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Budget Breakdown: They DIYed a \$212K ADU—and Loved It So Much That They Moved Right In

A Seattle couple built their own backyard house with a city-sponsored design—and then rented out their old home on the property to friends.

Text by
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When Chris Cloud and Adrienne "Adi" Braun purchased a small house in Seattle's Beacon Hill neighborhood five years ago, they were particularly excited about its large back lot, which they had been eyeing from the start.

The property is adjacent to a right-of-way for large electrical towers that cuts diagonally through the neighborhood, and the elongated backyard had plenty of space for a detached accessory dwelling unit (DADU), as they're known in Seattle—with room to spare for a garden and play area for their miniature schnauzer, Boris

The couple's budget was limited. Hiring an architect to design a dwelling from scratch seemed out of reach, and they dreaded getting caught up in permitting red tape. But then they learned about a City of Seattle pilot program that provides the public with plans for 10 different pre-certified dwellings designed by local architecture firms.



At 700 square feet, Chris and Adi's cottage had to make economical use of space. In the common area, a bar-height dining table doubles as a cooking countertop.

Photo: Peter Bohler

"We eagerly waited for those to be released instead of going with a custom design," Chris recalls.

During the pandemic, Chris, who had previously worked in architectural metal fabrication, dove into remodeling the existing house, which was built in 1948 and needed work. As he gained construction experience and confidence, Chris began to realize he and his wife could actually afford a DADU—if he built it.



Adi and Chris considered two-story options, but they ultimately settled on an L-shaped, pre-permitted plan by Cast architecture that would fit in better with their neighborhood.

Photo: Peter Bohler

\$8,934 Planning & Permitting	\$12,148 Electrical	\$7,339 Drywall
\$2,098 Paint	\$1,114 Drainage	\$4,000 Doors
\$6,304 Appliances	\$2,742 Tile	\$2,335 Steel Fence
\$9,133 Concrete Wall	\$21,492 Foundation	\$20,926 Framing
\$3,674 HVAC	\$25,076 Siding & Building Envelope	\$4,464 Excavation
\$9,197 Interior Finishes	\$10,226 Kitchen Cabinets & Countertops	\$5,020 Insulation
\$17,152 Plumbing	\$15,861 Roof	\$13,335 Windows
\$907 Site Costs	\$2,976 Landscaping	\$5,069 Sewer Connection
Grand Total: \$211,522		

"It was a learning curve. It still is," he says. "You're never not discovering new things and easier ways to do stuff." But by diving into DIY and using an existing city-approved design, the couple were able to build a 700-square-foot home by Seattle's Cast Architecture for \$211,522.

Adi and Chris liked the result so much that they decided to move into the DADU themselves, and rent their original house to friends. "It's great to be able to give other people a nice place to live," Adi says. "And it creates a little bit of community. It feels good." Chris says the neighbors even helped them weed the yard last week.

When choosing among the city's pre-permitted designs via its ADUniverse website, Chris initially favored a two-story option by Shape Architecture with a ground-floor garage. "I didn't get my way," he laughs. "But now I actually think the one we chose was the right move. The houses around us are mostly single-story homes, so we didn't want it to be taller than everything else."

Instead, they chose CAST architecture's Cedar Cottage, which the firm initially designed as a standalone home before providing the plans to the city's pilot program.



The couple's living room, anchored by an old favorite leather sofa, stays cool with the help of a ceiling fan and mini-split heating and cooling unit.

Photo: Peter Bohler



CAST architecture's original Cedar Cottage design, seen in this rendering, was a one-bedroom plan. Adi and Chris chose a larger two-bedroom model.

"There had been pretty stiff barriers: permitting, any number of zoning limitations," says Cast principal Matt Hutchins, an early advocate for the pilot program. "We would talk to people and they'd be really gung-ho about the idea, but one of these regulations would nick them to the point where it didn't make sense to proceed. At the same time, these DADUs were becoming more and more popular. People were seeing them and inquiring."

CAST has contributed to the construction of about 40 DADUs, some from custom designs and others using preapproved plans like the Cedar Cottage. In the latter case, it takes some letting go.

"What's fun is that when I see the finished product, the DNA is still the Cedar Cottage," Hutchins says. "But sometimes they're clad differently, or they have other owner-derived touches. We don't dictate. We're not out there telling the homeowner, 'You have to like do it exactly the way that we drew it.' The whole point of it is really for them to get through the gate of the city permitting process and then make it their own. It's cool to see what they've done with it."

Seattle isn't the only city to offer preapproved ADU designs. Nearby Olympia, Washington has a similar program, as do Santa Cruz, California and South Bend, Indiana.



The couple chose shou sugi ban siding, with an extra treatment to meet stringent fire codes.

Photo: Peter Bohler



The couple's large backyard allowed their original house and the DADU to come together like unclasped puzzle pieces, with leftover green space.

Photo: Peter Bohler

Although these program offer preapproved designs, "It's not exactly plug and play," Hutchins cautions. "It still takes about 25 to 35 hours of work to generate the site plan, the arborist report survey, etcetera. But it probably cuts the overall process of designing an ADU from something like (for us) \$30,000 to less than \$10,000."

CAST architecture's original Cedar Cottage was a 470-foot, one-bedroom unit, but Adi and Chris chose a slightly larger 700-square-foot, two-bedroom version. The L-shaped house has adjacent bedrooms on one side, and a living area on the other, for a nearly 50-50-split.



Chris and Adi's bedroom takes advantage of its tall ceilings with extra storage cabinetry above the closet.

Photo: Peter Bohler



The kitchen is the home's pivot point. In the adjacent hallway, Adi's artwork, a mosaic-festooned cow skull, hangs prominently.

Photo: Peter Bohler

At Chris and Adi's Cloud DADU, as they call it, large expanses of glass line the inside of the L, going floor to ceiling on the living room side. The roof slopes from back to front, extending over the kitchen/living/dining area to provide a shaded outdoor gathering space. The sloped roof also creates room for extra cabinetry above the couple's closet in the high-ceilinged master bedroom.

The light-filled living area is flexible, thanks in part to the dining table that Chris built at bar-stool height—when they're not eating, it can double as counter space. And even with so much glass, the home stays comfortable—even on warm summer days—thanks to shade from the overhanging roof and concrete floors that ease temperature fluctuations.

Even so, moving from their 1,000-square-foot home with a basement's worth of storage to an ADU with no basement did take some adjustment.

"We had to downsize quite a bit in this space," Chris recalls. "You have to think about everything you buy, and think about what you want to bring into the place. My partner and I got married this year, and we told people, 'Just don't get us anything. We're good.' In the long run, I think that's kind of better—we all need to have less stuff."

Building the wood-framed cottage mostly by himself (save for the foundation, roof, cabinetry and plumbing) and acting as his own general contractor posed no problems for Chris, who says he became a "competent carpenter" along the way. Yet supply chain delays became a headache.

Lumber prices were high at the time, so Chris initially waited to place his order, hoping the cost would come down. "Finally I pulled the trigger on it, and then two months later, lumber futures dove and we would have saved thousands of dollars," he recalls. "But, we'd already put it off for so long."



The second bedroom does triple duty as a guest room, office and Adi's sewing room.

Photo: Peter Bohler



A large overhang and sliding-glass door make the home ideal for indoor/outdoor living.

Photo: Peter Bohler

The original shou sugi ban siding they'd ordered from Japan was taking longer than expected too, so the couple switched to another product that a local supplier had in stock (a more expensive charred timber product treated to meet stringent California fire codes). By that time, the project had been held up long enough that Chris had to install the siding in December, in the rain. The first concrete pour for the driveway was also damaged by precipitation. "It was supposed to be sunny that day," Chris says with a laugh.

The couple saved money by performing some of the interior installation themselves. Adi, for example, leveraged her artistic passion, making mosaics, as she installed the bathroom tiles. That handiwork can also be found in some of the couple's artwork, like a cow's skull (a gift from Chris's slaughterhouse-owning dad) that Adi embellished with beads of mosaic glass.

Living in their Cedar Cottage is not just about being in it. Adi and Matt can often be found out in the yard with Boris, and in summertime tending to an increasingly ambitious garden full of peppers, pumpkins, broccoli, and collard greens.

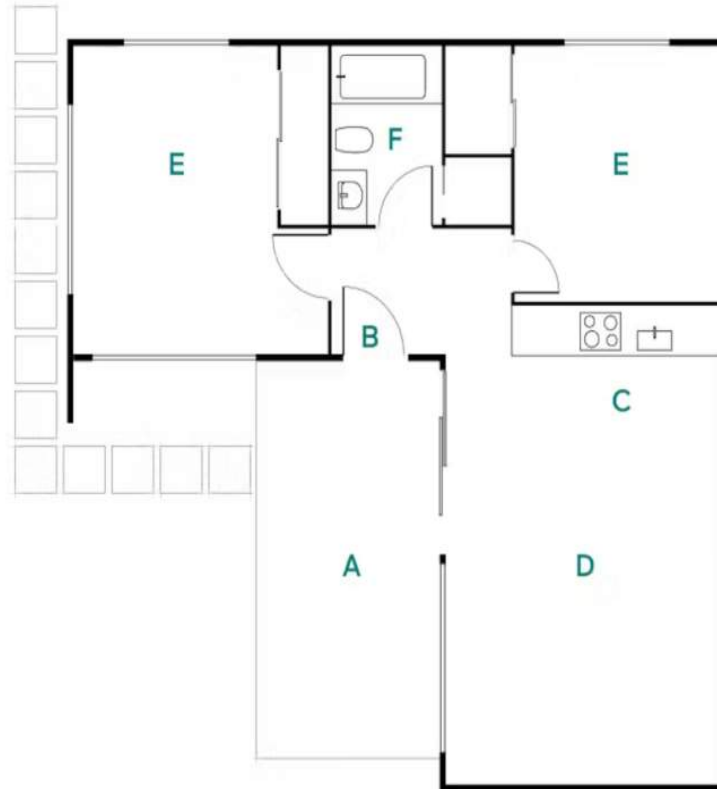
"There's no unused space," Adi says. "We literally use it all, indoor and out."



The master bedroom, though cozy, feels relatively spacious thanks to its 12-foot-tall ceiling.
Photo: Peter Bohler

ARCHITECT **Cast Architecture**

LOCATION **Seattle, Washington**



- A Patio
- B Entry
- C Kitchen
- D Living/Dining Area
- E Bedroom
- F Bathroom

Project Credits:

Architect of Record: Cast Architecture / @cast.arch

Builder: Christopher Cloud

Cabinetry: Sound Cabinets NW

Siding: Nakamoto Forestry