

TINY HOUSES

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Sandra Leitte

PRESTEL

Munich · London · New York

CONTENTS

6 Introduction

10 WOOLHOUSE

Csóromföldre, Hungary

Au Workshop + Marton Low

3 m² 32 ft²

14 HIDDEN STUDIO

Valencia, Spain

Fernando Abellanas

4 m² 43 ft²

18 aVOID

Pesaro, Italy

Leonardo Di Chiara

9 m² 97 ft²

24 ASHEN CABIN

Ithaca, New York, USA

HANNAH Design Office

9 m² 97 ft²

30 MARS CASE

Beijing, China

OPEN Architecture

12 m² 129 ft²

36 CASA PARÁSITO

Quito, Ecuador

El Sindicato Arquitectura

12 m² 129 ft²

42 THE CABIN

near Brno, Czech Republic

Jan Tyrpekl

12 m² 129 ft²

46 HAMMERFEST

HIKING CABINS

Hammerfest, Norway

SPINN Arkitekter; Format Engineers

14 m² 151 ft²

52 ON MOUNTAIN HUT

Piz Lunghin, Switzerland

BMCO Product Design; On Running

14 m² 151 ft²

58 HORTUS HERMITAGE

Haren (Groningen), Netherlands

Refunc - Denis Oudendijk and Jan Körbes;

Sjaak Langenberg & Rosé de Beer

14 m² 151 ft²

64 BASE CABIN

Melbourne, Australia

Studio Edwards; Base Cabin

15 m² 161 ft²

70 FOREST CABIN

Slootdorp, Netherlands

The Way We Build

15 m² 161 ft²

74 REFUGE LE PIC MINEUR

Poisson Blanc Regional Park,

Quebec, Canada

L'Abri

15 m² 161 ft²

80 MINI LIVING URBAN CABIN

Beijing, China

MINI Living with penda China

15 m² 161 ft²

86 FIRST LIGHT TINY HOUSE

near Wellington, New Zealand

First Light Studio; Build Tiny

17 m² 183 ft²

90 HYTTE NO. 1

Blankenhain, Germany

KOOP Architects; KOOP Mobile Timber

Constructions

18 m² 194 ft²

96 LA CASA DEL DESIERTO

Gorafe, Andalusia, Spain

OFIS Arhitekti

20 m² 215 ft²

102 OLIVE TREE HOUSE

Halkidiki, Greece

Eva Sópéoglou

21 m² 226 ft²

108 GARAGE CONVERSION

Vilnius, Lithuania

IM Interior

21 m² 226 ft²

114 PANORAMA GLASS

LODGE

Hella, Iceland

ÖÖD

23 m² 248 ft²

**120 CABANON CONCRETE
RETREAT**

Kissamos, Crete, Greece

Batakis Architects; Sofia Mavroudis +
Antonis Choudalakis

32 m² 344 ft²

126 BLACKBIRD BYRON

*Mullumbimby Creek, New South
Wales, Australia*

James and Stella Hudson

36–41 m² 388–441 ft²

132 BOOKWORM CABIN

near Adelin, Poland

Bartłomiej Kraciuk and Marta Puchalska-
Kraciuk; POLE Architekci

37 m² 398 ft²

138 PAN-TRETOPPHYTTER

Gjesåsen, Hedmark, Norway

Espen Surnevik

40 m² 431 ft²

142 CASA DE MONTE

Yucatán, Mexico

TACO taller de arquitectura contextual

42 m² 452 ft²

148 SUSTAINABLE HOUSE

Ouro Branco, Minas Gerais,

Brazil

Gustavo Penna Arquiteto & Associados

45 m² 484 ft²

154 THE HIDE

Callestick, Cornwall,

Great Britain

Jess Clark and Sarah Stanley/
Unique Homestays; Studio Arc

46 m² 495 ft²

160 APAN PROTOTYPE

Apan, Hidalgo, Mexico

Dellekamp Arquitectos - Derek Dellekamp
and Jachen Schleich

52 m² 560 ft²

166 GRANNY PAD

Seattle, Washington, USA

Best Practice Architecture

53 m² 571 ft²

170 CHALET

Donovaly, Slovakia

Y100 ateliér

64 m² 689 ft²

176 THE SLOT HOUSE

London, Great Britain

Sandy Rendel Architects with Sally Rendel

64 m² 689 ft²

182 YURT

near Portland, Oregon, USA

Zach Both and Nicole Lopez

68 m² 730 ft²

188 HOUSE ON AN ISLAND

Skåtøy, Norway

Atelier Oslo

70 m² 753 ft²

196 SKINNY HOUSE

Tezukayama, Osaka, Japan

FujiwaraMuro Architects

73 m² 786 ft²

202 H3 HOUSE

Mar Azul, Argentina

Luciano Kruk

75 m² 807 ft²

210 YŌ NO IE

Isumi, Chiba, Japan

Muji

80 m² 861 ft²

214 EX OF IN HOUSE

Rhinebeck, New York, USA

Steven Holl Architects

85 m² 918 ft²

220 Architects + Designers

222 Houses for Rent

223 The Author

224 Picture Credits

224 Imprint

INTRODUCTION

**Simplicity boils down to two steps:
Identify the essential.
Eliminate the rest.**

Leo Babauta, Zen Habits

Tiny houses – and living small – are hot topics. Many people find the idea appealing, to downsize, cut loose the ballast, perhaps even become more mobile while at the same time reducing their ecological footprint. Countless newspaper and magazine articles report on the trend, and television programmes accompany happy homeowners-to-be as they build their tiny house. People proudly show off their homes in online videos and discuss the advantages, and the disadvantages, of their chosen lifestyle. More life despite (or perhaps because of) fewer possessions – this is the philosophy behind the Tiny House Movement, which originated in the United States. The YouTube channel “Living Big in a Tiny House”, which New Zealand actor and filmmaker Bryce Langston has run since 2013, shows how this can be achieved and what the reality of living in a reduced

space actually looks like. Together with his partner Rasa Pescud, he travels around the world visiting people who have cut down their living space, be it in a camper van, tree house or a small home on wheels. With almost four million subscribers to the channel, it is clear how interested people are in the idea. But Bryce not only films and interviews tiny house owners, he is one himself. His fascination with tiny houses began when he was looking for a way to escape the expensive housing market in Auckland, New Zealand. He started to build his own tiny house in order to avoid high rents and give himself more freedom. Today he owns a tiny house on wheels of about 12 square metres (129 square feet), which he calls The Little Zen. He and Rasa live in it while they travel the United States for their YouTube show. They also have a small residence in New Zealand of around 15 square metres (161 square feet), also built on a trailer. This comparatively inexpensive way of living has enabled Bryce to devote himself entirely to his passion for small houses. In his online show, he tells the stories of people and their homes and gives insights into life in small spaces, sometimes even smaller than thought possible.

Take Kelly, for example, who built a tiny house near Wellington, New Zealand (see p.86). After twenty years in the same job, she wanted a change. She sold her house with its three bedrooms and an expensive mortgage and moved into a 17-square-metre (183-square-foot) tiny house. There, thanks to the lower costs, she lives a simpler life, more flexible and with more time for things she cares about and enjoys. Her house, with an extreme minimalist design, can be run completely off-the-grid, thus making it easier to find a place to park it, as she is not dependent on a connection to the mains. Kelly now lives surrounded by nature, away from the big city, and enjoys her new home, which thanks to its reduced size combines high-quality materials and workmanship at an affordable price. She is very happy with her new job as a kindergarten teacher but is still considering reducing her working hours to just two or three days. Financially, she could easily afford it because of her low cost of living.

Optimised design

The Tiny House Movement is strongly influenced by a do-it-yourself mentality. Yet many architects and designers are also drawn to architecture on a reduced scale as both challenging and thrilling. The spatial requirements are completely different from those of a “normal” residential building. After all, the smaller space should in no way induce a lack of comfort or restricted use. For this reason, different spatial concepts must be developed for small-scale architecture. The young Italian architect Leonardo Di Chiara has succeeded in this with his tiny house aVOID (see p. 18). After graduating from university, he had no intention of settling down in a fixed location. So, it seemed an obvious choice for him to build a house on wheels in which he could enjoy a flexible and nomadic lifestyle. aVOID consists of a single empty room in which all the furniture and fittings are stored away in the walls. This takes a principle often applied to tiny houses to the extreme – flexible, multifunctional areas often replace rigidly assigned uses of space. This is achieved, for example, through movable structural elements and furniture or even

foldable and collapsible fixtures. In Leonardo's 9-square-metre (97-square-foot) home, for instance, the dining room is created by folding the table and chairs out of the wall, while the bed is folded down in the evening.

All in all, the interaction between a home and its inhabitants is much closer in a tiny house, as every corner is put to maximum use or can be freely adapted by the inhabitants to their needs. Their relationship with their surroundings is usually also closer, as many of the houses are designed so the view outside visually expands the confined interior. Many such tiny houses are located in the middle of nature and the surrounding openness provides a generous sense of space.

And yet, especially in dense urban areas, small-scale building is a challenge to be met, increasingly becoming a topic of conversation. A shortage of housing and space and the rising prices of real estate in large cities demand a solution. Attempts have been made in this respect through projects that make use of small gaps between buildings and leftover plots, such as The Slot House in London (see p. 176) and a Skinny House in Osaka (see p. 196). In contrast, Casa Parásito

(see p. 36) in Quito was built on the unused roof of an existing building. The modular construction is intended to demonstrate possibilities for cost-effective re-densification in the city and to encourage responsible, resource-saving consumption.

Small buildings as a field of experimentation

Tiny houses are particularly suitable for conducting architectural trials and experiments. They can be used to test new types of construction and materials, try out unconventional spatial distributions or discover unusual locations – high up in the mountains (see p. 52) or even on distant planets (see p. 30). Themes such as sustainability and putting a halt to climate change play an important role here. The architecture collective Refunc, for example, has specialised in working with materials that others regard as waste – such as old car tyres and wooden pallets or discarded silos. Hortus Hermitage (see p. 58) was created from two fibreglass silos, combined with repurposed materials from Groningen's botanical garden

where the accommodation is located. For Refunc there is no rubbish, everything is part of the closed-loop cycle and reused accordingly. This conserves resources and, in doing so, the environment.

Construction materials companies also use small buildings for their materials research. A glass manufacturer, for example, built an extremely energy-efficient house entirely of glass in the Gorafe desert of Spain (see p. 96). This allows the individual properties of specially engineered glass to be tested in practice.

There is no official definition for tiny, micro, mini or small houses in most countries. In the United States, however, the dimensions provided by the International Residential Code have been enshrined in building regulations. They state that a house is considered “tiny” if it has a floor area of less than 37 square metres (400 square feet), without counting any lofts, while “small” houses generally include those with a floor area between 37 and 93 square metres (400 and 1,000 square feet). This is also the criterion that guided the selection of projects in this book.

Many of the examples presented here are only intended as temporary accommodations, as a holiday home or a place to rest and catch one’s breath. Few people dare take the somewhat radical step of adopting a tiny living arrangement. But maybe a holiday in a tiny house would be a good way to find out just what it is like to live in a minimalist home reduced to the bare essentials?

For all those who dream of this alternative lifestyle, this book offers a variety of ideas to get you started. It inspires you to dive into the world of small living, where big rooms and lots of possessions count less than immaterial things like time, independence, financial freedom and eco-consciousness. The tiny house phenomenon redefines what makes a house a home. Bryce Langston says of his home, *The Little Zen*, “While to some my home may not seem like much, to me it’s perfect. It meets all my basic needs and plenty of my desires. [. . .] It’s absolutely enough.”¹ With this house on wheels, he can be at home anywhere, anytime.

1 Bryce Langston, *Living Big in a Tiny House* (Nelson: Pottan & Burton, 2018).

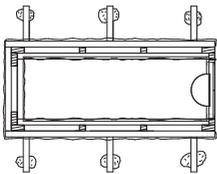
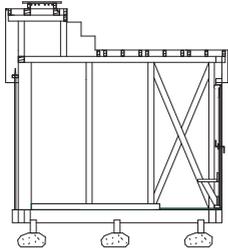
WOOLHOUSE

Csóromfölde, Hungary

Au Workshop + Marton Low

3 m²

32 ft²



Sheep's wool is ideally suited as a natural material for insulation in construction. In winter it provides good thermal insulation, and in summer it protects the interior from excessive heat. Usually the insulant is hidden behind cladding, but this building leaves the two layers of wool visible. The tiny shelter was created as part of the Hello Wood International Summer School and Festival, an annual event in which architects from the world over develop and implement projects in collaboration with students. In 2018, the event was held under the motto "Cabin Fever".

The basic structure of woolhouse consists of a pine frame supported on stones. The washed and roughly combed wool is woven between the vertical wooden beams as in a weaving frame. The outer layer serves the protective function of keeping out both rain and pests. Even if the first layer gets wet, the inner layer remains dry and clean. A prefabricated, stepped aluminium roof closes the building off at the top, taking advantage of the chimney effect to conduct warm air up and out of the structure. From here,

daylight also falls into the room through a skylight. Inside woolhouse there is space for just one person, either lying or sitting, on a wool mat with a wool pillow, of course. Behind the design is the idea of a "psychic ablution", a therapeutic space to let go of mental ballast. Accordingly, the small seat, which is mounted on the inside of the door, is meant to represent the place of an imaginary therapist. Surrounded by natural materials, their specific odour and individual feel, you may enjoy the silence of the room and retreat from everyday life.







HIDDEN STUDIO

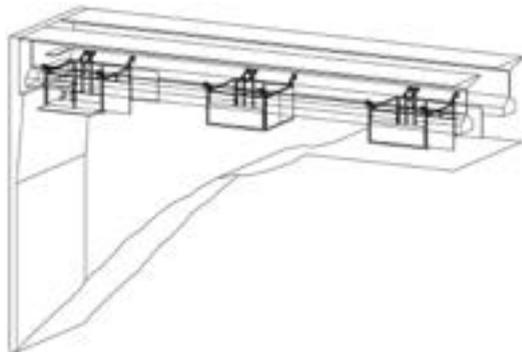
Valencia, Spain

Fernando Abellanas

4 m²

43 ft²

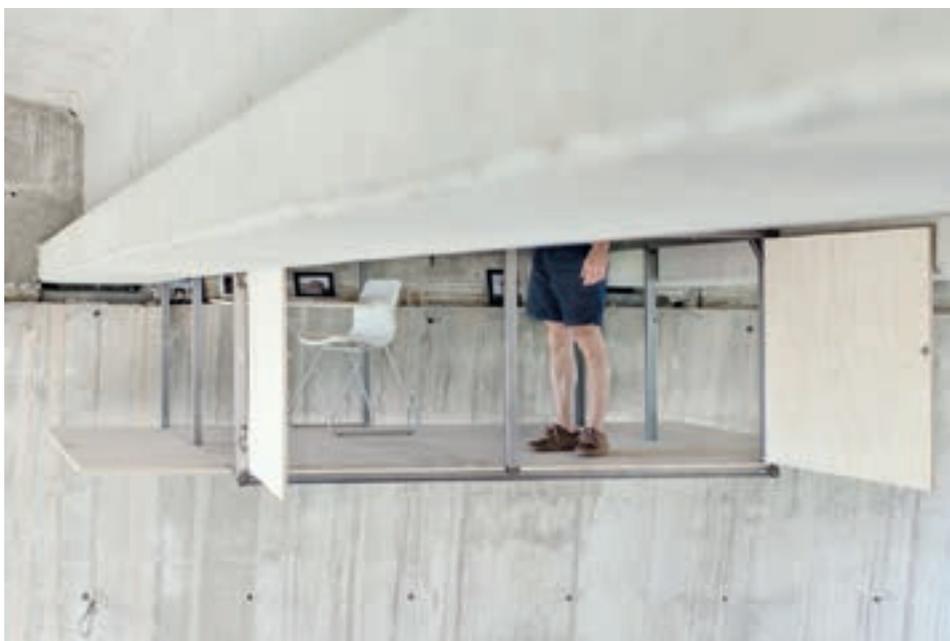
Designer Fernando Abellanas has created a truly unusual workspace in the Spanish port city of Valencia. In a place that he keeps to himself, he has concealed a 2 × 2-metre (6.5 × 6.5-foot) refuge in the graffiti-covered concrete base of a road bridge. The metal and plywood construction hangs with casters from the bridge's girders and can be moved with the help of a hand winch - from the entry side, from which Abellanas mounts the platform, to the supporting pile where his "office" is located. It is furnished with a plastic chair, wooden shelves and a tabletop, all of which are firmly attached to the concrete wall. The mobile floor rolls



under the furniture. And just in case it gets too late, a lamp and bedding are stored on one of the shelves. For this self-taught designer who creates furniture under the name Lebrél, the many unnoticed, unused spaces in urban landscapes are great sources of inspiration. Most people pass them by without noticing. Abellanas, however, sees their potential for architectural interventions that provide them with a function. He compares his hideout to that feeling in childhood, when you hid under the table at a family gathering - protected, away from the hustle and bustle and yet in the middle of the action, simultaneously close and far away. In times when space in our cities is becoming scarce, this perspective on pre-existing niches can certainly reveal plenty of places that could be used for unconventional architectural extensions.







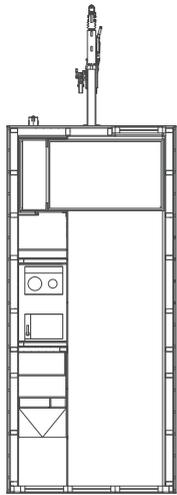
aVOID

Pesaro, Italy

Leonardo Di Chiara

9 m²

97 ft²



The name of the tiny house on wheels, designed by Italian architect Leonardo Di Chiara directly after his studies, refers to the void within. With external dimensions of just 5.10 × 2.50 metres (16.5 × 8 feet), aVOID is very small, even for a tiny house, despite a total height of 4 metres (13 feet). But the minimalist design of the interior allows for the space to be used in a multifunctional fashion, thereby accommodating all the requirements for living in a space of 9 square metres (97 square feet). All the furniture can be folded out of the walls – the bed and table, for example – or stored in it, such as the two folding chairs. One side consists entirely of cupboards and drawers. This is where the kitchenette, with fridge, sink, induction cooker and extractor fan, is accommodated. At the front by the entrance there is a bathroom of just 0.80 square metres (8.5 square feet) containing a composting toilet, folding washbasin and shower. It is lined throughout with Gaboon plywood. A particular highlight is the miniature

greenhouse for growing herbs, which is located under one of the skylights that illuminate the space. And should you ever feel cramped, you can enjoy the sun and the view from the accessible roof. The narrow entrance side is completely covered with glass and uses solar radiation to passively heat the interior. This is just one of the structure's sustainable energy concepts, alongside the photovoltaic system with a storage battery for the power supply, controlled ventilation, infrared heating and energy-efficient appliances. aVOID was created in cooperation with Tinyhouse University in Berlin and built with the support of Italian and German companies, who provided building materials for the project.







