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10 Cottage Projects You'll Love

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It's a small world after all.

Or at least that's the present mindset. The era of super-sizing apparently over, America is starting to build smaller houses. Last year, for the first time in more than a decade, the size of single-family homes under construction started to trend backward, falling from an average square footage of 2,629 in the second quarter of 2008 to an average of 2,343 by year's end, according to Census data. That's after doubling in size from 1960 to 2007. Moreover, in a recent NAHB survey of home builders nationwide, 90% reported that they were building smaller.



That downshift is expected to continue even once the economy picks back up, for compound reasons. Tighter lending standards mean buyers can't qualify for quite as much. Land in highly desirable areas (particularly close-in suburbs within walking distance to transit) is in short supply. Neighbors in said areas are waging all-out anti-mansionization wars with renewed vigor. Smaller homes have the capacity for greater energy efficiency.

And then there's the fact that buyers, on average, don't need as much because households are smaller. Of the 28 million households that are expected to be added to the American landscape between 2010 and 2030, fewer than 5 million (about 17%) will be families with kids, while 10 million are projected to be single person households.

Attached homes are claiming an ever-increasing share of the housing pie, but many citizens aren't quite ready to give up the dream of four exterior walls and a yard. For them, small cottage-style houses are a popular choice--and perhaps a bridge to the future. Here are a few of our faves, both new and old.

What can you do with \$100,000? **Dominick Tringali Architects** and Brooklynn Homes parlayed that meager budget into an all-American residence that's not only easy to build, but primed for LEED certification. Intended as a prototype for a new collection of Habitat for Humanity homes, the handsome little house was built for just \$54 per square foot. The pro forma relies on stacked framing and prefab walls and ceilings to reduce construction waste, with room dimensions dictated by plywood dimensions and stud spacing.

It's also energy-efficient. Strategic site orientation, window placement, canopies, and porches maximize daylighting and cross-ventilation, while preventing unwanted solar gain in summer and heat loss in winter. The tight structure is built with rigid insulation on the exterior walls and crawl spaces walls below grade. Add to that a tankless water heater, dual flush toilets, low-flow faucets and shower heads, a high-efficiency furnace, rainwater collection barrels, and Energy Star windows and appliances. Yes, it can be done.



Pontiac, Mich.