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The Next Revival

What if the simple dwelling types of our past became a template for smart construction?

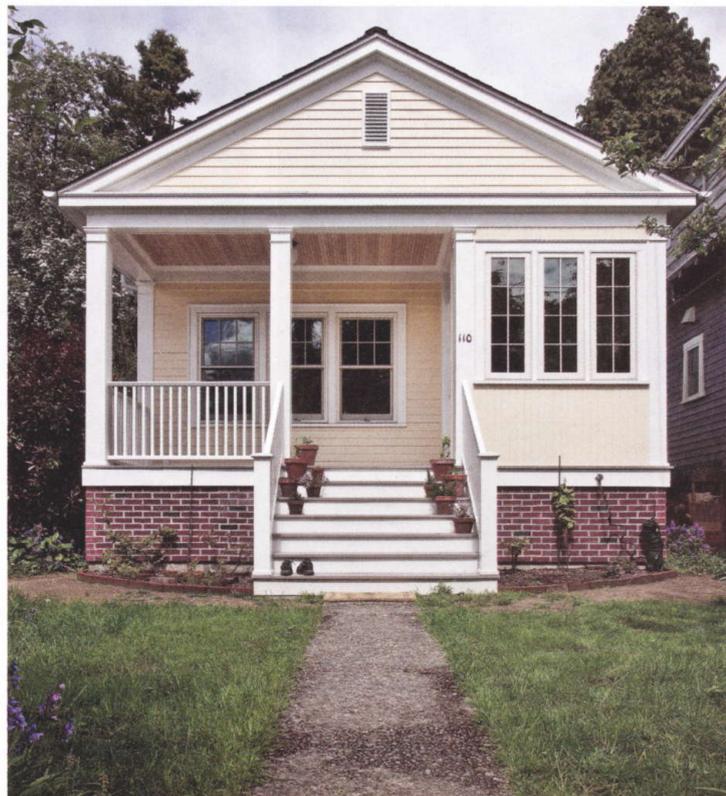
by Patricia Poore | photographs by David Whelan

ARCHITECT Tim Andersen is known for his painstaking restoration work, for renovations and additions to older houses, and for new designs that fit the vernacular. His most recent passion is a series of small, affordable, adaptable homes based on historical American types. Exteriors are simple, building is “green,” and the houses fit into established neighborhoods. Their interiors are classic but frankly contemporary, meant to be customized and finished by their owners.

Andersen offers the plans and construction drawings online. A tie-in with Connor Homes [connorbuilding.com] is in the works to produce pre-cut kits that can be shipped to the site and assembled by a local contractor. They can be built inexpensively—closed-in to weather in a matter of days.

It’s no accident that these sensible designs are adapted from early American house types: the Capes, Saltboxes, and temple-front cottages that served so well. Still, “Our designs are not reproductions,” Andersen says. “They are at once fresh and timeless, but without a designer’s imprint. They’re intended as a background for your life, and will be easy to make your own.” *

Greek Revival Cottage as built in a Seattle suburb. One-third of the porch is as if remodeled to create a buffered entry and mudroom; the soffit and siding continue through to the mudroom.



COTTAGE CLASSICS sampler

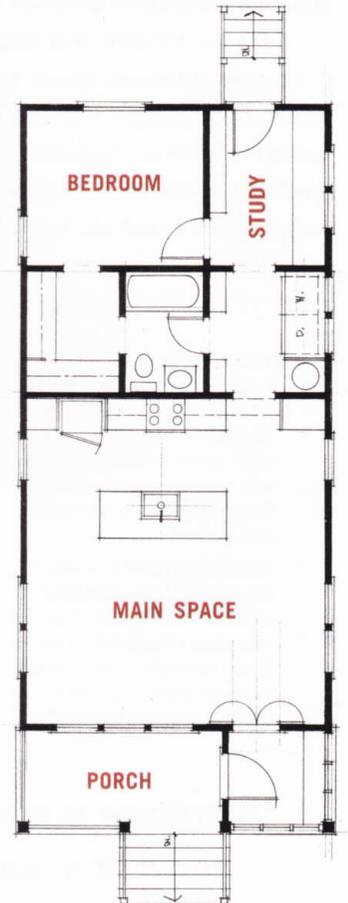
- **BACKYARD CAPE** A garden feature or apartment alternative for a single person. Based on New England half-Cape but with an open, sunny interior. Living area with kitchenette and bed alcove; bath and laundry appear to be a rear addition.
- **SALTBOX SLICE** On a typical city lot, 18' width would allow room for a side garden. Exterior resembles a Federal-era townhouse, symmetrical with delicate windows, dormers, pilasters. Informal and open inside with two bedrooms upstairs. Third-floor loft extends the full width.
- **GREEK REVIVAL COTTAGE** A small but dignified 940 square feet with one bedroom, one bath. At 20' wide, fits tight infill lots. Floor height 42" above grade for light and privacy. A vacation house that works in town, year-round.
- **COUNTRY SCHOOL** Versatile early 19th-century type adaptable for office, live-in studio, cottage industry—or a school. Lit cupola windows make it a beacon of civility. Covered porch and entry hall open to an “office” on one side with “classroom” opposite.
- **CAR BARN** Familiar after 1915, when small barns became garages, often with loft converted to a studio apartment. This one, at 25' x 26', accommodates two cars. Upstairs studio (separate entry with enclosed stair) for a guest retreat or office. Design adaptable for attached shop and covered porches.
- **SHROPSHIRE LAD** English Cottage like those of 1920s street-car suburbs. Basic footprint only 29' x 30'. Nice proportion and detail. Optional one-story library/studio with vaulted ceiling and windows three sides, also separate bath and closets to serve as a first-floor suite. Two bedrooms and baths upstairs.
- **NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY** Recalls mixed-use buildings; the shopkeeper often lived over store. Both units share entry lobby in this version. Storefront with tall windows has a 10' ceiling. Upstairs unit for residence, studio, or office.

“A cottage is smaller and more resourceful. Dismiss assumptions of what a house must be, and rethink what is really essential.”

RIGHT: An open plan and vaulted ceiling make the main living area feel spacious. The hall leads to bedroom and bath and then to the backyard, with alcoves along the way for laundry and study.



LEFT: The efficient bathroom has a custom console and medicine cabinet and a floor of Carrara marble tiles. Above-door transoms are possible with the 9' ceiling.
BELOW: Opposite view of the living space, looking south toward the mudroom and porch. Ceilings are fir beadboard with 2x4 decorative rafters. Engineered red oak flooring is laid over radiant heating.



BELOW: A slate floor is impervious in the mudroom. Shaker pegs hold coats; the room can be customized to suit.



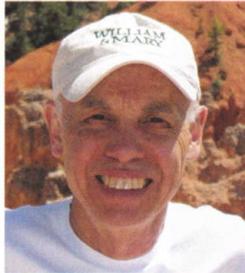
GREEK REVIVAL COTTAGE #1

This house in a streetcar-era suburb of Seattle is the first of the series to be built. The clients, a couple who are both teachers in Seattle public schools, “had a ramshackle little house built without a foundation on a 30’ lot,” Andersen explains. “We intended to raise it up and put foundation under it, then add on. But we found it would have been so expensive, the house was recycled instead.”

Designed for the narrow lot, the cottage is just 940 square feet, though the house it replaced was even smaller. A combined living, dining, and kitchen space opens to a covered porch. The siding, which looks like traditional clapboard, is of fiber cement with a 4” exposure; exterior trim is borate-treated pine—durable materials less expensive than red cedar.

Genesis of the Series

Nearly 30 percent of all U.S. households are now single-person; the figure is much higher in some metro areas. The demographic shift has caused cities to rethink single-family zoning, and some now allow backyard cottages and accessory uses.



I read a recent survey that said 40 percent of Americans between ages 18 and 24 were considering, among their options, leaving the country. Imagine! Their loss of optimism does not bode well for the future. With diminished employment and career prospects, young people will have to find alternative paths to creating a decent home. This will likely require more hands-on participation. Resourceful

people could assist a builder assembling a cottage kit, and do much of the finish work themselves.

It is a challenge to make any new house affordable. Architect Stephen Mouzon asks: “Do you want it bigger, or better? Make it bigger and the quality goes down. Make it better and it must be smaller.” You are also claiming a future, shaping it, and becoming committed to the vision. This is what our forebears discovered, and what led to a distinctly American culture.

“Invent, but within the rules of the historic type; respect the setting; anticipate growth and change.”

Recovery, both personal and national, is the implicit subtext here. Couch potatoes, arise! Leave your laptops and roll up your sleeves! One of the most rewarding experiences of my own youth was building a house with three other guys. The confidence I gained propelled me for years.

Some people will recognize in the designs from America’s early days a connection to our own lost values, self-reliance, and “can-do” attitude. When they see a tiny half-Cape anchored by its massive chimney against the wind, they might sense a connection with their own lives. If there is another Colonial Revival, it will emerge from those ready to reclaim the country and get it moving forward again. —*Tim Andersen*

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