



SMALL SCALE



LIVING LARGE IN A TINY HOME

By Kimberly Nicoletti

Photos by Dominique Taylor

Among domed mountain peaks steeped in alpenglow purples, pinks and oranges, a tiny home sits — a lone, three-dimensional rectangle in a vast Eagle Valley.

The exterior's honey brown cedar siding lends a warm glow, distinctively topped with wood paneling painted in a modern, high-gloss black. Inside, its 221 square feet can sleep four and includes a kitchen with a full-size refrigerator, dwarf dishwasher, pullout cooktop, trash compactor, washer/dryer combo and plenty of countertop and cabinet space; a living room with a fireplace, flat-screen television, king size bed and L-shaped sofa; and a bathroom with a composting toilet and shower, made roomier by its 3-by-3-foot skylight.

From September 2018 to September 2019, Vail Valley residents Jill Fried and Garrett Schmidt spent every weekend building the tiny home while working full-time jobs: Fried as a hotel engineer and Schmidt as a plumber. What they didn't know about solar power, elevator beds and small, wood-burning stoves, they learned watching YouTube videos.

THE INSPIRATION

Two years ago, a trip to Japan inspired Fried and Schmidt to simplify their lives and build a tiny home. Now, living the scaled-down lifestyle allows the couple to ski powder in Japan for a few weeks (which they did in January) and take off for weekend jaunts. Rather than paying a mortgage, they pop for plane tickets to Tokyo.



The bed is on a lift, which they raise and lower daily.



And rather than spending Saturdays cleaning the four-bedroom home in Gypsum that Schmidt owned — or the two-bedroom condo Fried still owns, but rents out — they explore various ski resorts.

“The way (people in Japan) live is so simple,” Fried says. “Their houses and apartments have the basic necessities to get by. It makes for a better adventure and lifestyle.”

THE PURGE

When the couple, who has been together for three-plus years, told their friends about their tiny home plan, some expressed concern about whether Fried and Schmidt would be content after decimating their belongings. They also worried about how the pair’s relationship would fare, living in such a confined space.

“With everything we accumulated in Garrett’s four-bedroom house, we had to get rid of a ridiculous amount of stuff,” Fried says. They purged skis, furniture and clothing. “We

thought it was going to be hard to do at first, but once we started doing it, it became easier. We realized we didn’t need all that stuff — three tents, five pairs of skis — to have fun. It’s nice to downsize to the essentials that really make us happy. It just frees up a lot more time for activities. Instead of cleaning the house, we camp and experience nature more and see more of the world.”

Fried still has “quite a bit” of clothing, she says. Her winter wardrobe consists of two pairs of jeans, two pairs of pants, six leggings and about 10 fleece, or other, tops.

But since they moved in last fall, has it been too stifling to live in a 26-foot-by-8-½-foot miniature home?

“It’s just made us stronger. We’ve learned we work well together,” Fried says, adding that she works the night shift and he works days. “If we had the same shift, it may have been a little more difficult.”

THE LEARNING CURVE

Watching shows like “Tiny Home Nation” convinced the couple they could live the tiny home lifestyle — and build the dwelling themselves — but they ran into “a few complications.”

To begin with, their tiny home square footage was way too small for homeowner’s associations in the Vail Valley, so they struggled to find a lot. Right now, their home sits on a friend’s expansive land in Eagle. This summer, they’ll camp in their mobile tiny home, which sits on a trailer frame, as they search for affordable land to purchase. Vail Valley lots look “pricey,” Fried says, so they’ll be looking everywhere from the outskirts of Telluride to Montana and Alaska.

Apart from YouTube videos and the technical knowledge they came in with, they learned about living completely off the grid through experience.

They discovered their 200 gallon tank of water “doesn’t go as fast as you’d think,” Fried says, though they

consciously conserve water, which they also collect from rainwater streaming down their rubber roof. But they did run out of solar power a few times; it’s only in the last couple months that they’ve figured out how much they can use, particularly when a storm rolls in for a day or two and blocks sunlight. They also found out that their wood-burning stove, which only accommodates up to 6-inch logs, requires them to wake up around 2 a.m., especially on cold nights, to fuel the dwindled fire. They tried propane heat, but it produced too much condensation, so they’ve begun to supplement with kerosene, which burns for 14 hours on one can.

FROM THE (TRAILER) UP

Fried used her engineering background to design the home’s layout, including the steel framing kit, which fits over the 26-foot trailer.

But why spend the \$65,000 it took to build a tiny home on a trailer when they could’ve just bought a turnkey



Rounds from aspen trees and custom storage spaces further personalize the couple's space.

A FOCAL WALL DESIGNED WITH THIN SLICES OF TRUNKS AND BRANCHES COLLECTED FROM 'SOME OF THE AMAZING PLACES WE VISITED' VISUALLY TRANSLATES TO VARIOUS-SIZED ROUNDS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF TREES SET UPON A BLACK PAINTED BACKGROUND.





COPPER KITCHEN COUNTERTOPS AND A COPPER KITCHEN WALL STAND OUT WITH A SPECKLED PATINA OF BLACK AND RED TONES FROM THE AGED METAL, WHICH COMPLEMENTS THEIR RED WASHER AND DRYER.



RV? The answer: Fried and Schmidt built their home for their exact needs. Every nook and cranny, from ski storage located on a roller system under the trailer to food storage to keep veggies chilled in the metal tin adjacent to the wheel well, fit their personal requirements.

While many tiny homes include stairs with hideaway space, the couple decided they'd rather maintain an open floor plan. Every night and morning, they lower and raise their king-size elevator bed, which hangs above the living room, rather than sleeping (and crawling on hands and knees) in a loft with a low ceiling.

Fried fashioned their L-shaped couch using 2x4s for the frame, thin plywood for the base and memory foam mattresses, cut into two seats and a backrest, which, when laid flat, forms a full-size bed. When they host overnight guests, they only lower their elevator bed halfway. Schmidt's mom helped Fried sew fabric around the memory foam, so it looks like a "real" sofa. Underneath, 1x1-foot storage

compartments hold shoes, summer clothing and other equipment.

"The tiny home has way more storage than my two-bedroom condo has," Fried says.

And, it fits plenty of people; about 20 friends all fit comfortably inside during the couple's housewarming party last November.

"People say from the outside this place looks so small, but they say from the inside, it's huge," Fried says. "I feel like we have so much space in ours. If you're in the kitchen, it's not like you're on top of each other. We have space for prepping, and we have a lot of cabinets."

Through hut trips and seeing yurts, they noticed many used Plexiglas windows, rather than glass. So, they improved on the design, using two pieces of Plexiglas with weather-stripping in the middle.

"We found out it's better than glass," Fried says. "It keeps in more heat than our glass door, and we saved a ton of money."

Carpet squares add coziness to the living room, while Pergo spans the rest of the floor.

Fried and Schmidt added style to their mountain casual, chic home with pine beetle kill wood walls and pops of red.

"We used a bunch of beetle kill because the colors and personalities in each piece are incredible, and this is one of the only places you can get it, and if we travel with it, it definitely has a story of its own," Fried says.

A focal wall designed with thin slices of trunks and branches collected from "some of the amazing places we visited" visually translates to various-sized rounds of different types of trees set upon a black painted background.

Copper kitchen countertops and a copper kitchen wall stand out with a speckled patina of black and red tones from the aged metal, which complements their red washer and dryer.

"It pops a little differently than most people would go in a house,

but I thought since it's a tiny home we could add a fun vibe," Fried says.

They also incorporated a creative patchwork accent wall under the bed with repurposed pieces of leather.

PASSING ALONG INSPIRATION

The couple's tiny home has inspired their friends, several of whom have asked Fried and Schmidt: "Can you build ours next?"

"They say they could do it, after seeing it," Fried says. "When they come inside, they say, 'oh, I could live in this.'"

Fried says they wouldn't mind building more in the future, but they're going to take a few years off, settle into their own tiny home and enjoy their new lifestyle.

"We're saving a ton," Fried says, "and planning more and more trips and fun things to do."

They're just one example of how tiny home living can result in a very expansive lifestyle. **RVB**