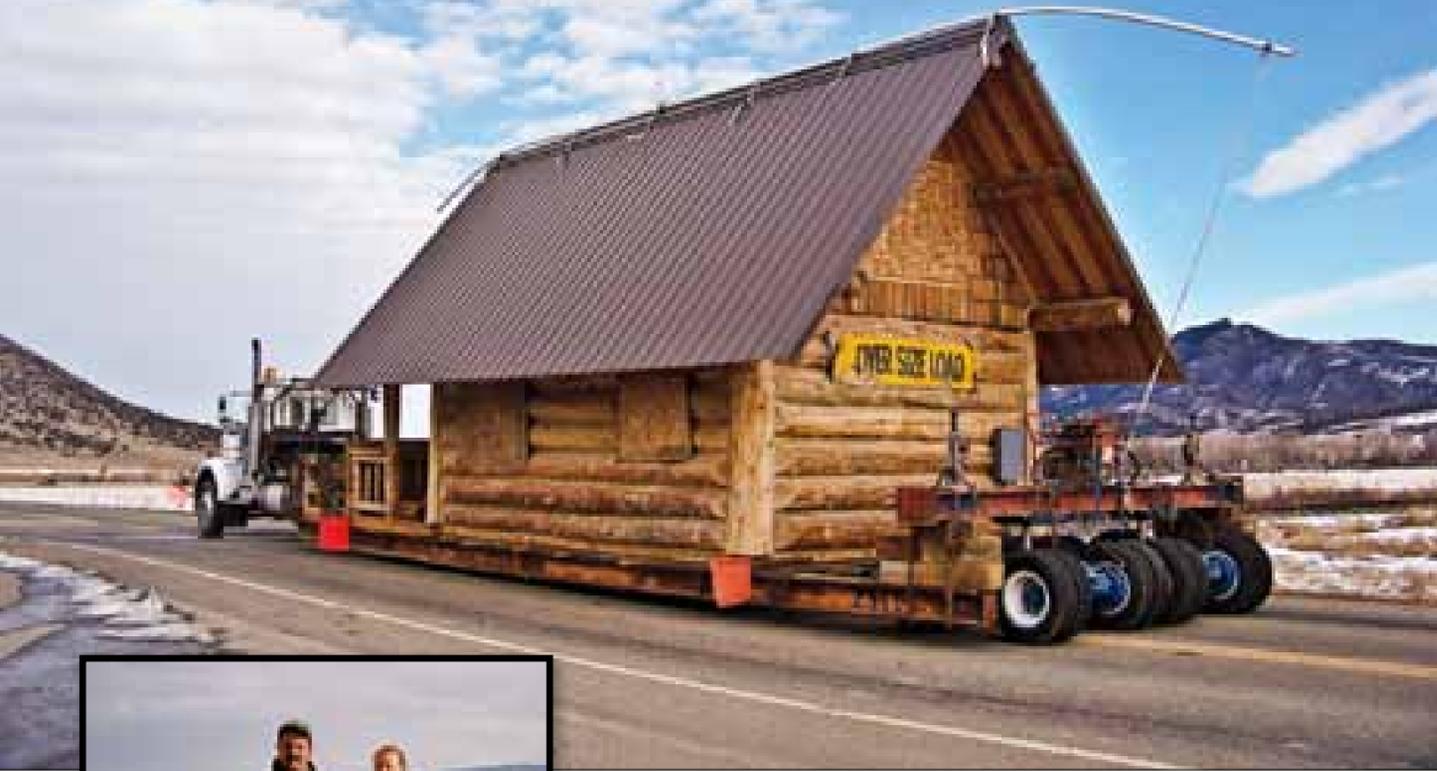


1. Bedroom/living room
2. Deck
3. Kitchen
4. Closet



# Montana Mobile Cabins

Kip and Dawndi Keim



**Website:** [www.MontanaMobileCabins.com](http://www.MontanaMobileCabins.com)  
**Email:** [info@montanamobilecabins.com](mailto:info@montanamobilecabins.com)

**Montana Mobile Cabins**  
P.O. Box 826  
Whitehall, MT 59759  
(406) 287-5030

**Size range:** 10' x 14' to 14' x 24'  
**Price range:** \$27,000–\$56,000

**M**ONTANA MOBILE CABINS is a family-owned-and-operated business located in Whitehall, Montana. The cabins we produce are not kits. We build your cabin on our site and transport the completed cabin to your site.

Each cabin we build is as unique as its owner, because the owner actually helps design the cabin. Individual preferences and the unique coloring of our hand-peeled logs make for a truly "one-of-a-kind" cabin.

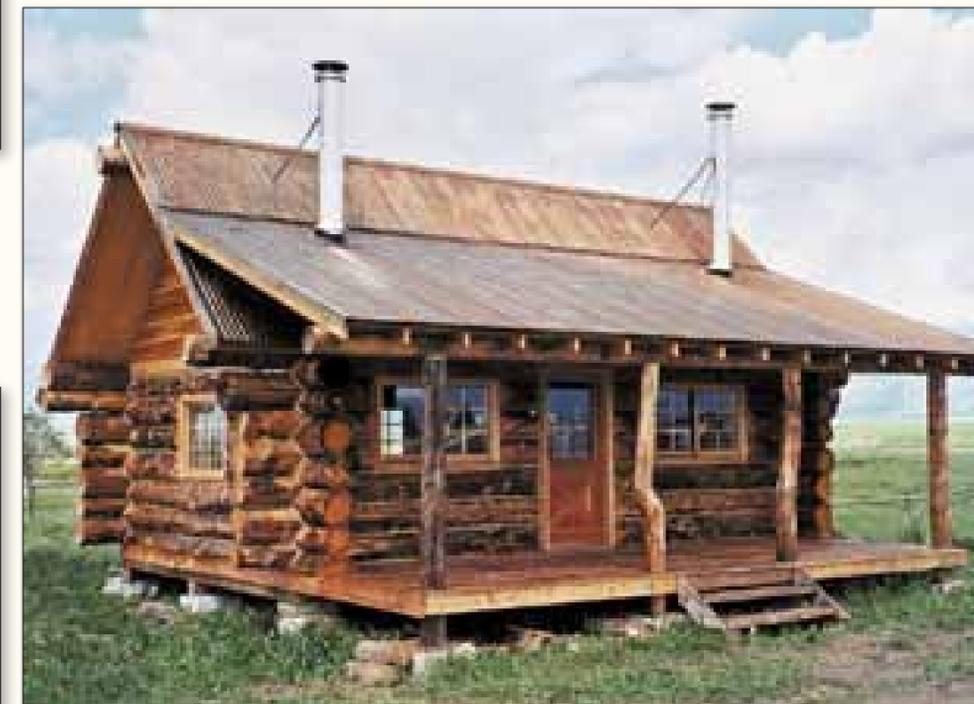
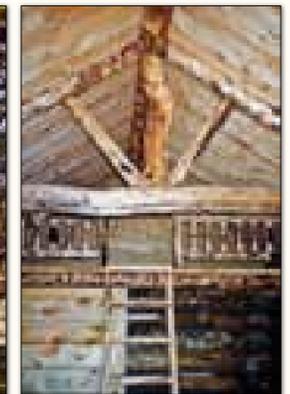
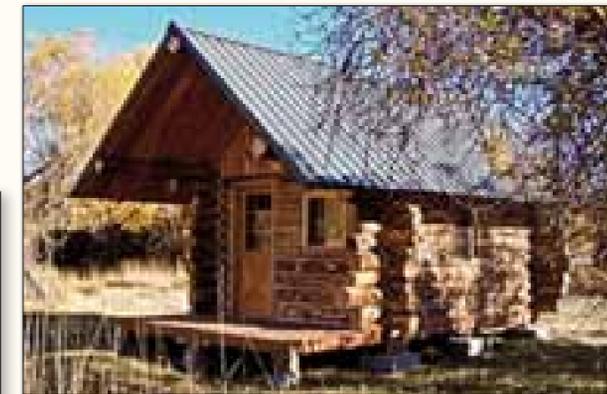
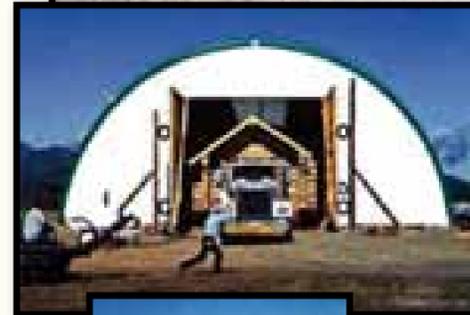
Our cabins are made much the same way that log homes were constructed a hundred years ago with hand-peeled logs, full-front porches, rustic wood ceilings and exposed, finished wood floors.

The cabins range in size from a 6' x 9' child's playhouse up to a 18' x 24' which can be delivered in Montana. For deliveries outside Montana, cabins must be 14' x 24' or smaller.

Log home/cabin handcrafters have traditionally been small operations. We produce the logs for your cabin much the way the settlers did, by carefully selecting each individual tree. We use hand-held tools such as a drawknife to peel the logs, as well as chisels and scribes to notch and shape each log.

The manner in which we select and cut our logs differs significantly from the methods used by manufacturers. Generally, in a manufactured kit you will find milled logs that have been cut to uniform shape and size. Our log smiths select logs to span the full length of the wall; they cut and shape every log to fit a specific location in your cabin. When we work with full round logs, the log retains the natural shape of the tree.

Our log smiths work in groups of two skilled individuals, custom building each and every cabin in the traditional way. Each handcrafters is an artisan, and the finished cabin is a work of art.



*"Our log smiths work in groups of two skilled individuals, custom building each and every cabin in the traditional way."*



## Hani's Man Cave

### SunRay Kelley

I went on a road trip northward in December, to shoot photos of my brother's olive harvest, jump in the water at Harbin Hot Springs, and hang out with my friend Louie in Mendocino County. SunRay (one of the principal builders in *Builders of the Pacific Coast*) was in the area, and had told me on the phone he was building a "man cave," but didn't give any details. One misty morning I went out a country lane in the Northern California hills to visit SunRay and his girlfriend Bonnie, and see the little building. It turned out to be a delight, another shining star from SunRay.

It's a 12-sided, 14½ foot diameter wooden yurt, actually a kit with the cedar for walls and roof coming from SunRay's forested land in Washington. SunRay trucked it down to the building site, assembled the yurt panels with Timberlock stardrive screws, and used scrap wood for the floor. It's got sculptured cob for the interior finish.

For the porch, SunRay went out into the woods, to get manzanita for the posts, bay for the beams, pine for rafters, and oak for the porch railing. Look at the way he uses forks in the manzanita posts to join two (or more) different parts of the rafters. This is a unique art that he has perfected over many years.

"I love it when I can go out in the forest and gather sticks and put them together." He calls it "carpenterless joinery." He says he just thinned out dense patches of manzanita, so it didn't even look as if anything was missing in the woods. No-cost-to-planet building materials.

Bonnie: "Most guys go to the lumber yard looking for straight lumber, but SunRay looks for the curviest."

SunRay "... the wildest."

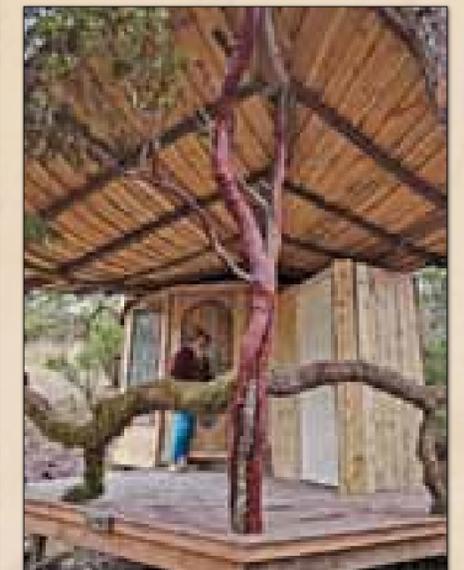


What's the deal with a man cave?  
 "Hani lives with four women — a wife and three daughters. He wanted some solitude and asked for a man cave."  
 (Rumor has it that the female contingent may be requesting one (or more) similar structures.)

SunRay's yurt kits (which don't include the porch) can be shipped anywhere.

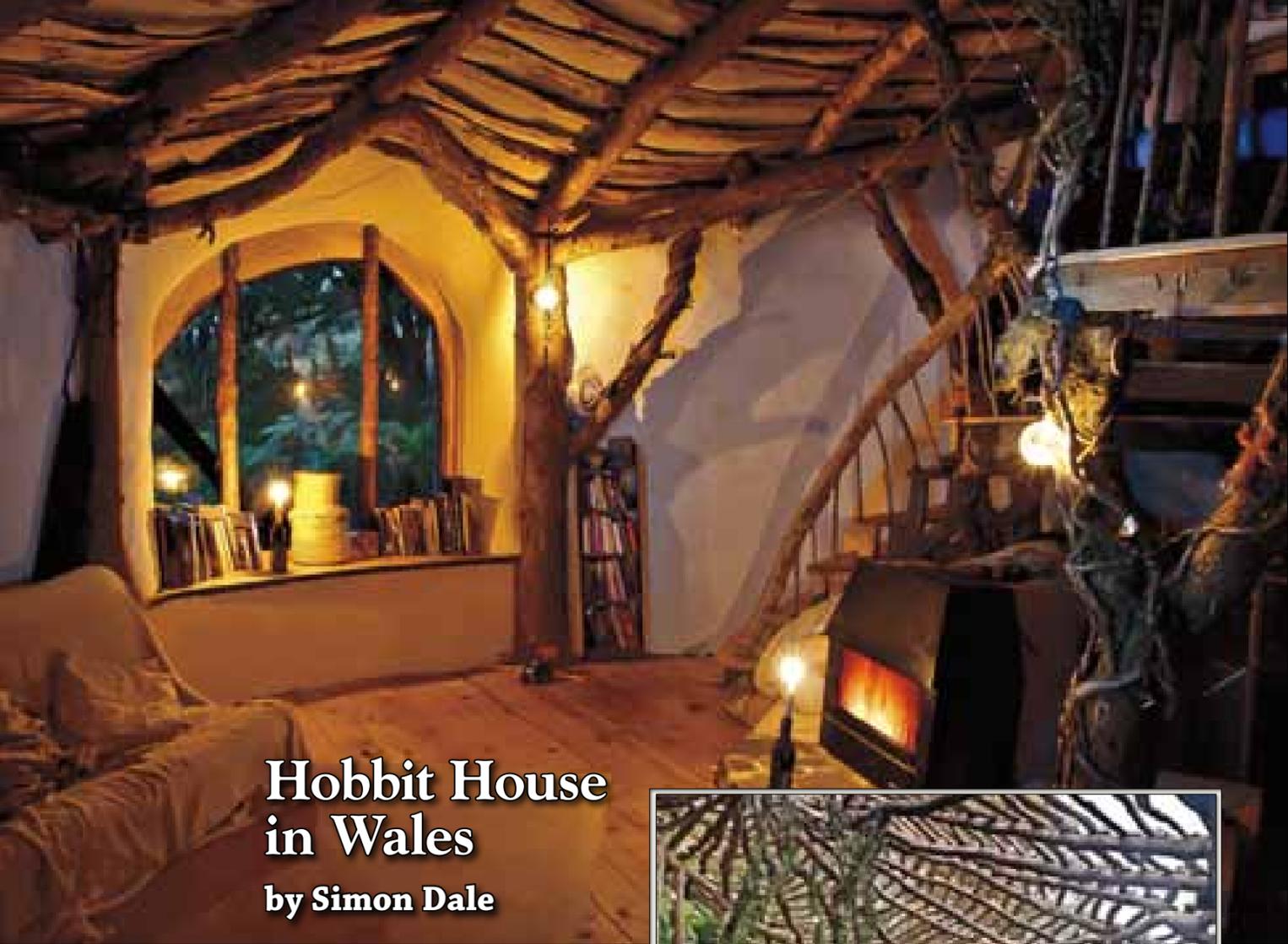
 [www.sunraykelley.com](http://www.sunraykelley.com)

**It's a 12-sided, 14½ foot diameter wooden yurt, actually a kit with the cedar for walls and roof coming from SunRay's forested land in Washington.**



**"I love it when I can go out in the forest and gather sticks and put them together."**





## Hobbit House in Wales

by Simon Dale

**T**HIS IS A HOUSE I BUILT for our family in Wales, with help from my father-in-law, passers-by, and visiting friends. Four months after starting we were moved in and cozy. I estimate 1000–1500 man hours and £3,000 put in to this point.

The house was built with maximum regard for the environment and reciprocally gives us a unique opportunity to live close to nature. Being your own architect allows you

to create and enjoy something which is part of yourself and the land rather than, at worst, a mass-produced box designed for maximum profit and convenience of the construction industry. Building from natural materials does away with producers' profits and the cocktail of carcinogenic poisons that fills most modern buildings.

Some key points of the design and construction:

- Dug into hillside for low visual impact and shelter
- Stone and mud from diggings used for retaining walls, foundations, etc.
- Frame of oak thinnings (spare wood) from surrounding woodland
- Reciprocal roof rafters are structurally and aesthetically fantastic and very easy to do.
- Straw bales in floor, walls and roof for super-insulation and easy building



- Plastic sheet and mud/turf roof for low impact and ease
- Lime plaster on walls is breathable and low-energy to manufacture (compared to cement).
- Reclaimed (scrap) wood for floors and fittings
- Anything you could possibly want is in a rubbish pile somewhere (windows, burner, plumbing, wiring...).
- Woodburner for heating — renewable and locally plentiful
- Flue goes through big stone/plaster lump to retain and slowly release heat.
- Fridge is cooled by air coming underground through foundations.
- Skylight in roof lets in natural-feeling light.
- Solar panels for lighting, music and computing



- Water by gravity from nearby spring
- Compost toilet
- Roof water collects in pond for garden, etc.

Main tools used: chainsaw, hammer and 1-inch chisel, little else really. Oh, and by

the way, I am not a builder or carpenter, my experience is only having a go at one similar house 2 years before and a bit of mucking around in between. This kind of building is accessible to anyone. My main relevant skills were being able-bodied, having

self-belief, perseverance, and a mate or two to give a lift now and again.

This building is one part of a low-impact or permaculture approach to life — living in harmony with the natural world, doing things simply, and using appropriate levels of technology. These sorts of low-cost, natural buildings have a place not only in their own sustainability, but also in their potential to provide affordable housing which allows people access to land and the opportunity to lead more simple, sustainable lives. For example this house was made to house our family whilst we worked in the woodland surrounding the house doing ecological woodland management and setting up a forest garden, things that would have been impossible had we had to pay a regular rent or mortgage.

[www.simondale.net/house](http://www.simondale.net/house)

### Vital Statistics

12' x 14.5'  
340 sq. ft. + 120 sq. ft. deck



*“Oh, and by the way, I am not a builder or carpenter...”*





## The Laughing House

### Linda Smiley Evans

Photos by Scott Spiker and Ann Sabbota

**W**ITH EVERY dream home comes a story. Mine begins with a childhood drawing of a cute little country cottage. Upon my fifty-ninth birthday, I realized I had completed this dream house in reality.

*The Laughing House* is my home, a demonstration building at Cob Cottage Company in the Oregon Coast rainforest. With my husband Ianto Evans, my goal was to show people how to build a mortgage-free starter home. A couple without construction experience could build it for under \$10,000 in a year, with only a manual and a week's training. It is passive solar, without toxins. It contains all the basic rooms and is designed to not look out of place in an American neighborhood.

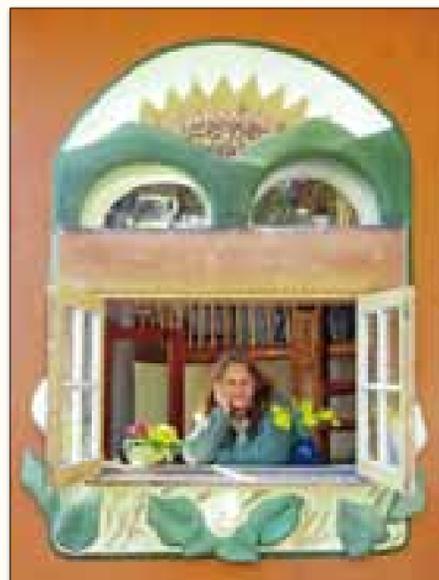
Walls are of cob and straw bales, structurally bonded ("BaleCob"). Almost all materials are either from the site—the



ground under our feet—recycled, or snatched from the commercial waste stream. The foundation is "urbanite" (recycled sidewalks), most wood is unmilled roundwood, or is reused. Floor, plasters, and paints were compounded on site from natural components—sands, clay, straw, lime and casein, with simple mineral pigments. Both inside and out, we used traditional lime-sand plasters with lime-based paints.

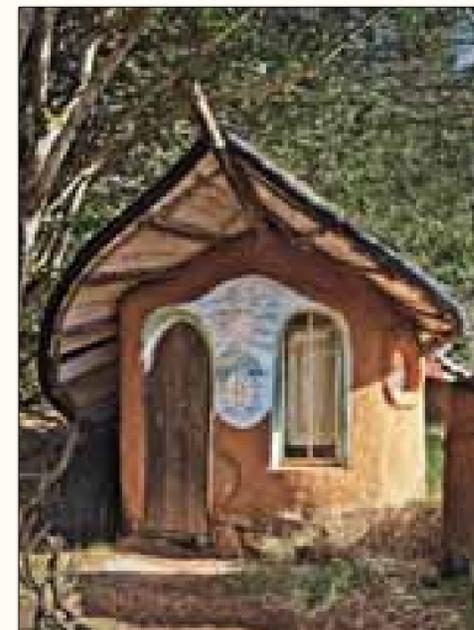
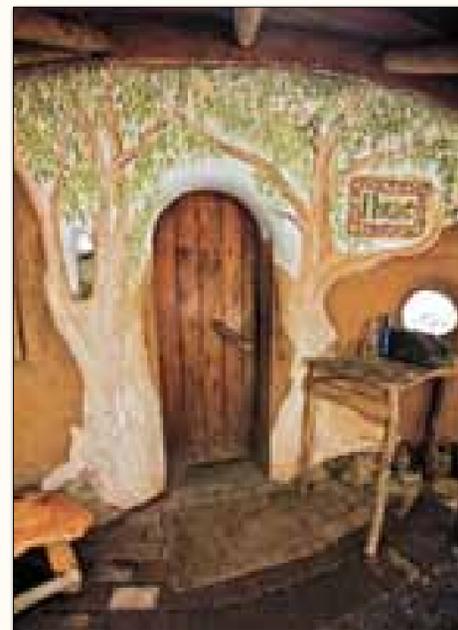
The exterior kitchen window is a burnished lime fresco *bas relief*, a landscape with sunflower and calla lilies to match the Mexican kitchen sink. The living room floor is my own creation: clay/straw with hydraulic lime. It is very durable, yet soft and warm feeling.

An EPDM (pond liner) membrane covers the whole roof, with two experimental insulations. One half has 6" of cardboard above the ceiling of reed matting, separated by white bed sheets. The other side is



"outsulated" with 4" of recycled Styrofoam appliance packaging over lime-washed bender boards. Above the EPDM is carpet covered with 6" of hay and 6" of leaf mulch, planted with native ferns and sedums with flower bulbs.

Being here is like living inside a hug. The walls gently curve with no square corners, hand-sculpted with embracing arms, as a glove fits one's hand or a cozy nest snuggles around eggs.



*"...my goal was to show people how to build a mortgage-free starter home. A couple without construction experience could build it for under \$10,000 in a year, with only a manual and a week's training."*



The Mudgirls are a non-profit collective of women builders who work together to build natural structures on the west coast of Canada. The collective began in 2004 on Lasqueti, a small, off-the-grid Gulf Island, as a way to address the issues of a lack of affordable housing, and to empower women with the confidence and skills to build their own homes. It began as a bartering collective and evolved into a larger collective of women from islands and cities around the coast who set out to do this as both a living and as part of the sustainability revolution.

**W**E USE LOW-TECH methods, often building off-the-grid, with hand tools and hard work, building homes and community as we go.



We build homes that are designed site-specifically, using what materials the land offers and designing for the sun, wind, and water patterns that exist there. We love sculpting houses out of cob, but also work with other materials such as straw bale, light-clay, wattle and daub, driftwood, and cordwood. What we can't gently harvest from the natural world, we salvage from our wasteful society—for example, we love using recycled windows and doors.

In addition to building new structures, we do eco-renovations on existing conventional buildings: applying earth-based paints and plasters to dry wall as a natural, healthy finish, and sculpting cob hearths around wood stoves for beauty and employment of cob's thermal mass for heat storage, improving the energy efficiency of a conventional house.

*“What we can't gently harvest from the natural world, we salvage from our wasteful society.”*



## The Mudgirls of British Columbia All-Woman Natural Building Crew

We work as crews, and as well, we hold workshops for people who want to learn. We build for others and we also barter amongst ourselves, building homes for each other and our families.

All our buildings are small, ranging from 100 to 500 sq. ft. We've built several 100 sq. ft. (plus loft) cabins that exemplify clever, efficient spatial design, such as built-in furniture to provide cozy but livable dwellings.

We find that learning to work together is as central to what we do as is building, and perhaps even more challenging. It is the era of machines and cheap fossil fuels that have allowed the individualist, “each man for himself,” approach to life. We are working hard relearning to do together what needs to be done, which none of us could do alone: to create homes, but also recreate our lives, our culture and economy in ways that are based wholeheartedly on taking care of ourselves, each other, and the earth.

—Jen Gobby  
[www.mudgirls.ca](http://www.mudgirls.ca)

*“We are a women's collective and seek to empower ourselves with employment and the skills to build homes.”*



*“We use low-tech methods, often building off-the-grid, with hand tools and hard work, building homes and community as we go.”*



# Sauna on Haida Gwaii

*In January 2009, someone sent us a photo of this unique little building and I eventually tracked it down to Meredith Adams on Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) in British Columbia. I wrote, asking who was the builder?*

Hey Lloyd—

That's one of Colin's buildings on the land we live on (North Beach, Haida Gwaii). Pictures never really did justice to this sauna, none that I've seen anyway. We were in Victoria

on Christmas Day when we got the phone call from our caretaker that the structure had completely burned down. Hard come, easy go. . . .

Thanks for your inspiring photos. We love all of your books around here and thumb through them often to glean ideas for wood structures.

I hope this finds you well and that you'll come find us up here one day!!

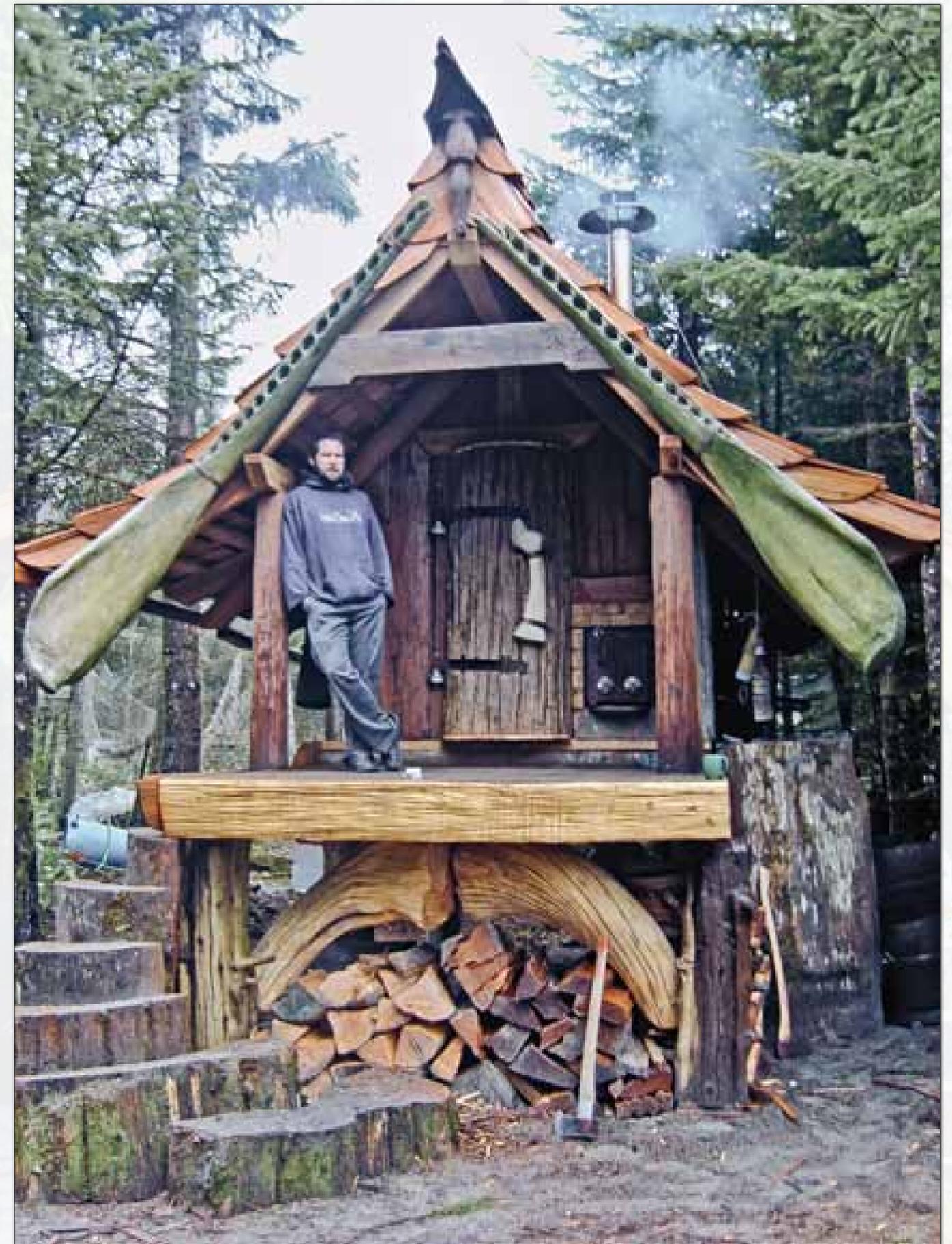
—Meredith

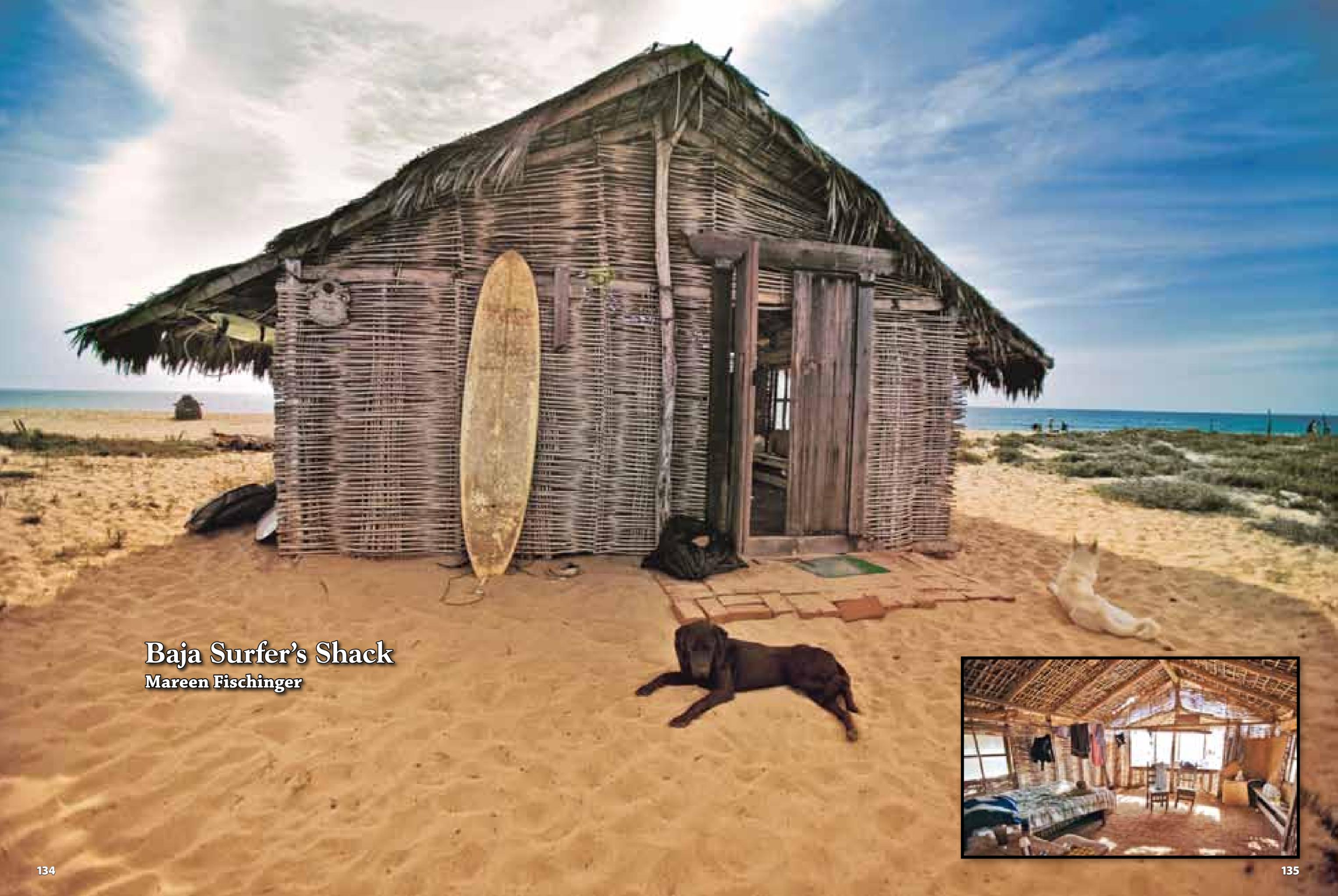
## Built by Colin Doane

P.S.: We had another big fire two weeks ago. Our famous bakery, the Moon Over Naikoon, burned down after a fierce wind-storm when some forgetful renters left the wood stove door open. So we've had your books (and twenty others) scattered around the coffee table dreaming up a new space. The upside is that a wicked new building site just got opened up, and Colin is stoked to sink his teeth into a big project.

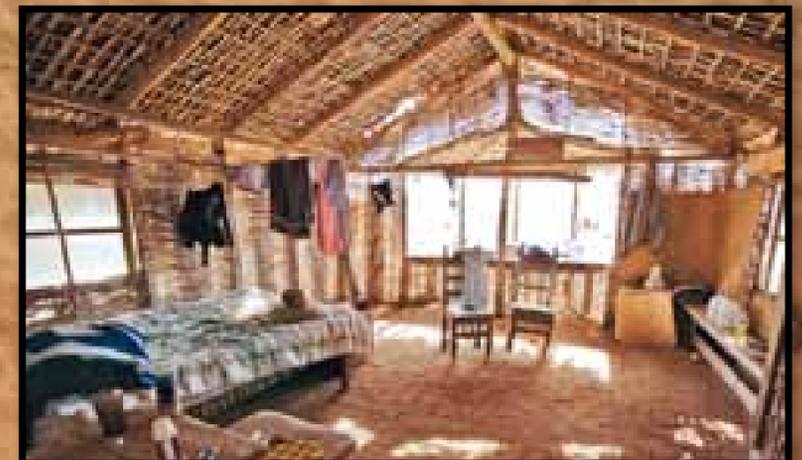


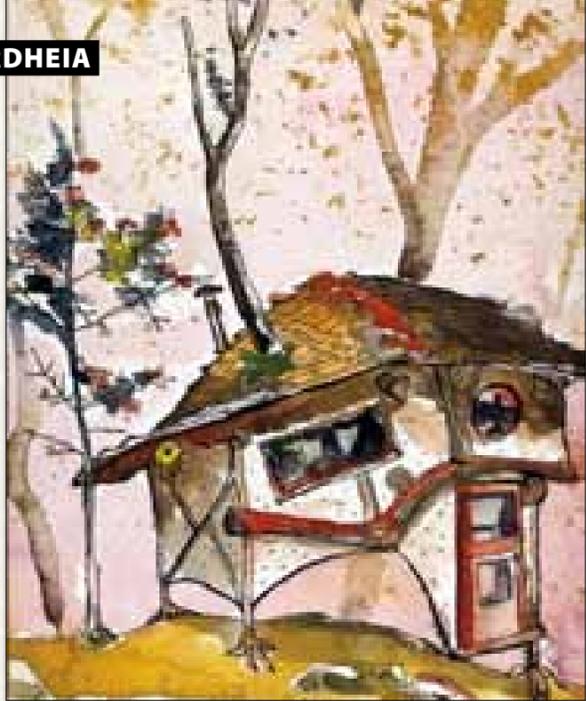
*Note whale jawbone front rafters, big bone door handle.*





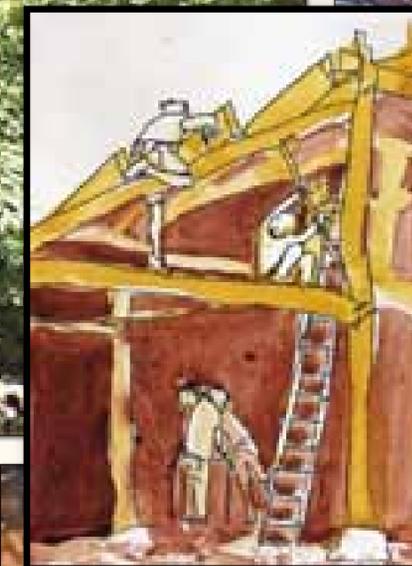
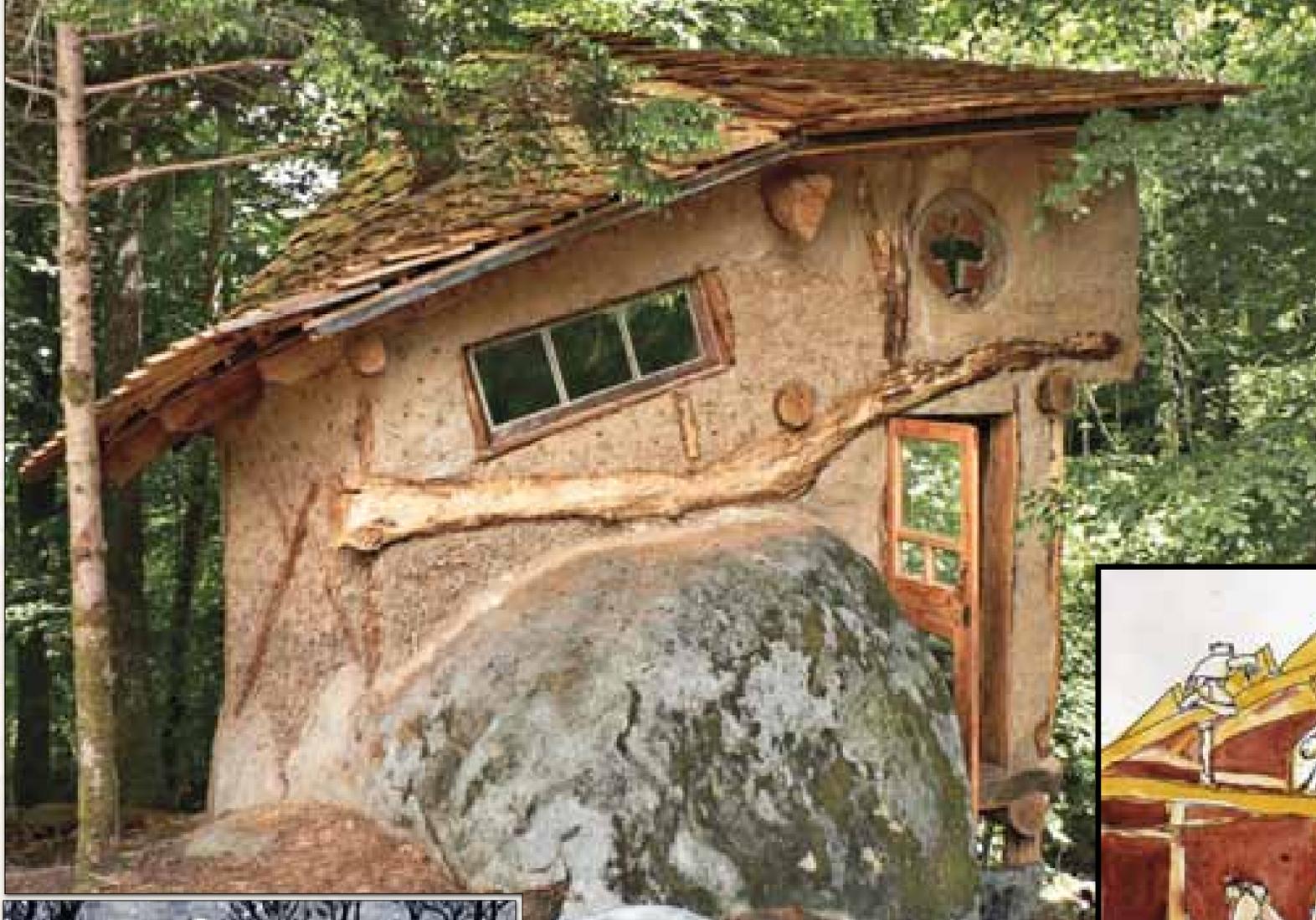
**Baja Surfer's Shack**  
**Mareen Fischinger**





**Toad Cabin**

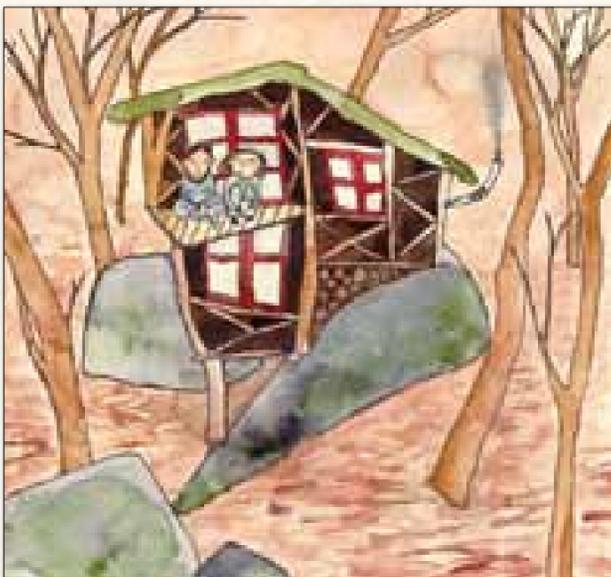
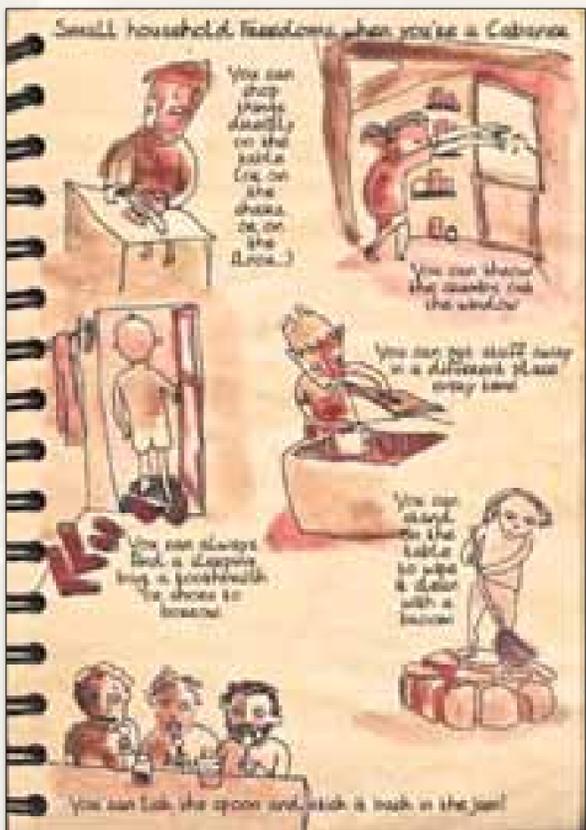
A roomier cabin up the hill is known as the "Toad Cabin" after its cool next-door neighbors and the nearby sculpture carved in their likeness. Originally built for six, the 17m<sup>2</sup> (183 sq. ft.) Toad Cabin currently houses a couple and their new baby. Its blowdown timber frame, cob walls, wooden shingles, and the twisted oak tree growing right through the middle add to its trolly personality. The cabin is perched at the summit of an old quarry site, and a tiny balcony allows the inhabitants to take full advantage of the sunrise in the high branches.



*"We better do lots of stuff!  
We'll be dead soon!"*



*"...defiantly homemade, beautifully livable houses are what we have chosen to be the stuff of our daily lives."*





# Chasing a Lost Sea in a Covered Wagon

**A Man, a Mule, a 21-Square-Foot Home**

**Bernie Harberts**



South Dakota in the snow



Crossing New Mexico



The Lost Sea in Tennessee

**“By making my home tiny, it made me vulnerable to the prairie mud, dust storms, grasshopper hordes, rattlesnakes, and dry lightning: 2,500 miles and 10 states’ worth.”**

**T**HE ONLY TIME I WISHED MY home was larger was the day my mule Polly, who was hitched to it, ran away, tiny shelter in tow. Galloping across the Montana plain with my abode clipping at her heels, the ever-faster-running mule made sure that when the procession came to a halt, the destruction would be complete. But no, in a quirk of fate, the runaway mule jumped a fence, and beast and home came to a jarring halt. You see, for 13 months, my home was a 21-square-foot wagon that carried me from Canada to Mexico. The goal of my journey? To learn more about the people and marine fossils of the American Great Plains.

65 million years ago, a warm, shallow sea covered the middle third of the American continent. Scientists call it the Western Interior Seaway. It was full of giant marine creatures whose remains,

once the waters receded, now lie scattered across America’s grassy midsection: stop-sign-sized clams in Kansas, car-sized turtles in South Dakota. Curious to investigate this little-known sea, I built a tiny wagon for my mule Polly, and painted “The Lost Sea Expedition” on my new home’s side, and hit the road.

I chose to travel by mule because it would allow me to voyage at the pace best suited to observing and socializing: the speed of walking. For this, I needed a tiny, movable home, small and light enough to be towed by one mule, but large enough to allow me a place to sleep, cook, film, photograph and write up my field notes. It also had to house a 100-watt solar panel with room left over to carry 10 gallons of water and 50 pounds of horse feed. My budget was \$4,000.

Unlike home designs, of which there are countless thousands, I

found modern mule wagon designs nonexistent. So I designed and built my own. What I settled on was a light steel frame in-filled with insulated foam panels covered by a plywood roof. It was small, too: 21 square feet, which is about how much skin covers the average human being.

While most folks build homes that insulate them from the outside world (a man’s house is his fortress, right?), I chose the opposite approach. By making my home tiny, it made me vulnerable to the prairie mud, dust storms, grasshopper hordes, rattlesnakes, and dry lightning: 2,500 miles and 10 states’ worth. Sensing this exposure, people invited me into their homes and lives. I found myself sleeping in spare bedrooms, from frugal to fancy. On a near-daily basis, I found myself seated at that Holy Grail of travelers chasing a story: the kitchen table.

It’s here, in their homes, on their porches, sharing their meals, that folks taught me about life on the plains and at the bottom of the Lost Sea. It’s here that I learned how Texans and Montanans pray differently: the former pray for rain to come, the later for the hail to stay away. It’s here I learned some folks thought the Lost Sea was evidence of Noah’s Flood, while others said it harked back to the Age of the Stone Men of Lakota myth.

It was in the larger confines of strangers’ homes, that I learned the beauty of a small home: it brought me access to the fuller story I was chasing. Sometimes, for that, a voyager needs to travel in a vessel as small and comfortable as the skin he’s in.

North Carolina author Bernie Harberts has spent two decades sailing alone around the world and crisscrossing the United States in wind- and mule-powered homes ranging from 21 to 150 square feet. When not traveling in a tipi, wagon or sailboat, he lives in a 72 sq. ft. home on the 900-acre family farm. His latest book, about traveling coast-to-coast with a tipi and a cranky mule, is *Too Proud to Ride a Cow*.

 [www.riverearth.com](http://www.riverearth.com)

**“... a light steel frame in-filled with insulated foam panels covered by a plywood roof. It was small, too: 21 square feet, which is about how much skin covers the average human being.”**



## Floating Homestead in British Columbia

Henrik Lindström

