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OUR VIEW

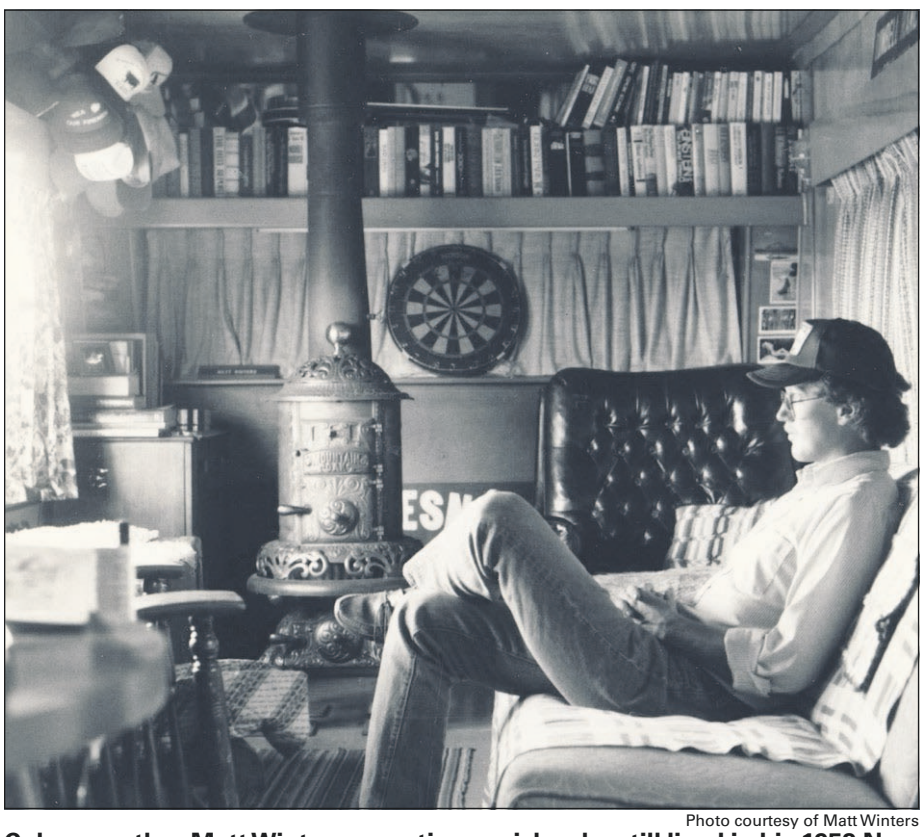

Photo courtesy of Matt Winters

Column author Matt Winters sometimes wishes he still lived in his 1953 New Moon trailer, an elegantly efficient and inexpensive housing option.

Living big is easier in a small house

By MATT WINTERS
EO Media Group

Search some apparently innocent words in Google and you're in for an offensive onslaught — slavering packs of predators lurk in the weeds of the Internet Serengeti, delighting in ambushing unsuspecting eyeballs.

So you'll be happy to learn the loaded phrase "cabin porn" does not inevitably lead to photos of Viagra-popping sodbusters and buxom schoolmarms, but to hundreds of cabins, shacks, alpine shelters, huts and other enviable little habitations. Set amidst fantasy-igniting natural scenery, cabinporn.com's photos are pornographic only in the sense that they make us long for things in short supply in 21st century American life: simplicity, immediate connection to lands and waters, silent surroundings and free time to enjoy them. Raptly gazing at the images, we imagine lives without mortgages, dining on fresh trout caught in a sinfully pretty Scottish lake.

Functional and practical, small dwellings work on a human scale. Often they're constructed of stones and wood from the construction site or nearby, or from salvaged items. "Vernacular materials, techniques and forms" is the official architectural term for it. We shouldn't over-glamorize all these utilitarian homes: For every elegant and organically beautiful resident-built dwelling, there are perhaps a thousand shanties where no one should have to live. But when time, space, materials and skills come together in just the right combinations, little handmade houses are one of the highest expressions of human creativity.

On our coastline and Northern California — most famously in Carmel before the ultrawealthy colonized it — Pacific beach pines and ocean-delivered lumber were long used to build homes that feel like they've naturally grown out of hillsides — fully formed and inviting. In the past I've mentioned The Wreckage in Ocean Park, Wash., as the starring local example of shipwreck-salvage architecture. There are hundreds of other stylish vernacular beach homes in our area, though winter storms and neglect have devoured a good many.

Though never an epitome of fine design, my own house has been a good example of deferred maintenance — something you can't get away with for long in this climate where blackberry vines and English ivy soon cover anything that stands in one place for too long. Thanks to the kind and incredibly diligent crew at Dr. Roof, everything is now literally safe and sound again, and we'll probably be here as long as we live. Some days, though, I fantasize about being in a place about a quarter the size of where we are now, where my wife and I will each soon have an entire 1,000-square-foot story to ourselves once Elizabeth leaves for college.

The appeal of snug and efficient homes with lots of individual character has most recently found expression in the Tiny House Movement, generating much interest at both ends of the demographic age spectrum in the Pacific Northwest. This week at the Seattle Home Show, a display model by Salem-based Tiny Mountain Houses caught the eye of attendees and a KING5 news crew. It is indeed a cute little house, though an exterior view on the company's website reminds me quite a lot of the sheepherder wagons that Basque and Hispanic men used to reside in for months at a time in the Rocky Mountain high country when I was a boy. Later supplanted by cheap campers, these wood-and-iron framed contraptions had roomy, shellacked canvas roofs, cook stoves ventilated by tin stovepipes, and plenty of built-in storage — land yachts for smelly bachelors.

Factory-made tiny houses will need years of seasoning and customization to attain anything like the character of a multigenerational cabin at the beach or in the mountains. However, they have instantaneous appeal in being better scaled to suit young people just starting out and older people shedding the mass of possessions that encrust our lives. Resources like thetinylife.com accurately report that a typically sized, modest family home can easily end up costing more than $1 million by the time principle, interest, repairs, insurance and other expenses are factored in. Modern Americans don't owe our souls to the company store as did the character in Tennessee Ernie Ford's song "Sixteen Tons," but our houses often seem more like profit centers for the mortgage-industrial complex than domestic sanctuaries for our families.

> Simplicity, immediate connection to lands and waters, silent surroundings and free time to enjoy them.

Snobbery and classism are intimately bound up in our housing choices, with the tar-paper shacks and mining-company towns of Ford's day now replaced by trailer parks, which the mass entertainment media uses as symbols of low-class laziness and tastelessness. Elites who would claw your eyes out for making a racial slur somehow feel it's acceptable to call somebody "trailer trash" because they reside in a small, manufactured house. In contrast, I think of my Grandaunt Bertha who lived in a tiny trailer in Salt Lake City. The interior was almost literally carpeted and wallpapered in her psychedelically colored crocheted afghans. She somehow managed to live in humor and dignity on about $385 a month in Social Security. Poor? Hell yes. But what a gal. I'd share a talcum-powder scented trailer with her for a hundred years before I'd spend an afternoon in one of Donald Trump's pretentious hotel suites.

People's houses reflect our souls, and there's an inverse relationship between fancy and fulfillment. Of the houses I've owned, the only one I truly regret selling is my 40-foot New Moon trailer by the Union Pacific Railroad tracks south of Laramie, Wyo. It cost $5,345 off the factory floor in 1953. Used, I bought mine for $1,500 and sold it for $1,800 three years later. If you know of a good one, let me know: I'm thinking of being a trailer person again someday.

— Matt Winters is editor of the Chinook (Wash.) Observer and Coast River Business Journal, sister papers of The East Oregonian.

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OTHER VIEWS

Scientology's chilling effect

JOE NOCERA
Comment

When I was at Fortune magazine in the 1990s, one of my colleagues was a reporter named Richard Behar. He had a special lock on his door, and he wouldn't even let the janitor in to empty his wastebasket. He used a secret phone, which he kept hidden in a desk drawer, so that calls made to sources couldn't be traced back to him.

At first, I just thought he was paranoid. But I soon learned that he had come by his paranoia honestly. In May 1991, as a correspondent for Time magazine, Behar had written an exposé of Scientology, calling it a "hugely profitable global racket that survives by intimidating members and critics in a Mafia-like manner."

Before the article was published, Behar says he was followed by private detectives, who also contacted acquaintances, asking whether he had financial problems. After its publication, that sort of harassment continued, he says — along with a major libel suit. Although the suit was eventually dismissed, it took years, and cost millions of dollars to defend. Behar's deposition alone lasted 28 days.

> It is impossible to tell the story without getting into the issue of intimidation.

What brings this to mind is Alex Gibney's fine new HBO documentary about Scientology, "Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief," which is based on the book "Going Clear" by Lawrence Wright. (Disclosure: I played a small role in Gibney's 2005 documentary on Enron.) "Going Clear," which was shown at Sundance in late January, is scheduled to air on HBO on March 29.

It is virtually impossible to tell the story of Scientology without getting into the issue of intimidation. As the film notes, going on the offensive against its critics is part of Scientology's doctrine, handed down by its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

"It is the antithesis of turn the other cheek," says Marty Rathbun, a former high-ranking official who left the church in 2004 and has since been subjected to Scientology harassment, as the film documents. It also retells the story, first reported in *The New York Times*, of how, in 1993, Scientology won a 25-year fight against the Internal Revenue Service, which had refused to grant it nonprofit status. Scientologists filed several thousand lawsuits, against not just the IRS but individual IRS officials, and hired private detectives to look for dirt and conduct surveillance operations.

But the film doesn't really tackle the intimidation of journalists. One of the first journalists to take on Scientology, in the early 1970s, was a young freelance writer named Paulette Cooper. Scientology's retaliation was astounding. It framed her for supposedly sending bomb threats to the church. The documents it forged were so convincing that she was indicted in 1973 and was fully exonerated only when the FBI, acting on a tip, raided Scientology offices and discovered the plot against her in 1977.

Over the course of the next three decades-plus, there were a handful — though only a handful — of tough-minded articles like Behar's. "Everybody who wrote about Scientology knew they were taking a risk," Wright told me. You've heard of the "chilling effect"? Scientology offered a prime example of how it works.

Then, in 2009, *The Tampa Bay Times* (then *The St. Petersburg Times*) published an important series about Scientology, based on interviews with high-ranking defectors, including Rathbun and Mike Rinder, who had been Scientology's top spokesman. The series was the first to suggest that Scientology had a longstanding culture of abuse. Amazingly, the church did not sue.

Vanity Fair published a big piece about Scientology. (This was after the breakup of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes; Cruise, of course, is the most famous Scientologist of them all.) No lawsuit. Anderson Cooper did a series on CNN. The BBC weighed in. Ditto and ditto.

Sure enough, when I spoke to Wright and Gibney, they said that the pushback they had gotten was nothing they couldn't handle. A Scientology website has posted a video attacking the two men, and the church has also taken out full-page newspaper ads denouncing "Going Clear." "I didn't expect quite this much venom," Gibney told me, but, he added, "I regard it as good publicity."

(In a lengthy statement, a Scientology spokesperson said Gibney had "lied to us repeatedly," that Marty Rathbun had "destroyed evidence and lied under oath," that a judge had described Behar as "biased," and that in defending itself against Gibney's "propaganda and bigotry," it was speaking "for those who are subjected to religious persecution and hatred.")

Gibney also noted that the people who are really harassed these days aren't journalists but those who have left the church, like Rathbun, who told me that, with more people leaving and talking about the church, it no longer has the resources to sic private eyes on all its critics. He also thinks the Internet has hurt the church, because it is far easier to find out information about it — and many of its supposed secrets are posted online for all to see.

"Part of the message here is that you don't need to fear Scientology anymore," Wright says. It's long overdue.

■

Joe Nocera is an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times.

YOUR VIEWS

Houk's claims of transparency fall flat in city's tangled web

It's not easy to attend a committee meeting in Pendleton. At the council meeting February 17, Mayor Houk said the next art committee meeting would be on February 23. On Wednesday, February 18, I checked with the city staff and got the same answer. Only luck got me to the meeting. On Friday, February 20, I was in City Hall on another matter and found out the meeting was happening then. I did attend the meeting.

At the meeting there was no discussion about moving the Requa statue. Most of the discussion was about how to make the large statue look better in the small area. Keith May presented a draft of an ordinance about public art. The draft contained size regulations, placement, review process, and removal of art. A little late, but a start.

The city of Pendleton has at least 16 other committees that affect our life in one way or another.

When I picked up a copy of all these committees from city staff, I asked them when these committees met. The answer was, "We don't know." This makes it very hard to be involved in actions that affect you and your family.

You can be assured that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin and other leaders never thought our country would end up like this.

Our Founding Fathers believed that the citizens of the United States would never let this happen. The sad fact is we let it happen.

So much for Mayor Houk's transparent city.

Rex Morehouse
Pendleton

Pendleton should unite behind Requa statue at high school

Citizens of Pendleton, join the campaign to locate the Don Requa statue at Pendleton High School.

On Feb. 5, *East Oregonian* reporter Antonio Sierra explained the Requa-Brownfield Park conflict prompting City Councilman Al Plute to urge the city address the issue to move the statue to a different location. Councilwoman McKennon McDonald suggests the city would benefit from a public arts plan that would specify the theme and spaces for all future public art.

Personally, I would like to see the Requa statue placed at the high school. Furthermore, I would like to see the statue of Esther Motanic moved to a better location. Where she presently stands, so small at the southeast division of Court and Dorion, it is difficult to see her on that small island. Tourists aware of her statue would find it difficult to stop, park, and walk to the small space where she stands. It is dangerous because of the traffic at this intersection.

Besides, she needs to join her friends Jackson Sundown, George Fletcher and Stella Darby on Main Street.

Dorys Grover, Pendleton