

New book shines spotlight on PNW's eco-conscious homes

By Jennifer Haupt / Special to At Home in the Northwest

The Pacific Northwest is at the forefront of a shift away from expensive, oversized urban living, with some people searching for smaller, more well-designed, affordable homes.

“Bigger Than Tiny, Smaller Than Average,” a new book by Sheri Koones, showcases 26 small homes with energy-efficient designs from around the country, including four homes in Washington.

“I see a trend towards more energy-efficient, environmentally friendly houses in many parts of the country, particularly in Washington, California and parts of New England,” says Koones, an expert on small houses and sustainable building. “Nearly every homeowner I spoke with for this book and my last book on downsizing were concerned with limiting their energy, not only for the cost savings, but also for the environment.”

Here’s more from Koones, on topics ranging from environmentally friendly building practices to energy-efficient living.

Q: Why “Bigger Than Tiny, Smaller Than Average”?

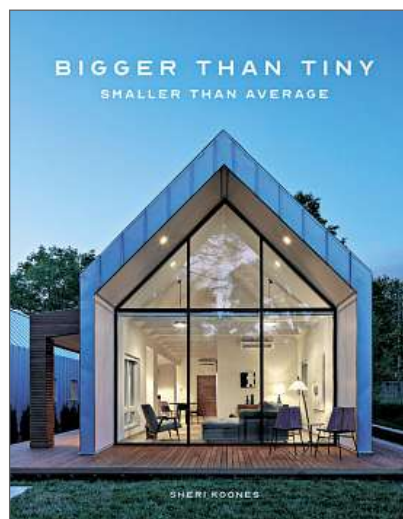
A: In as much as I understand the advantages of tiny houses, they are not what I write about. “Tiny” indicates a mobile house that is not code compliant. All the houses I write about are small, and even what some might consider “tiny,” but they are all permanent, code-compliant homes.

Q: What was the overall



COURTESY OF TJ SIMON / GIBBS SMITH BOOKS

The Bellingham home shown above is designed with window glazing throughout, providing natural light and improved ventilation. The extended roofline blocks out the sun in warm months and allows in the sun during the cooler months when the sun is lower in the sky. It is among the Washington homes featured in “Bigger Than Tiny, Smaller Than Average” by Sheri Koones.



criteria you used to choose the 26 houses highlighted in this book?

A: All the houses had to be less than 2,000 square feet, energy efficient, well-designed, optimally using the space and with outdoor spaces. And, of course, they had to be attractive inside and out.

Q: Four of the homes showcased in your book are in Washington. Is our region a trendsetter in energy-efficient design?

A: I have great respect for

the work that is being done in the Northwest. I think the architects and builders in that area are among the most eco-conscious I have found. I’ve been dealing with Pacific Northwest architects almost as long as I’ve been writing — and I’ve written 10 books! Environmentally friendly practices are part of the DNA in their designs, materials and construction.

Lucky for me, I’ve had the opportunity to visit Washington several times

for conferences, and I’m always impressed with the people and the homes they have built there.

Q: You’ve written extensively about “prefabulous” homes. Why is prefabricated construction a particularly good choice for homeowners in the Pacific Northwest?

A: Prefabricated construction is a great choice for homeowners in any part of the country and the world. I believe it is

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page particularly popular in the Northwest because the people are so eco-conscious, and prefab is a more environmentally friendly way to build. In addition, there are some excellent prefab manufacturers in the Pacific Northwest, including Lindal Cedar Homes, Method Homes and Stillwater Dwellings.

Q: The Lucki Farmhouse on San Juan Island has numerous energy-efficient design features: a solar array on the roof, radiant floor heating, an extra layer of foam in the walls, an efficient heat pump, and track lighting in the thinner angled roof areas to avoid thermal loss through the ceilings. Given the environment of the Pacific Northwest, how important is it to have multiple design features to save energy and money?

A: I think it is particularly important in this location to create an energy-efficient home with excellent insulation because of the winter months, which can be rainy and cold, and then the heat of the summer months. Many people are conscious of saving energy and creating a house that is also comfortable and healthy to live in.

Q: Low-maintenance materials and practices were a priority for the homeowners featured in your book, like the Alley Cat accessory dwelling unit in Seattle. What are some aspects that fall into this category in the Pacific Northwest, considering our environment?

A: There were several houses in the book that included metal roofs, which are low-maintenance and sustainable. Many people also used natural landscaping that is drought-resistant to limit their maintenance requirement, as well as limit their water use.

Q: What are your top five tips for homeowners in the Pacific Northwest for reducing their ecological footprint?

A: Here's a good starting point:

- If possible, try to position the house with optimal solar orientation to take the best advantage of the sun and cool winds.
- Create the best possible thermal envelope for the house, including the foundation, siding and roofing. To limit the need for energy, the house should be built with the least possible loss of energy.
- To keep the house

healthy and comfortable, homeowners should consider including a heat recovery ventilation system, which will retain the heat and cool air in the house while bringing in fresh outside air.

- Build an all-electric house, since the Northwest uses green energy power, and avoid the use of gas, which is bad for the environment.

- Build the house small, with well-designed spaces to make sure all the space is multifunctional and comfortable. Create well-designed outdoor spaces to expand the living space.



COURTESY OF ALEX FARRELL / GIBBS SMITH BOOKS

The owners of the Lucki Farmhouse on San Juan Island wanted lots of storage space, despite the prefabricated home's limited space. The builder, Method Homes, incorporated many built-in cabinets in the kitchen and elsewhere throughout the home.

“I’ve had the opportunity to visit Washington several times ... and I’m always impressed with the people and the homes they have built there.”

Sheri Koones, author of “Bigger Than Tiny, Smaller Than Average”



COURTESY OF MARK WOODS PHOTOGRAPHY / GIBBS SMITH BOOKS

The siding on this accessory dwelling unit in Seattle is all metal for easy upkeep and sustainability. It's featured in “Bigger Than Tiny, Smaller Than Average” by Sheri Koones.