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SPECIAL INSERT

THE TINY HOUSE WORLD: STATE OF THE UNION as written by thom stanton

New Year Unity

Tiny House Movement is a
Dedicated Industry

2018 was a great year for the expanding presence of tiny homes. With much momentum, renewed vigor, and a unified sense of purpose, the organic Tiny House Movement branches out as a bona fide industry in 2019.

Here's a recap of why we're here, where we're headed, how we'll get there, and who can help (which means: We need you!)

Why We're Here: Tiny Homes Meet Needs

Why go tiny? Well... we remain in a housing crisis, energy costs are on the rise, career paths change, natural disasters are cranking up the heat, and myriad economic factors leave many house-less in the wake of family crisis and personal financial hardship.

Aesthetic interests and economies of small spaces aside, tiny houses fill voids where critical needs meet permissible use in these areas:

Crisis - Flexible use of relocation is appealing to support organizations

Disaster - Adaptable housing for victims, responders, and recovery personnel

Education - Uniform platform for teaching principles and practical skills

Caregiving - On-site medical care or other means of personal/family support

Workforce - Housing temporary workers, low-wage staff, and training participants

Transition - Builds bridges for returning US veterans and homeless families

Rehabilitation - Private space for recovery within a managed environment

Resilience - Adapts to changing social, economic, and environmental factors

Residence - Permissible primary residence for individuals and families

Recreation - Cost effective second home or seasonal housing

Whatever your personal interest, tiny homes continually prove their unique ability to meet myriad needs for alternative forms of housing.

Where We're Headed: Tiny House Futures

Life is often a matter of perspective, and seen through the tiny lens, every empty space appears as an idyllic backdrop for tiny homes. In the mind of a tiny house lover, backyards, odd lots, lush meadows, secluded forests, lakeside vistas, seaside escapes, and edgy urban areas present host locations for wee homes filled with happy tiny people.

But look beyond the sheen of blissful tiny dreams, and -- whether parked on wheels or placed upon permanent foundations -- you'll see that tiny's still struggling for acceptance. So why must tiny house pros, advocates, and communities still fight for our right to go tiny?

Strictly speaking, it's a balance of what structures can be placed on which piece of land. Consider this 2-hand approach we're using to "Legitimize and Legalize" tiny houses as permissible homes.

Legitimize: This step solves the "what you can use" component for dwellings. We seek to establish a means of uniform planning, production, inspection, and certification that proves conformance to minimum metrics of recognized standards for specific housing classes which provides a reason-based argument for permissible use of a Tiny Home as full-time residences.

Taking the long-view, our collaborative efforts will help carve out and defend the tiny niche as a missing link on the chain of housing classifications and support systems for:

Site-Built: Typically a home built on a permanent foundation to a state-mandated edition of the International Residential Code (IRC) or a derivative uniform statewide building code. Per IRC 2015, the minimum size of a residence is 70 square feet, though this small sized footprint may vary a bit in municipally managed construction codes. Local code enforcement officials usually manage the planning and inspection process during construction. A home is then granted a Certificate of Occupancy upon successful completion and approval by local authorities. Leading representative support associations include the National Home Builders Association (NAHB) and the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

Modular: Constructed to the same state, local, or regional building codes as site-built homes using the same manner of process for planning, inspection, and certification. As with Site-Built homes, local ordinance of land use dictates site-specific criteria for constructing housing modules. Modular Homes allow that pre-approved off-site construction activities remain inspectable after delivery with installation of component parts (modules) seamlessly integrated into the finished home. The national Modular Home Builders Association (MHBA) and local organizations are among the support network for modular home construction.

Manufactured: Administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Manufactured Homes are built to the Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards (HUD Code) with a certification label on the exterior of each transportable section. Manufactured homes are not less than 320 sqft in gross area, are built in the controlled environment of a manufacturing plant, and are transported in one or more sections on a permanent chassis. The Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) and similar organizations at the state level represent the interests of this component of the housing industry.

Recreational Vehicles: An RV is a vehicle designed as temporary living quarters for recreational, camping, travel, or seasonal use. RVs may be motorized (motorhomes) or towable (travel trailers, folding camping trailers, truck campers, and park models). Park Models (PMRVs) are typically over 8'-6" in width, must be less than 400 sqft in gross area, and are certified by their manufacturers to comply with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A119.5 Park Model Recreational Vehicle Standard. Travel trailers and self-powered motorhomes are less than 8'-6" in width and certified by manufacturers to comply with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1192 (also ANSI A119.2). While inspection of manufacturing facilities and certification of RV units is voluntary, proof of compliance may be required for use of recreational vehicles in privately owned RV parks, public venues, or other areas designated for their permissible use. The Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) offers a self-regulated quality assurance program for their member manufacturers. Where RVIA maintains an exclusive rostering of high-volume producers and has historically rejected membership to tiny house builders, private companies offer inspection programs that record construction activities offering records, seals, and certificates as proofs of compliance in meeting (at least) minimal RV standards for health and safety, with quality assurance programs offered for single-unit "bay builds," dedicated production lines, and turnkey unit manufacturing facilities. RV certification is viewed as the point of entry for certification of Movable Tiny Homes, though there are significant drawbacks to Tiny House RVs which are -- by their very nature -- strictly recreational in purpose and intended use.

Tiny House/Home: Currently lacks official recognition, a specific classification, and broad-reaching designation for permissible use as housing throughout most of the world. Tiny houses may be built on foundations using the same process and approvals as Site-Built homes, with IRC 2018 Appendix Q providing relief (where adopted) with specific exceptions for ceiling heights, stairway dimensions, sleeping loft spaces, and alternate provisions for emergency egress. Tiny Homes on Wheels (THOWs) may be built to meet/exceed minimums of either ANSI/NFPA RV standard, with inspection records from accredited inspection agencies/bodies offering proof of compliance where required prior to permissible use (like overnight RV parks, RV communities with long-term lot rentals, and ADUs where permitted by special ordinance). Our grassroots Tiny House Movement is an industry of bootstrap start-ups and is represented by two predominant not-for-profit associations including the American Tiny House Association (ATHA, permissible land use) and the Tiny Home Industry Association (THIA, standards development and construction codes), while continuing to work in concert with other organizations hosting events and supporting tiny homes as permissible housing.

While anyone can build a home of any size and any type using any materials -- whether on wheels or a permanent foundation -- local ordinance and code enforcement usually dictate what may or may not be used as housing and/or factored in as a component of property valuation.

The Tiny Home Industry Association (THIA) is working to develop a model code through the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) that specifically addresses the construct of tiny houses which will aid in THIA's lobby for recognition of Tiny Homes as a new class of housing.

Standards development is a process of consensus, and will need participation from knowledgeable tiny house advocates, design/construction professionals, supporting industry leaders, representatives from peer associations, and key administrators involved in housing and community development at state and local levels.

THIA executives are experienced in consensus-based standards development and have a long history of leading successful efforts through ANSI for standardization of industry activities.

Legalize: This step covers land use, and provides an official allowance of recognized forms of housing on specific parcels of property. Looking at the current landscape, tiny housing typically leverages these areas of land use:

Recreational Vehicle - Temporary use and part-time habitation

Temporary Housing - Permitted for a limited time and conditional use

Housing Park - Permits use of a movable home within a designated community

Single-Family Home - Attaches a dwelling to land tying it into property value

Accessory Dwelling - Increases inventory of and access to low-cost housing

Community - Residences and amenities as planned development efforts

As an industry, we use the tiny house as a tool. Rather than a hammer to pound nails of opposition, industry advocates have greater success using tiny houses as levers that align needs of local communities with this new form of housing. As such, tiny homes exist in harmony in local communities where they are adopted in the mix of manageable municipal housing solutions.

The American Tiny House Association (ATHA) empowers local advocates with a means of developing a dialogue between our industry and state/local governments. Where states usually hold sway over recognition of construction codes, municipalities are better aligned with an agreement of housing needs, authorization of land use, and an allowance for tiny houses to be used as homes.

ATHA is making great strides in connecting with local advocates to unlock land use for tinies in localities throughout the US.

Together: These efforts build upon our industry's desire to develop a means of "Legitimizing and Legalizing" movable tiny homes through a framework that provides:

Accounting for sufficiently proven
levels of minimal compliance

Through development of uniform planning
requirements and construction standards

Providing proof of conformance through
qualified inspection and commissioning bodies

Using recognized recording agencies
exercising dedicated practices/methods

Making dwelling units suitable for
temporary use and full-time occupancy

Where permissible use of housing must be
officially approved and ordained for use

By government agencies/commissions,
municipal administrators, local committees,
and other authorities having jurisdiction

Through the cooperative efforts of the tiny home industry's national associations and increased activity of local advocacy groups, we are pushing forward with the fun-loving popularity of tiny homes as supported by collaborative efforts to help them achieve residential status.

How We'll Get There: The Tiny Road Home

So we've identified typical housing needs, recapped the balance of what-goes-where for homes and land, and will now put the pieces together to illustrate how we're working as an industry to address needs for housing and ways tiny homes uniquely fill common voids.

The following bit of backstory and commentary outlines variables in the mix and challenges we face. My goal is to illuminate a path that is helping tiny houses gain official recognition so the door swings open more fully for use of tiny homes as permissible residences. That said, the opinions shared below remain my own :)

State of the Industry: While the terms Tiny House and Tiny Home are mostly synonymous, the definition of "what is tiny" remains rather broad. Support of the ability to build and live in small spaces remains as what I believe are the strongest core interests of our constituency. These are not new desires, more likely key goals lost in traditional housing classifications where the work of mature industries is overseen through governmental legislation with support from special interest groups and industry associations. Tiny homes aren't new, our industry is simply the contemporary outcome of a broadly held renewed vision of what comprises "home." The needs are great and tiny homes are a proven solution, so we must stand united in our right to go tiny.

Ad Hoc History: Current models for both Residential and Recreational construction activities provide a base of "core codes" from which tiny house designers/builders have developed self-defined best practices. These usual and customary practices -- however well meaning and justified -- have yielded nonconforming protocols which have proven insufficient to affect broad-reaching adoption of IRC 2018 Appendix Q and haven't helped net large-scale acceptance of unclassified THOWs (especially non-inspected and uncertified units) within housing administrations. These are areas that require strategic agreement and a unified approach to foster true change in support of tiny homes as broadly adopted forms of permissible housing.

Movable or Static: So which is more important to our constituency of tiny house people: Alignment with and support of either a movable (chassis-based) or static (permanent foundation) based models? For the 10+ years of its history, the Tiny House Movement appears to have embodied the Tiny House/Tiny Home as independent of its underpinnings. As such, our industry must support both models to remain relevant for meeting current needs, practical in implementation during development, and feasible in terms of creating a new class of housing in the Movable Tiny House as a fully permissible portable dwelling unit.

Organizational Alignment: Construction and land use are often touted as “two halves of the same onion,” so our industry’s take on divide-and-conquer is the creation of a broadly applicable housing class (standards development through THIA) that is complimented by more localized shifts in land use (model zoning ordinance development from ATHA) as illustrated at tiny house events that provide promotional opportunities to connect communities with leading advocates and supporting industry initiatives (supportive festivals illustrate great success in this arena). With this mix, we are likely to share support for housing/community development efforts by cooperatively introducing solutions that pair codes applicable to the management of housing (legit dwelling = standards) through an easing of land use that includes smaller forms of residential dwelling units (legal use = zoning). Again, this 2-hand approach allows that arguments can be made for meeting housing needs through recognition of a new housing standard and identifications of locations where it use is allowed.

Local Connections: The American Tiny House Association (ATHA) is focused on helping people “live tiny legally.” ATHA’s expanding approach to the consumer side of small/tiny solutions, introducing tinies to municipalities where the ground seems fertile for changes in land use. ATHA State Chapter Representatives (like me in Virginia) are also working to introduce tiny house friendly standards (like Appendix Q) during upcoming Code Change Cycles in states that mandate adherence to uniform statewide building codes. As such, ATHA is working to coordinate the efforts of many, working more locally to expand efforts to introduce, defend, and manage tinies into existence throughout the US.

Standards and Classification: The Tiny Home Industry Association (THIA) is focused on standardization. As such, the THIA is likely to aid in efforts fostering/supporting tiny-friendly changes (like Appendix Q) to IRC-based model codes that may form derivatives at state and municipal levels. Additionally, THIA is gearing up to lead an ANSI-based model code specifically designed for Movable Tiny Houses as portable dwelling units. In both cases, while THIA may lead the activities of consensus-based model code development, ATHA/THIA and others must work in concert to affect change through the usual administrative channels. Leveraging of localized populations is paramount to our collective success in the support of model code adoption.

ANSI Standards Development: From its inception, THIA has defined itself as a not-for-profit industry association that seeks to develop standards which it can then lobby through legislation for recognition and adoption. New work on its constitution and bylaws positions the THIA for acceptance as a certified ANSI Standards Developer (ASD). One of our declarations is that we are not involved in the creation of what could become "competing codes." ANSI standards development is consensus based, meaning we must "canvass" those who may be materially affected by the presence of this standard. We need input from those involved in tiny house production including DIY home owner/builders, custom home builders, prefab component producers, and turnkey tiny house manufacturers, plus designers, architects, engineers, building officials, zoning officials, and trade professionals. If you're involved in tiny home construction, we invite your input in the consensus process of standards development.

Appendix Q - Part 2: IRC 2018 Appendix Q provides exceptional relief in key categories for foundation-based construction or modular assembly of a Tiny House in municipalities where Appendix Q is authorized for use by Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). As a burgeoning industry seeking validation of our purpose and intent, we need Appendix Q in IRC to maintain a presence for tiny homes and reasoning for identifying differences in design for small structures. Since IRC has strictly stated that it does not define vehicular standards, "those round things" beneath an inherently movable structure are in conflict with IRC's primary purpose and core application (on-site foundation-based construction). So here's a cautionary point: There is great inherent risk in proposing anything drastically different in Appendix Q, especially proposals that are maligned with IRC's primary purpose during the upcoming IRC Code Change Cycle. Rather than "poke the tiger" by proposing the addition of wheels within a staunchly foundation-based construction class, it seems more advantageous to work in concert on reasonable enhancements to existing "codes" within Appendix Q, and -- maybe more so -- develop as strong defense should others propose the eradication of Appendix Q during the upcoming Code Change Cycle for IRC 2021. Tiny industry association executives are working on proposed changes, which are due in early January 2019. Regardless of what is or isn't proposed, many long-standing advocates will likely attend the committee hearings in late Spring 2019 to defend Appendix Q as a whole and any proposed changes.

Off-site Inspections: Tiny homes built or assembled through the usual process upon foundations are inspected by local code enforcement officials. Movable Tiny Homes (aka: THOWs) are typically built off-site with a goal of seeking permissible use in one or more host locations throughout their life cycles. Independent inspection agency Pacific West Associates (PWA) is leading an effort to develop a means to prove that “movable” tinies built to recreational standards uphold the RV industry's usual and customary qualifications. While RVs are recognized as a class of temporary housing, they are usually only allowed for use in “designated areas” illustrating once again how an existing construction standard (IRC, HUD, RV) unlocks land use through zoning ordinance, property variance, or special use permits. As such, the method of TH inspection and certification begins with a dedicated emphasis on legitimizing tiny houses to RV standards as proven through inspection records. This stop-gap measure is best embodied by the proposed allowance of Recreational Park Trailers (aka: Park Model RVs) as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in Los Angeles County. This temporary measure in a huge municipality is seen as a means of addressing the housing crisis they face, and it's believed that other municipalities will adopt the land use precedent LA ushers in through its approval of PMRVs as ADUs. Where the RV industry's recreational focus provides an allowance for their industry to self-regulate, the residential capacity of tiny homes implies that our industry will need to define a specific path for certification with dedicated credentialing routes for inspection agencies and record-keeping companies that uphold expected levels of compliance for off-site inspection of residential structures built as Tiny Homes.

Commissioning: HUD Code based Manufactured Homes are permitted for off-site construction for delivery as turnkey dwelling units. As an industry, we are likely to support existing efforts from prefab manufacturers to develop the means to produce fully-finished component parts off-site as compliant for use in residential construction. For tiny homes, these products could be pre-engineered trailers/chassis, fully assembled frame kits, panelized construction packages, finish-ready tiny house shells, and more. This is a new addition to the tiny house compliance mix, and offers a glimpse at ways inspection groups within the tiny house world may expand their support of companies wishing to step-up their offerings from tiny house RVs to fully compliant fixed or mobile residences. Regardless, the goal is for tiny house companies to craft legitimate tiny housing solutions in the 70-650 sqft space without swallowing the big HUD Code pill and its time/cost intensive enforcement of factories fabricating 400+ sqft manufactured homes.

Building Buzz: With all these tiny house interests moving in a concerted direction, we seek to organize the efforts of recognized industry organizations in ways that are most applicable and meaningful in terms of purpose (“why we're here” reasoning) and alignment with constituent interests (“what/how” they expect us to do on their behalf). To this end, the festival organizers have done well to create a huge buzz about tiny homes throughout the United States. Such event organizers are popularizing the exciting use of tiny homes, and tiny house festivals open doors for dialogue between local advocates and communities in leveraging our industry’s broad-reaching, collaborative, and practical framework for an adoption of alternative construction codes for tiny houses and modification of land use ordinances that provide allowance for tiny houses as permissible residences.

Peer Associations & Special Interests: Where related industries could suppress our growth, we see that that a collaborative and comprehensive approach works to everyone’s benefit. As such, redefining space allocation for Tiny Houses (IRC 2018 Appendix Q) is inherently applicable for Site-Built custom and/or modular homes. Manufactured housing benefits from the efforts of our industry as 400+ sqft manufactured homes can be produced within the HUD Code using tiny house designs and consumer preferences for MH design and marketing processes. Plus, many tiny house builders wish to maintain a presence in the recreational industry, which provides RV manufacturer’s an opportunity to homogenize THOWs to RV-like efficiencies in size, weight, and cost.

In the end, the Tiny Home Movement brings much insight and innovation to existing industries. Others have argued (or otherwise promoted) that tiny houses are merely glorified PMRVs which are ill suited for full-time habitation, or simply a new style of “mobile home” and therefore should require HUD oversight, or -- my favorite -- that “only site-built homes are real houses” and therefore should only fall under the auspices of IRC-based standards for design, construction, inspection, and certification for occupancy.

I submit that Tiny Homes are an offshoot of organic interest nourished by an increased disenfranchisement with existing industries and their “bigger is better” marketing messages.

History shows a steady shift of housing from its reasonably centralized points of origin. Where site-built huts of mud and timber became permanent houses for early humanity, earthquake houses lined up a look at the future of manufactured houses. As gypsy wagons were a true form of transportable workforce housing, pack mules could be viewed as an early means of recreational transportation.

Regardless of modality, all industries started off small and simple... just like today’s tiny homes.

Who Can Help? We Need You!

While we leave the field open for competition, we must insist on our place in the game. It remains up to us to define our own sense of manifest destiny for the tiny home and the industry that supports it.

Here's how you can connect where you fit best (presented in alphanumeric order):

American Tiny House Association > AmericanTinyHouseAssociation.org

ATHA is dedicated to ensuring tiny houses are accepted in local communities as viable dwelling units. Members advocate locally and nationally, providing education and support to enthusiasts, municipalities, key housing organizations, builders and other professionals. ATHA has state and local chapters across the United States focused on one thing: Help people to live tiny legally. ATHA needs volunteers for groups leading local efforts to legalize use of tiny houses.

Tiny Home Industry Association > TinyHomeIndustryAssociation.org

THIA is working with other industries and leading the charge on consensus-based development of construction standards, planning and inspection protocols, professional development resources, consumer education programs, and other forms of advocacy related to a collaborative and coordinated approach to legitimizing tiny homes as sufficient for use as housing. THIA needs board members with executive levels of industry-related experience, part-time staff for key paid positions, and members of consensus committees with practical experience in design, construction, trades, inspection, and public administration in support of standards development.

In closing, housing is in short supply and needs ever expanding; the means of going tiny are well proven; support of our "Legitimation and Legalization" efforts should clear a permissible path for building and living in a tiny home.

Personally, I believe in our rights to fair housing, including an equity that extends to the smaller side of the square foot spectrum. I also believe in our rights to organize around our areas of interest and support free enterprise that includes an expansion of housing classifications to include both fixed and movable Tiny Homes.

Further, I proudly represent and support our three industry associations as a volunteer leader at the national, state, and local levels, and always welcome the opportunity to share my enthusiasm for tiny house design, construction, and use.

Feel free to contact me directly to discuss ways you can join in the Tiny House Movement as an enthusiast, advocate, home buyer, home owner/builder, trade professional, material provider, finished goods supplier, or manufacturer.

Live in service to others, and leave the world a better place.

Go Tiny!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thom", with a stylized, cursive script.

Thom Stanton

Co-Founder/Chief Exec
Timber Trails LLC & GoTiny!

President/COO, Tiny Home Industry Association
State Chapter Leader, American Tiny House Association (Virginia)
Lead Organizer, Uniform Compliance Initiative for Tiny Homes
Founder, RVA Tiny House Team (Capital Region, Virginia)

Email: GoTiny.com@gmail.com
Tel: 804.714.6247

Thom Stanton: Tiny Housing Authority

BRIEF OVERVIEW

A professional tiny house designer, Thom Stanton is President of the Tiny Home Industry Association, State Chapter Leader for the American Tiny House Association, and frequent speaker at festivals throughout the US. Thom leads the Uniform Compliance Initiative, a grass-roots collaborative of working professionals invested in developing standards for the design, construction, and inspection/certification of tiny homes. Living as full-time RVers the past three years, Thom and his wife Midge are finishing off a 14' THOW as their off-grid tiny home.

EXPANDED INFO

Thom is a creative, design, and marketing executive who designs small spaces for clients as cabins, cottages, movable tiny homes as portable dwelling units.

Thom and his wife, Midge, have lived the past three years as full-timers in a travel trailer while covering their travel and living expenses by assisting tiny home companies with their business strategies, marketing plans, and model designs, some of which include concession trailers, basic campers, and classic gypsy wagons alongside small DIY home owner/builder constructed tiny homes, modular-styled cabins/cottages, panelized construction kits, and fully permitted backyard ADUs.

Thom is President of the newly reformed Tiny Home Industry Association, multiyear State Chapter Leader for the American Tiny House Association, and frequent speaker at tiny house festivals throughout the country. Thom leads the Uniform Compliance Initiative for Tiny Houses, a grass-roots collaborative of working professionals invested in developing standards for the design, construction, and inspection/certification of tiny homes. Thom is a guest lecturer at secondary schools and universities, supporting Building Science classes and workforce development centers with tiny home designs and consulting used to teach construction activities and related management skills.

Together, Thom and Midge are working with other organizations to co-develop a series of tiny home plans designed to aid in the rapid construction of low-cost housing for victims of crisis and disaster. The Stantons are also developing hands-on design and construction workshops on alternative construction methods that build skills in resilience and sustainability.


As time permits, the Stantons will finish off their 14' movable tiny as their off-grid home.

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letter from the editor



Kent Griswold | Editor-In-Chief


The Future of Tiny Houses

Many people will tell you the tiny house movement is just a fad...that eventually people will get sick of their small space and come to their senses. But, is this true? Is this something we will laugh at in 20 years, or is it going to stand the test of time?

I've been blogging about tiny houses going on twelve years on the Tiny House Blog. The Tiny House Magazine is now six years old and going strong. I personally do not think tiny houses are just a fad.

Thom Stanton gives us an update of the State of the Union of Tiny Houses and says the following: 2018 was a great year for the expanding presence of tiny homes. With much momentum, renewed vigor, a unified sense of purpose, the organic Tiny House Movement branches out as a bona fide industry in 2019.

Just yesterday, a town in Colorado legalized tiny houses in their community. This follows on the heels of two other towns in California. I believe this is just the beginning. I see 2019 as being the year of the tiny house!

Your Friend,


EMAIL: tinyhousemagazine@gmail.com TWITTER: [@tinyhouseblog](https://twitter.com/tinyhouseblog) INSTAGRAM: [@tinyhouseblog](https://www.instagram.com/tinyhouseblog)

PUBLISHER/FOUNDER
 Kent Griswold

MANAGING EDITOR
 Andrew M. Odom

MONTHLY CONTRIBUTORS
 Christina Nellemann
 Joshua Becker
 Maria Saxton
 Laura M. LaVoie
 Carmen Rose Shenk

If you want to share your experience in the modern tiny house movement or otherwise contribute an article subject to publication in Tiny House Magazine, please send an email to tinyhousemagazine@gmail.com

contributors



BRENDA MASON is a **blogger**, speaker, author, and downsizing specialist. A single empty nester, she downsized her 3,100 sq.ft. home to a 310 sq.ft. tiny converted motorcoach in 31 days living mostly off-grid for four years. To help others she offers a popular [Downsizing31](#) course.



ARIEL MCGLOTHLIN is a photographer and freelance odd jobber who lives off-grid in her tiny house tucked into the mountains of northern Wyoming with her faithful dog. Find her on [YouTube](#) or any other social media as [Fy Nyth](#).



A professional tiny house designer, **THOM STANTON** is President of the Tiny Home Industry Association, State Chapter Leader for the American Tiny House Association, and frequent speaker at festivals throughout the US. Thom leads the Uniform Compliance Initiative, a grass-roots collaborative of working professionals invested in developing standards for the design, construction, and inspection/certification of tiny homes.



ASHLEY SUTTERFIELD lives in Fayetteville, AR where she has made her tiny house both her home and her office where she operates her business as a Food Manufacturing Consultant. She strives to intentionally live in the present moment making meditation, reading and coffee a priority of each day.

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 For details contact Thom Stanton at GoTiny.