

Try 120 square feet of living space on for size at a tiny-house hotel

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN
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The lure of the tiny house is huge. These small homes, less than 200 square feet and often on wheels, appeal to the minimalist, the environmentalist and the frugalist. Certainly, living in a space smaller than some bathrooms is not for everyone, but during the past few years I've found myself in countless conversations with like-minded small-dwelling enthusiasts. We'll talk about the idea of paring down and living more simply and affordably. After all, when I'm on the road for extended periods, I'm content with my itty-bitty existence — that which I can fit in my car. Time and again, I return home and

shake my head at all the possessions I'd left behind.

In my journey to self-educate about small living, I made multiple visits to a tiny-house community in Northeast Washington (since disbanded) and watched a tiny-house documentary. I've fantasized about buying one as a second home, towing it to locales with dreamy views. When my last partner and I had casually discussed cohabitating and talked about tiny houses, I insisted we'd need a flock of them—his, hers, one for my office, one for entertaining and one that housed all our recreational gear. That defeats the purpose, he said earnestly. I sighed, exaggeratedly, sitting in my spacious 900-square-foot

TINY HOUSES CONTINUED ON F6



MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

The author's beagle found a spot in their lodgings at Caravan in Portland, Ore. The human sleeping area was up the ladder.

Check in to a teensy corner of ‘Portlandia’

TINY HOUSES FROM FI

rowhouse.

Given the robust tiny-house movement (to wit: a handful of TV shows, DIY workshops, tiny-house kits, an annual conference and countless books and blogs), it’s surprising that so few of them exist legally. Although cities don’t spend much time hunting down tiny-house dwellers, the structures violate building code in most jurisdictions, because they don’t meet the square footage requirement for permanent residences. Hence the house-on-wheels regulatory loophole: If folks complain about your house, simply tow it to another spot.

Plenty of people offer tiny houses as vacation rentals, but leave it to progressive Portland to introduce the first tiny-house hotel. The Oregon city has not only legalized accessory dwelling units, also called ADUs (small living quarters on the same lot as a larger home), the city embraces and incentivizes smaller-scale living. This approach helped make it possible for Deb Delman and Kol Peterson to open Caravan, which they say is the first legal commercial application of tiny houses in the United States. The houses are hooked up to the electric grid and the city water and sewer systems (sorry, compost-toilet devotees).

Since Caravan’s opening in 2013, WeeCasa has opened in the small mountain town of Lyons, Colo., with 11 tiny houses, partly inspired by Caravan. The owners promote the resort as a learning center and place to “try before you buy”; they also have a dealership for purchasing blueprints or finished houses. Next year, a tiny-home inn called Understory will open in Thomas, W.Va., with structures made using natural earth, reclaimed materials and off-grid technologies.

“People think nothing of spending hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars building a tiny house, but very few people have been inside a tiny house,” Delman said. She and Peterson, who seem more at ease as small-living activists and educators than hoteliers, regularly open the tiny houses for tours, which can attract upward of 100 people. Delman says three-quarters want to build a tiny house, but a show of hands tells her that typically only one or two have ever spent the night in one.

Guests either leave Caravan thinking “No way,” or their visit fortifies their dream. “Some are really here investigating and measuring,” Delman said, “or, they never thought about living in one but, staying here, they realize they can downsize.”

I planned part of my recent cross-country drive around a stay at Caravan, which tends to book up a couple months out. Located in Portland’s Alberta Arts District, the tiny houses are fenced inside a lot accessed by a keypad, so guests enjoy the privacy of a tiny house and the coziness of an enclosed community, yet they’re surrounded by night-

life and they’re steps from a vibrant strip of indie shops and cafes.

My beagle and I checked into a house called Rosebud: 120 square feet with a rocking chair on the (tiny) porch and ladder up to a loft sleeping space. On a bookshelf, I found titles such as “The Big Tiny,” a memoir by tiny-house pioneer Dee Williams, and “Curious Gorge,” about hiking the Columbia River Gorge. A booklet told the stories of each of the six tiny homes, some of which were built specifically for Caravan. Mine was leased from its builder, made largely from recycled materials and lit by Mason jar lights. Inside the closet was wallpaper that looks like a bookshelf, left over from the “Portlandia” skit shot here.

On Alberta Street, I stopped at Case Study, a beautiful coffee shop built with wood and steel, for a locally made, small-batch black tea chai. I then convinced myself that citywide tax-free shopping was reason enough to buy souvenirs. A hemp-and-organic-cotton dress and some locally made ruffled pants later, I chuckled at the hypocrisy: succumbing to consumerism during a minimalist living experiment. With the contents of my car, my shopping bags and my bike, I’d covered most of the tiny house floor space.

That night, I met some Portland friends for dinner around the corner, at an edgy vegan spot called Bye and Bye. We sat on the patio and shared vegetable and noodle bowls, a vegan meatball sub and soft-pretzel knots. Over drinks, we realized that our group of four consisted of a gay guy with a husband and a straight gal who calls her significant other her “partner.” We laughed about this new era in which we live.

We all returned to Caravan and gathered around the fire pit, and I glanced at the houses around us. One looked like a covered wagon, another was made with corrugated metal and wood shingles. Armed with s’mores ingredients, we set to work at the fire, raindrops tapping on the tent overhead.

I met some of the other guests: A Portland couple celebrating a birthday and dreaming about building a tiny house; a single woman traveling from British Columbia; a road-tripping couple who had seen Caravan on Pinterest; and a mother-daughter duo visiting from Ohio after watching “Tiny House Nation.” A photographer who had just finished a campfire photo shoot hung around and offered his expertise on marshmallow roasting.

As guests retreated to their tiny abodes, those of us remaining had a serious conversation about milk vs. dark chocolate (both were on hand for s’mores, in mini, organic, fair-trade-bar form).

The photographer and I closed down the fire pit, and I invited him into my well-lit house so he could point out some routes on a Portland bike map. We sat in the tiny space, knees touching, the map spread out between

TINY HOUSES CONTINUED ON **F7**



PHOTOS BY JEFF FREEMAN

On a May evening, the Robin Jackson Band performed at Caravan in Portland, Ore. In the summer, the tiny-house hotel offers local music, a bonfire and s'mores.

TINY HOUSES FROM F6

us. When he left, I stood in the door frame and waved from the tiny porch.

I climbed the ladder and onto the bed. Just to see if I could, I sat up straight, and the top of my head grazed the ceiling. I slid under the covers, listening to the rain outside the tiny window, and fell asleep.

The next morning I woke early to dreary skies and cycled the photographer's suggested route to St. Johns Bridge. Back at Caravan, I made tea and oatmeal on the hot plate, showered in the tiny bathroom without banging my elbows on the shower walls and answered a few e-mails on my laptop, standing at the kitchen counter.

Before I knew it, the clock struck check-out time, and I regretted booking only one night. I packed my car, situated the beagle and went back to the tiny house for one last look at the place where I'd slept, cooked, bathed, worked and enjoyed company. Then I drove away, feeling wistful, a tiny-house fan wanting just a little more.

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SYDNEY FROM F6

have been more indebted.

One woman grabbed a pen and a napkin and within a few minutes presented me with a scribbled list of 22 bars. It felt like I had been handed a treasure map. I folded it up neatly, said my farewells, and made the trek to the hotel. It took 14 minutes.

Stitch opened in the bustling Central Business District in 2012, just one of several small bars to debut there around that time. These hangouts contribute to the fresh, postmodern energy that practically defines the city. I can't help wonder whether that stems from the fact that it's a relatively new metropolis. There are no centuries-old cathedrals, castles, or cafes once inhabited by monks, royals, artists and cult intellectuals. There are no war-scarred civic buildings. The most iconic structures are its grand cantilevered opera house, completed in 1973, and the Sydney Harbor Bridge, an art deco colossus unveiled in 1932. Add to that the fact that the city is rimmed by beaches, each one packed with surfers, and it's understandable how Sydney is as relaxed and modest as it is stylish and forward-looking.

The bars of the city embody the same balance, shunning pretension while mixing up intriguing cocktails, from classic to avant-garde. Yes, some bars are tucked away in that all-too-familiar speakeasy mode that makes me roll my eyes, but unlike the vibe in other cocktail-obsessed cities, there's no preciousness and no exclusivity at these hideaways. The tucked-away locations started to seem like mere matters of real estate availability.

Such is the case at Bulletin Place, which opened in 2012 on the outskirts of the Central Business District. The compact space has small tables and artfully distressed walls. It's situated above a cafe in a building old enough that it's classified as "heritage." Thus, there are strict signage regulations. It'd be tough to find if not for fashionable types tapping on their iPhones outside. The entrance is guarded by a baby-faced but no-nonsense young man in a black T-shirt who monitors the foot traffic. And, as with Stitch, once you're seated and your drink arrives, it feels like a reward.

Co-owner Tim Philips, a veteran barman who's a familiar face on the global cocktail competition circuit, has a laser focus on seasonal cocktails. Menus are scrawled on butcher paper and tacked to the walls because they change daily, a tribute to Australia's lush vegetation. While the rum in my Corella Swizzle was well aged, the garnish, a generous bouquet of fresh mint, was newly born.

Chatting with Philips, I learned how drastically the city's bar scene had changed in the past few years thanks to the introduction of

what's referred to as the "small-bar license." Whereas once bars had to serve food and/or be in a hotel and/or have a gaming license, that requirement was eliminated in 2008 for establishments with a capacity of less than 60. This created new opportunities for entrepreneurs who weren't keen on the big, boisterous, clubby venues that had long been the norm.

"We're owner-operated — and small — so it's easy to control. We never have issues," Philips told me. "Police came three months after we opened to see if we had the right signage. Since then, police only come when they're off-duty. These bars look after themselves."

That same sentiment was echoed by the bartenders at Grandma's Bar, who told me their location "keeps the riffraff out." Another Central Business District spot, it's located down a set of stairs, over which a stag head is perched like a sentinel. The bar is a study in retro kitsch: crocheted blankets, tacky ceramic statues and an attic's worth of tchotchkes soften the cement-walled space. The menu is rum-centric, but even the drinks with other



At 170 square feet, the Kangablue is the biggest house of the six at Caravan. Portland is home to what Caravan's owners say is the first legal commercial application of tiny houses.

If you go

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

Stitch Bar

61 York St.

011-61-2-9279-0380

www.stitchbar.com/bar

Dim, Victorian-accented subterranean bar serving creative cocktails and modern fare, from duck sausage to lamb burgers. Drinks from \$12, small plates from \$9.

Bulletin Place

1, 10-14 Bulletin Pl.

www.bulletinplace.com

The daily-changing menu at this compact, shabby-chic hot spot features cocktails (\$7 to \$14) made with fresh, seasonal ingredients.

Grandma's Bar

Basement 275 Clarence St.

011-61-2-9264-3004

www.grandmasbarsydney.com.au

The decor at this hip basement bar is an exercise in light-hearted kitschy cool, while the rum-focused cocktail menu, from \$12, allows

the bartenders to display serious craftsmanship. Toasted sandwiches and retro-minded snacks from \$4 to \$7.

Tokyo Bird

Commonwealth Street and Belmore Lane

011-61-2-8880-0788

www.tokyobird.com.au

Tucked away in a discreet alley, this sleek but casual yakitori restaurant offers an impressive selection of Japanese whiskys and cutting-edge cocktails. Cocktails from \$12; plates from \$4.

This Must Be the Place

239 Oxford St.

011-61-2-9331-8063

www.tmbtp.com.au

Refreshing and seasonal wine-based spritzers are the draw at this airy, minimalist bar opened in February by a pair of Sydney's best-known bartenders. Drinks from \$10. The Spanish-accented snacks include chicharonnes (\$4); cheese plates, from \$17; and classic tins of seafood with toast, from \$13.

— L.W.

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spirits lean tiki. My Rye Me to the Moon (rye whiskey, Punt e Mes, fresh lime, passion fruit), was so vibrant, it seemed likely to break into a cha-cha routine.

Opened in 2010, Grandma's received the city's second small-bar license. The intimacy makes it feel like a house party with Granny as host. I imagine her as a feisty broad who frequented the glamorous Polynesian-inspired party spots in California in the 1950s.

Tokyo Bird is the subdued, contemplative yin to Grandma's sassy, whimsical yang. If it weren't for the swirling aromas of charred wood and teriyaki wafting from an alleyway, I probably wouldn't have found this year-old pocket-size restaurant in the ultra-trendy Surry Hills neighborhood. I also wouldn't have ventured down the kinda-creepy alley to the nondescript cement-faced building.

The drinks are serious business: The oversized ice cubes are hand-carved with the cleaver, saw and ice pick mounted on the wall by the bar; the sleek Japanese mixing glasses and bar tools seem designed by engineers. But the space has a laid-back, luncheonette air about

If you go

WHERE TO STAY

Caravan

5009 NE 11th Ave., Portland, Ore.

503-288-5225

www.tinyhousehotel.com

Each of the six tiny houses at Caravan is \$145 per night; a couple are pet-friendly. Some sleep as many as four guests and all have running water, electric heat, a kitchenette, flush toilet and hot shower. WiFi and s'mores ingredients included. Tours on select Sundays, \$10. On Nov. 6-8, Caravan will host part of a tiny-house weekend, including a summit, ADU tour and workshop.

WeeCasa

501 West Main St., Lyons, Colo.

720-460-0239

www.weecasa.com

Ten tiny homes, each with kitchenettes, electricity, flush toilets and free WiFi. Houses sleep up to four adults, \$169-\$199 per night. Free tours every Tuesday at noon and Saturday at 11:30 a.m. (or by appointment for a fee).

WHERE TO EAT

Bye and Bye

1011 NE Alberta St.

www.thebyeandbye.com

Vegan comfort food and drinks with a large patio and \$2 PBRs. Eastern Bowl, BBQ Brussel Bowl and Georgia Bowl, \$9. Cocktails include Three Liars (house-infused cucumber gin, fresh lime and sugar) and Autumn Toddy (bourbon, allspice dram, lemon, agave, and orange and black walnut bitters), \$8.

Grilled Cheese Grill

NE 11th and Alberta

503-206-8959

www.grilledcheesegrill.com

The kitchen is a converted trailer and the dining room is an old school bus. Select from grilled cheese varieties such as the classic Kindergartner, \$4.50; the Sour Apple (cheddar and Braeburn apples), \$5; and the Cheesus (burger between two grilled cheeses), \$8.50.

Case Study Coffee Roasters

1422 NE Alberta St.

503-477-8221

www.casestudycoffee.com

Locally made sweet and spicy black tea chai, starting at \$3.50, single-origin coffees and seasonal drinks such as lavender-infused cold brew. Baked goods from Petunia's Pies & Pastries and Roman Candle Baking Co., including mini bundt cakes, \$4; and scones, \$3.

INFORMATION

www.travelportland.com

www.albertamainst.org

— M.K.

it, what with tiled walls, tall tables made of salvaged wood, a small open kitchen (with a bell signaling when an order's ready) and cocktails listed on an aluminum-framed letter board. The Japanese whiskies here, including hard-to-find brands, encompass a vast diversity of flavors and subtleties. (The variety comes from the fact that Japanese whiskymakers are not tied to rules like Scotch and bourbon producers are.) Each selection is listed on a menu with almost haikulike tasting notes, like "Stonefruit, light peat, oak toffee" (Nikka Pure Black Malt, \$26) and "Red berry fruits, mild chocolate, spice" (Yamazaki Distillers Reserve, \$13).

"We wanted it to feel like Tokyo — you look down the alley, you smell the food and there you go," bartender Yoshi Onishi told me as he finished making my Smoked Hunter, which involved him pouring a Nikka From the Barrel — the name of a Japanese whisky — and Cherry Heering into a bottle he filled with applewood smoke. The smoke complemented the grill char on the assortment of creative yakitori — Japanese scallops, shiitake mushrooms, crispy fish skin. Traditional skewers like these are the restaurant's focus. A Tokyo feel? Mission accomplished.

Bar-going in Sydney is a bit like scanning radio stations, each of which specializes in a genre. You get your tiki drinks here, your Japanese-whisky fix there, your market-fresh cocktails a distance over there.

The specialty at This Must Be the Place is spritzers — light, wine-based drinks carbonated in-house and designed for the season. They're as bright as the narrow Scandinavian-inspired space, which features a shallow counter along a wide window overlooking Oxford Street. This no-frills commercial strip is in Darlinghurst, a revitalized neighborhood once known for its red-light district.

Charlie Ainsbury and Luke Ashton, two well-known barmen in town, opened This Must Be the Place in February. They wanted a break from labor-intensive, high-proof (and, accordingly, high-priced) cocktails. They're living evidence that simplicity is supreme. At least that's what I thought as I sipped the shimmering Rose Gold (quinquina, violette, rosé wine and grapefruit oil). It was an exercise in casual elegance. Nothing esoteric, nothing hidden and nothing presumptuous. Just a drink that's imaginative, invigorating and fiercely rewarding.

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