

Live Tall on a Small Footprint

BY MICHAEL
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Two projects smaller than 1500 sq. ft. illustrate how to design a comfortable home with little impact on the site

Because of my preference for smaller, smarter houses, I have kept a healthy distance from most developers. When I was asked to design homes for a development in picturesque Black Mountain, N.C., however, I received a pleasant surprise.

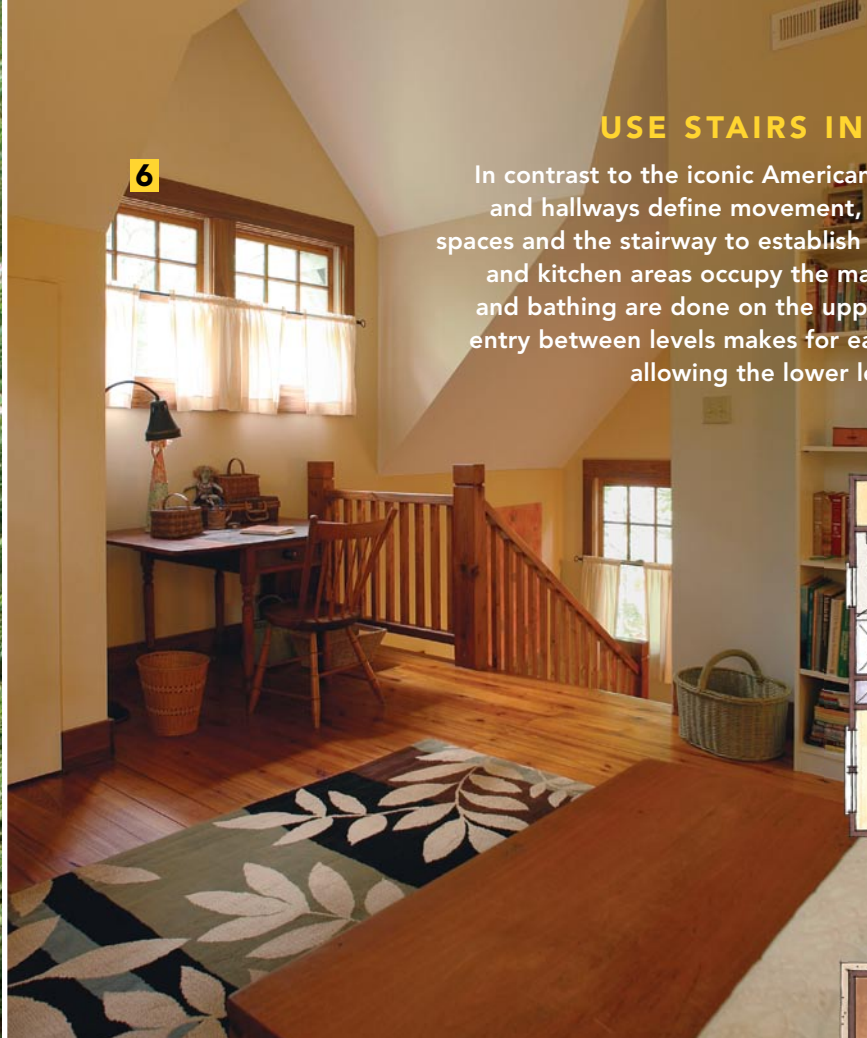
The Village of Cheshire is a skillfully developed neighborhood that encourages the building of small homes nestled among some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. When the developer, Caldwell Sikes Ragan, told me that most of the houses would be small and that one steep section would have houses limited to a 500-sq.-ft. footprint in an effort to minimize impact on the landscape, I realized that his commitment to responsible development was in line with mine.

Using these restrictions, I designed a handful of homes that afford the level of comfort my clients want on a footprint no bigger than a two-car garage. The two projects here show how I worked with Ryan McLellan of

8 IDEAS FOR A LOW-IMPACT HOME

In the Village of Cheshire, unique design guidelines overlay a cluster of lots, limiting each house to a footprint of 500 sq. ft. This restriction minimizes disturbance to the steep wooded sites and inspires a distinctive building form. The homes are taller than they are wide.

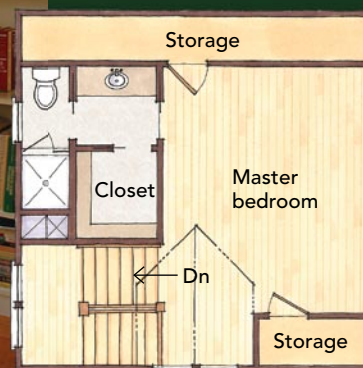
- 1** Enter between levels to promote movement and to save floor space.
- 2** Carry loads with brackets to add visual interest and to minimize impact to the site.
- 3** Use big windows to add architectural detail and to let light into the house.
- 4** Extend overhangs to protect materials, provide shade, and ground tall facades.
- 5** Connect the interior and exterior with balconies, patios, and porches.
- 6** Inhabit the roof via dormers to add space inside and visual interest outside.
- 7** Use stone and plants native to the site to weave the home into the landscape.
- 8** Leave the car at the curb for a more natural setting.



USE STAIRS INSTEAD OF HALLWAYS

In contrast to the iconic American ranch, where walls divide rooms and hallways define movement, these houses use floors to divide spaces and the stairway to establish a vertical flow. The living, dining, and kitchen areas occupy the main level, while sleeping, working, and bathing are done on the upper and lower levels. Situating the entry between levels makes for easy access to the main floor while allowing the lower level to flow easily to the outside.

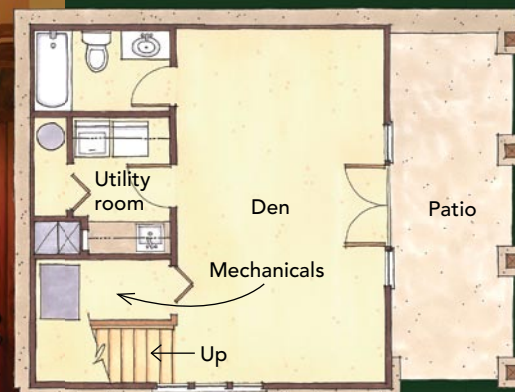
Upper level



Main level



Lower level



0 2 4 8 ft.



Lower level spill-out. Below the covered porch, a pebble-stone patio adjoins the den that doubles as a family room, guest room, and home office. The exposed deck framing adds a sense of spaciousness.

TAKE IT OUTSIDE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

Sloped building sites create both challenges and opportunities. For small homes that rely on outdoor living spaces to feel more open, these sites offer multiple grade elevations. On one side of the house, the grade level allows the entry to be located between levels. The lower grade on the other side accommodates a patio off the den under a large deck that expands the living room.



Copperwood Builders to use the landscape, a gracious entry, and a vertical mechanical scheme to create compact, three-story homes that feel spacious and uncluttered.

Homes spill into the landscape

I knew that a strong connection to the outdoors was going to be essential for these small homes to feel spacious. So I incorporated decks, porches, and balconies into each of the three floors.

By tucking the first floor into the sloping sites, both it and the middle level take advantage of grade-level exterior spaces for entries and patios. On the upper level, I cantilevered bedroom balconies that overlook the landscape. Brackets that support the balconies and roofs that shelter the homes' decks, patios, and entries add character and minimize the scale of the tall homes' exteriors.

Because much of the first floor is tucked into the hillside, there were limited oppor-

tunities to locate the homes' entries here. It made much more sense to enter the home to views and lots of natural light, given the strong outdoor connection that I was hoping to attain. I still could have grade-level entries on the second floor, but the foyer would eat up much of the limited floor space. The solution was to locate the entries on a stair landing between these two levels.

Having the landing also act as an entry foyer meant that an essential element would



do double duty, an economical use of space. Although the actual size of the foyer may be limited, it feels large because it opens to the rest of the house. Your eye moves immediately up or down, and windows offer welcoming sunlight.

Obviously, these homes are not for everyone, especially those averse to stairs. And building smaller doesn't always translate to a smaller budget. But while building and living in a small, vertical home is challenging, it

comes with subtle rewards. Among my first clients was an unlikely retiring couple who embraced the challenge of purging unnecessary belongings, living with less, and keeping fit with daily movement up and down stairs. They are never more than a few steps from a window or door to a balcony, a porch, or their wooded surroundings. □

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Compact, inside and out

To minimize the space required for mechanicals, the author stacked baths, kitchens, and utility rooms near the stairs, as seen here in plans from a second Cheshire design. A compact chase concealing vertical plumbing, electrical, and HVAC shares the openings in the floor decks with the stairs. Short horizontal plenums connect the rooms.

0 2 4 8 ft.

