



Fine Homebuilding
2014
HOUSES
AWARD

BEST SMALL HOME

At roughly 1600 sq. ft., this year's best small home, designed by Anne Callender of Whipple-Callender Architects, is sure to spark debate about small-home design. We believe small to be relative, and for empty-nesters and baby-boomers heading toward retirement, this home shows that downsizing doesn't have to come with sacrifices in style, comfort, and good living.

How to Live Well With Less

At 1000 sq. ft. smaller than the average house, this compact home is comfortable, practical, and attainable

BY ANNE CALLENDER

I met Dave and Libby at a wedding in the fall of 2010. My husband and I had just moved into their neighborhood as they were putting their three-story Victorian home on the market in order to move to a small house on Munjoy Hill in Portland, Maine. As we spoke about the large remodeling project we were undertaking, they spoke of their readiness to leave behind the 3200-sq.-ft. home where they had raised their three daughters. The house was too big for them now, and the maintenance demands were too great. They travel a lot, and they were at a point in their lives where they could redefine how they wanted to live. Like a lot of empty-nesters, they were eager to downsize to a much smaller home and to unload a good portion of their material possessions in the process.

An old house in an evolving neighborhood

Dave and Libby had owned the small house on Munjoy Hill for several years and used it as a rental property. Located in a densely built residential neighborhood established by Italian immigrants, it sits two blocks from Casco Bay and the Eastern Promenade, a beautiful city park designed by the Olmstead Brothers. Munjoy Hill's aging housing stock, harbor views, fabulous park, and proximity to downtown have made this area the hottest part of town and a prime spot for aggressive rehabs.

Dave and Libby's house was built in 1879, and when they considered moving there full-time, they were forced to assess its condition carefully. Having withstood the coastal Maine environment for well over a hundred years, the house was quickly approaching the end of its useful life. There was a fair amount of rot, the foundation was out of square, the basement was frequently wet, and all of the major elements—mechanicals, windows, roof, siding—needed to be replaced. Dave and Libby realized one day that not a single original detail was left in the house. They quickly replaced their thoughts of a restoration with an acknowledgment that what little could be saved wasn't worth saving and that starting over would be the best and most practical option.

Prime siting on a small lot

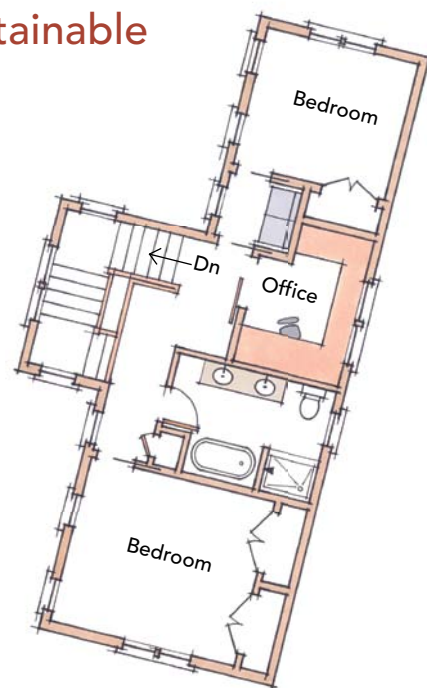
Dave and Libby's lot is only 36 ft. wide and 105 ft. deep, and it lies on a decent slope. The existing house was built to the rear of the lot and close to the west and north lot lines. Fortunately, the neighboring houses were situated close to the street. Dave and Libby wanted to build on the footprint of the old house, and its location offered some nice advantages: Dave and Libby wouldn't be looking

PRACTICALLY PLANNED

The new stair tower blocks the backyard and the deck from public view, and it helps to streamline the arrangement of the main living spaces. The front-to-back sequence of living room, dining room, and kitchen is typical of shotgun-style homes or industrial lofts. The lack of interior walls allows the spaces to be defined by art and furnishings, giving the owners ongoing flexibility.

0 2 4 8 ft.

North ▲



Second floor



First floor

SPECS

Bedrooms: 2, plus flex office space **Bathrooms:** 1½ **Size:** 1600 sq. ft.

Cost: \$280 per sq. ft., including custom furnishings **Completed:** 2012

Location: Portland, Maine **Architect:** Anne Callender, whipplecallender.com

Builder: Rick Romano, papiandromanobuilders.com



Restrained living. The monochromatic color scheme inside—all of the walls, cabinetry, trim, and ceilings are painted the same linen white—gives the house a more contemporary, gallery feel and highlights its few playfully colored furnishings and plentiful art.

directly into the neighbors' windows, but onto their backyards. The neighbors' homes wouldn't shade Dave and Libby's house, so the couple would have greater access to daylight. Also, if we built on the existing footprint, the zoning board would allow us to increase the height by one story and to add on to the south side of the house.

A traditional home with contemporary details

The houses surrounding the property are mostly folk Victorians. Dave and Libby wanted to preserve the neighborhood aesthetic on the exterior; on the interior, however, they wanted a contemporary, open plan.

The house's traditional qualities are established with its simple gable roof facing the street, its wide trim boards, and its first-floor box-bay window. The side porch entry, which was a key element on the original house, was replicated on the new house. This allowed for the main volume of the living space to be uninterrupted and open from the front of the house to the back.

The placement of the interior stairs was no less critical. In dense neighborhoods, the daylight on a home's second floor is usually better than on the first floor because of shading from the abutting properties and trees. Placing the interior stair on the south side of the house and wrap-

9 ways to make the most of small spaces

1. Designing with 9-ft. ceilings adds volume to narrow floor plans.
2. Placing stairs strategically provides daylight access and views.
3. Flexible spaces allow homeowners to react to changing lifestyle demands.
4. See-through items—such as a kitchen island or a transom—provide extended views through small spaces.
5. Open, shotgun-style floor plans offer shared views and daylight, and they allow defined living spaces to expand as needed.
6. Big-house features—such as multiple bedrooms, bathrooms, and office space—ensure living without compromise.
7. Adequate storage space relieves the burden on main living areas, enabling them to remain open and free of clutter.
8. Providing access to outdoor living areas in narrow floor plans increases the perception of space and improves comfort.
9. Monochromatic finishes make small spaces feel larger and contiguous by blurring their boundaries.



PAINT
californiapaints.com

CUBE PENDANTS
techlighting.com

PEDESTAL SINK
porcher-us.com

CABINETS
papiandromanobuilders.com



**Built-in
bathroom.**

Rick Romano designed and built the first-floor bathroom to blend into the kitchen cabinetry. A corner pedestal sink by Porcher is the perfect solution for a bath with such a small footprint.



This home has all the elements that make up much larger homes. Nothing about this design demands sacrifice.



DESIGN VIDEO For an inside look at this home and those behind its design, visit FineHomebuilding.com/houses.

One space, two roles. A laundry room is carved out of the hallway between the stair's top landing area and the guest room. Adding such functionality to circulation areas makes the most of limited square footage.

ping the well with glass allowed daylight to flood both floors. In addition to light access, the height of the stairwell adds volume and spaciousness to what could have been a long, narrow, and cramped first-floor living space.

Compact, but expansive and flexible

The small house was designed to feel as open and large as possible. The 9-ft. ceilings certainly help in that effort, but it's in the arrangement of spaces that a sense of expansiveness and flexibility is achieved.

The main floor is arranged shotgun style, with the living room, dining room, and kitchen sharing a contiguous space from front to back. The bathroom sits in one corner

at the back of the house, and the kitchen in the other. The kitchen cabinetry abuts the north wall in order to preserve direct access to sunlight from the south.

Immediately outside the kitchen, we built a deck that is accessed through large sliding patio doors. This visual connection from the kitchen to the yard makes a 12-ft.-wide space expand well beyond the interior walls. Libby designed the kitchen island with builder Rick Romano, who also built the custom cabinets. It has a band of drawers and is open below, which adds to the sense of space and openness. It's also placed atop casters, which allow its role to change from a prep area to a serving buffet simply by altering its location within the large living space.

There are no interior walls on the first floor, except for two small fin walls that define the end of the kitchen and the extent of the dining area. These walls are also used as the plumbing chases to the second-floor bathroom and laundry room.

Since the house is occupied by two empty-nesters most of the time, even the second floor was conceived as an open space. The two bedrooms are located at opposite ends of the house, bookending a bath, office, and laundry space. A sliding barn door for the office lets the space double as a guest room. Its opening can be reframed to create another bedroom, should future owners need one. A laundry room and hallway were combined in a niche between the stair landing and the guest bedroom. Pocket doors close it off from sight and sound as needed.

In another effort to add flexibility and functionality to the home, we placed a side door onto a lower landing to the basement. This gives Dave and Libby exterior access to the basement for dirty or oversize items such as shovels, snow tires, and the like. Because we made the effort to create a dry basement, Dave and Libby have plenty of space for storage. Moreover, the windows allow for it to be finished comfortably in the future if a family with children moves in and needs additional living or play space.

Small is relative

This home has all the elements that make up much larger homes: two bedrooms, a home office, one and a half baths, a spacious kitchen, and a generous living area. Finishes and materials were selected for their ease of maintenance. Nothing about this design demands sacrifice. There are rooms to retreat to if anyone needs privacy. Dave and Libby still can host parties for 50 to 60 people, and with the house so open and comfortable, party guests actually move out of the kitchen. □

Anne Callender is an architect in Portland, Maine. Photos by Rob Yagid.