

# BIG IDEAS FOR SMALL SPACES NORTHWEST HOME

MARCH 2008

## Small & Smart

**SIZING UP  
SMALL SPACE  
DESIGN:**  
FROM A  
SUPER-SMALL  
BALLARD  
COTTAGE TO  
SUPER-COOL  
STORAGE  
IDEAS

**SPACE-SAVVY  
FURNITURE**

**COMPACT  
CONDO  
KITCHEN  
UPGRADE**

**OPEN HOUSE:  
A WEST SEATTLE  
FAMILY'S NEWLY  
ROOMY HOME**

# COTTAGE INDUSTRY



A NEWLYWED COUPLE'S LABOR OF LOVE TURNED A DILAPIDATED FISHERMAN'S SHACK INTO A NIFTY NEST

TEXT ALI BASYE PHOTOGRAPHY LARA SWIMMER STYLIST SARA NUCKOLLS FOR CÉLESTINE AGENCY





Small, but cozy. Tim and Diana Hammer in front of the 550-square-foot tear-down home they converted into a little slice of heaven. Opposite page: This view from the front door to the back bedroom illustrates how much space the couple created by keeping the palette light and bright, replacing traditional doors with pocket doorways and opening up the kitchen from behind its formerly closed-in walls.

When you're contemplating making a sailboat your primary residence, a 550-square-foot cottage in south Ballard can seem downright palatial. However, Tim and Diana Hammer never really thought of their house, which was built as quarters for a logger or fishermen in 1902, as small. In 1999, the newlyweds put their seafaring dreams aside and bought the tiny house near the Bardahl Oil sign for \$140,000, despite its dank built-in shelving, dilapidated chimney and steep, sloping floors.

"The first night we had to sleep with our heads at the end of the bed," Diana says. "We didn't realize how much the back of the house was sinking."

The couple—he's a 35-year-old architect and she's a 41-year-old landscape architect—had no experience with carpentry or home renovation, but gamely tackled the project at a slow and steady pace, consulting books, borrowing tools and seeking the advice of friends and neighbors.

The first order of business was leveling the house and renovating the broken-down shed in the backyard.

"That was the test project. If we could fix the shed we could fix this," Diana says, gesturing to the house. The 10-by-12-foot shed (120 square feet is the maximum structure size that can be built without a permit in Seattle) was rebuilt into an attractive free-standing guest room/office (see a photo at [nwhomemag.com/shed](http://nwhomemag.com/shed)), using mostly reclaimed and donated materials, including French doors, oak floors and oversized windows, the latter of which were a gift courtesy of a friend's backyard.

Pleased with the results and bitten by the design bug, over the next four years the couple alternated between camping out in the living room and the finished "guest shed" while they gutted the main house and slowly improved on its structure and layout. The primary goals were to open up and improve on the efficiency of the space, which included stripping and renovating the attic, kitchen and bathroom, replacing the swinging doors with pocket doorways and creating a laundry room. Tim took on the craftsmanship while Diana did demolition work, painting and landscaping. They built neither out nor up, adding no square footage, opting instead simply to improve on what existed. As well as drawing from green retailers such as Seattle's ecohaus for new materials, reclaimed items were culled from scrap yards and

through the help of friends.

"One of the many benefits of remodeling a small house is the small-scale economy," Tim remarks, pointing out that much of the reclaimed materials were bought at a discount because they needed so little footage that they could often use leftover scraps from other people's larger projects. "You don't need 12 matching doors in a small home," Tim says. "You don't need miles of flooring."

The couple learned along the way. Tim's first plumbing attempts sprayed water across the room and more-experienced friends occasionally would come by and dismantle his efforts in favor of more lasting designs. Diana landscaped the front, side and back yards, discovering and removing invasive species and replanting low-maintenance and low-water greenery, relying on evergreen

■ TEAM: ARCHITECT: TIM HAMMER, CAST ARCHITECTURE, 4216 SIXTH AVE. NW, SEATTLE; 206.256.9886; CASTARCHITECTURE.COM; AND DIANA HAMMER, SB & ASSOCIATES LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, 1148 NW LEARY WAY, SEATTLE; 206.789.2133; SBASSOCIATES.COM.

■ COST: \$40,000

■ TIM'S FAVORITE SPACE-SAVING ELEMENT: "THE POCKET DOORS WERE AN UNEXPECTEDLY DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENT THAT TOTALLY CHANGED THE DYNAMIC OF THE HOME. SPACES ...RESERVED FOR DOOR SWINGS WERE AVAILABLE FOR FURNITURE AND ARTWORK—THIS IS A BIG DEAL IN A 550 SQUARE FOOT HOME."

■ DIANA'S SMALL-LIVING LIFESTYLE TIP: "ALWAYS THINK OF THE BIG PICTURE BEFORE BUYING ANYTHING."



flowering shrubs and bamboo.

The Hammers became hooked on the remodeling process, so much so that it helped push them back to school to pursue advanced design degrees: Tim in architecture and Diana in landscape architecture. Tim even earned a scholarship to study small-space and high-density-living design in Kobe, Japan, and the couple finished the renovation just in time to rent it out for a year. All told, it took eight years, two advanced degrees and just \$40,000 for the Hammers to finish their tiny home.

"Living in a construction zone all those years allowed us to learn how a space works and discover what we needed to do to improve it," says Tim. "We never felt crowded, we just felt comfortable." +

**Clockwise from above: By simply removing a decrepit chimney and old shelving that had walled in the kitchen, the entire interior space became open and airy. Architect Tim Hammer sits on a vintage chair that is small enough to complement the room, and fits his and Diana's "reduce reuse recycle" mantra. All of Diana's landscaping choices were driven by the idea that the cottage could one day become a rental. So, plants are mostly evergreen and low-water and low-maintenance. The bedroom is just big enough for a full-sized bed and all clothing is stored in closets. The quilt is a wedding gift sewed by Tim's mother and quilted by seven aunts and three uncles.**

