

the

BIG DEAL

about tiny houses

Text by JEFF BOOK / photography courtesy of CLAYTON HOMES

Smartly designed small homes trade quantity of space for quality of life. Check out plans by local architects who are embracing this trend.

Who knew tiny homes would become so big? Not in size, which by definition is less than 500 square feet—sometimes much less. What has mushroomed is the tiny house movement. It has spawned a spate of books, blogs, and TV shows (*Tiny House Builders*, *Tiny House Hunters*, *Tiny House Nation*, and so on). Specialty builders, conferences, and trade shows have sprung up to address a growing market. Last month's Birmingham Home Show drew crowds

with a Tiny Home Village. And this month, the gallery of the American Institute of Architecture's Birmingham chapter unveils "Living Small," an international survey of tiny home designs, complemented by ingenious examples from local architects.

The tiny-home phenomenon is as local as your backyard and as global as the cities represented in the AIA show (New York, Copenhagen, Seoul, Stockholm, and Tokyo). And with land and housing costs so high in

many urban areas, tiny homes can be a practical solution. But interest in them is as much romantic as realistic. "They tap into our childhood fascination with playhouses and tree houses," observes Birmingham architect Jeff Dungan.

In high-density cities, tiny homes tend to be more like modular micro-apartments with expansive windows, shared living and green spaces, and multi-functional furniture. Those same features are often found in freestanding tiny houses, though they can be more fanciful. The prototypical tiny homesteaders are millennials who, after much online research, design and build their houses themselves (with help from friends) on a trailer for as little as \$10,000. Styles range from gingerbread cottages to modernist mini-villas, from steel-clad steampunk pods to whimsical Hobbit huts. It's a dream come true: a custom starter home that enables a mobile, mortgage-free life. Call it the anti-McMansion.

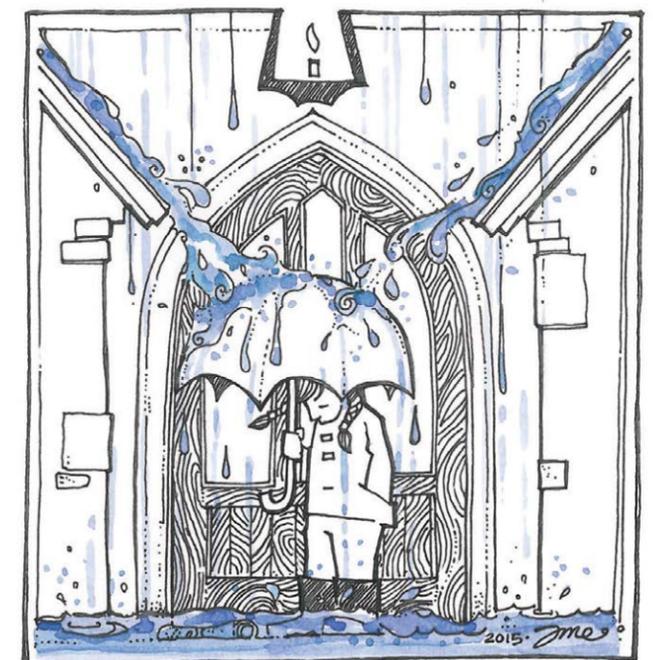
"They're not for everyone, but there is a need for this type of housing," says architect Garrett Reynolds, who created the Living Small exhibit for the AIA's Seattle chapter. "It's about just living in the space you need. Editing and simplifying your life can add value to it."

For manufacturer Clayton Homes, architect Jeff Dungan designed five tiny houses, each in a different style and all under 400 square feet. Known for creating grand, high-end houses, Jeff saw it as a challenge "to design by the cubic inch instead of the square foot, to make it like a prime cut of a really nice house," he says. Twelve-foot ceilings, ample windows, French doors, and careful detailing elevate the designs. Clayton Homes executive Gary Hollingsworth has cited millennials,

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Architect Jeff Dungan designed this Low Country Cottage for Clayton Homes. The house will be on display at the Living Small exhibit. See more of the Designer Series: Clayton Tiny Homes at designerseriestinyhomes.com.



LIVING SMALL

tiny house exhibit

March 9 - March 31
 Tuesday - Friday 10am-3pm
OPENING RECEPTION:
 March 9 • 5:30-7:30pm (FREE)

Alabama Center for Architecture
 109 Richard Arrington Jr. Blvd. South

Don't miss the lecture by Garrett Reynolds, AIA, of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson in Seattle, WA
 March 9
 Iron City / 513 22nd St. South
 11am registration
 11:30am - 1pm lunch and lecture
 Tickets (\$20) must be purchased in advance.
squareup.com/store/AIA-birmingham
 205.322.4386 or alca.org

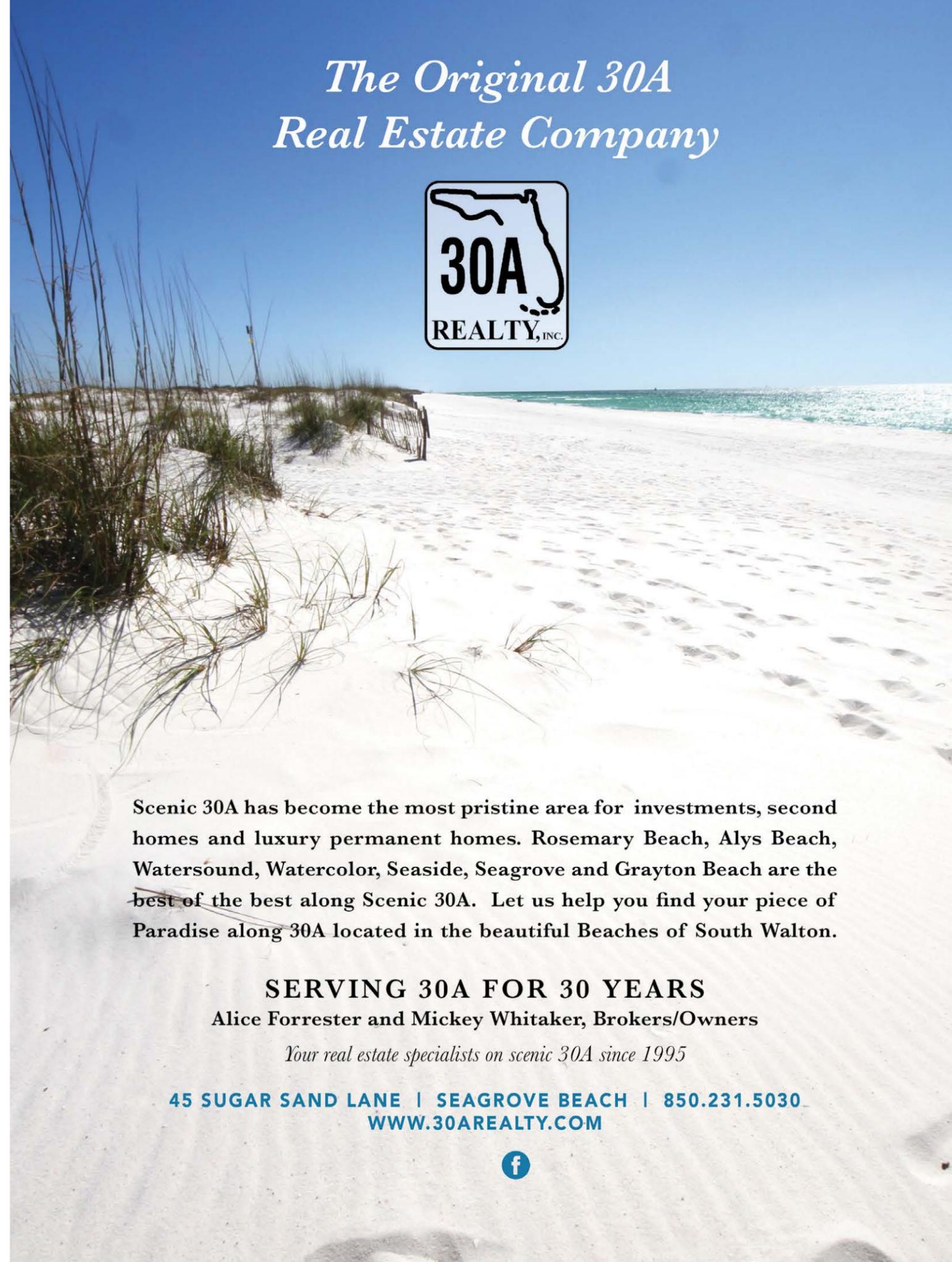
empty nesters, retirees, and seekers of second homes or guest houses as likely buyers. Most models cost around \$100,000.

Squeezing so many big-house features into a tiny footprint can sometimes result in a high cost per square foot, "but the bottom line is still lower," notes architect Robert Sproull. "And it's a more sustainable way of living. It takes far less energy and materials to build and power a tiny house."

Last year, the International Code Council took steps

toward approving tiny-house building codes. Locally, especially in Birmingham's city core, tiny houses could increase density, affordability, and livability. "We want the Living Small exhibit to encourage people to think about the way we live, now and in the future," says Rhea Williams, executive director of AIA Birmingham. "With a tiny house, you have less environmental impact, less upkeep, and more disposable income."

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