



TODD MILLER OF
OREGON COTTAGE COMPANY

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

DESIGN

Feedback from customers has led to the evolution of his designs, Miller says. Six years after his tiny house building began, he's including features like ladders secured with wooden notches, optional French doors, washers and dryers and sleeping lofts that feel big enough to gather with five or six people thanks to the addition of dormers.

"Our suppliers are actually changing their designs, which really helps us because we can adapt our kitchen design to accommodate their appliances," Miller says. Oregon Cottage Company's kitchens feature a stacked design in which each space has multiple functions, meaning two people can work in the small space without backing into one another.

Anson says there's a lot she'd change if she were to build another house — she'd like a compost toilet, less built-in furniture and more food storage — but she's thrilled with the metal roof that didn't dent during the recent ice storm, the high ceilings and the closet that's absolutely packed with clothing, which might be the crown jewel for the first-time builder. Anson says that clothing, much of it thoughtfully thrifted, was the hardest thing to give up when moving into her tiny home.

"I thought it was going to be sort of a giant release to sell everything I own — I've never been much of a keeper anyway, but it was surprisingly hard," she says. "It wasn't really immediate; it was a much more prolonged orientation from living in a small space and how you move in the space to not being able to buy things or having a different relationship with what I buy."

ROMANTICIZATION

Even after an adjustment period, Anson says that not everything about tiny house living is easy. "The rhetoric — and I think it's slowly changing — is pretty romanticized," she says. Not picking up little treasures that she finds while thrift shopping can still be disappointing for her, and she still keeps books in storage at her mom's house.

Another challenge is finding a legal place to park. Anson is living in her grandmother's backyard while she finishes her Ph.D., but not everyone has that option.

An association that Miller works with is trying to find and perpetuate an example of land use codes that work for tiny homes. "We're finding that we're going to have to reclassify what a tiny house is," he explains. "It's different than an RV because of the way we build them, the way they look and they're not being taken on the road all the time. They're usually taken to a certain place and stay there for a while."

In the meantime, there are slim parking options for tiny homes that are technically RVs. "They are finding that the places that they can put them are a little less desirable: RV parks," Miller says. "They're not near walkable areas near the facilities they might want."

Despite the trade-offs, Miller says, many tiny house dwellers do feel that a tiny home can be freeing. "They're willing to give up some of the luxuries of a larger kitchen to downsize and to have the freedom to spend with their friends and family and spend a lot less on their housing and the bills they're paying every month," he says.

Even with the romanticization of tiny homes, Anson still believes in small living. "I think if the movement can woo people in, the political work of the movement actually comes in the reality of living in one and realizing the degree to which we, including me, have taken stuff for granted." ■



APRIL ANSON'S LOFT

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

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