

# The Seattle Times

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## Home sweet, cozy home

By Catherine Arnold  
Special to The Seattle Times

For anyone who thinks that spending one's days and nights in a 1,000-square-foot house might be a tight fit, try kicking around first on a boat, says Todd Staheli, who has lived with his wife and two daughters in a Shoreline bungalow for two years.

"If we could live on a boat that's about 50 square feet â€" then a thousand seems like a lot," Staheli says, referring to the sailboat he used to live on at Shilshole Bay Marina in Ballard.

Empty-nester Allison Jones was ready to downsize. She left a 2,300-square-foot house in Bellevue for a new 1,000-square-foot bungalow in Redmond in June.

"I don't need a large home," says Jones, who lives in a courtyard-centric Craftsman-style bungalow designed by Seattle-based The Cottage Company. "These [houses] are beautifully designed, so I don't feel like I'm going to live in a cracker box."

"I think [downsizing] is going to be more and more popular, actually," Jones says.

The average house size in Seattle, 1,460 square feet, is smaller than the national average of 1,548 square feet, according to Seattle-based real-estate website [Zillow.com](http://Zillow.com).

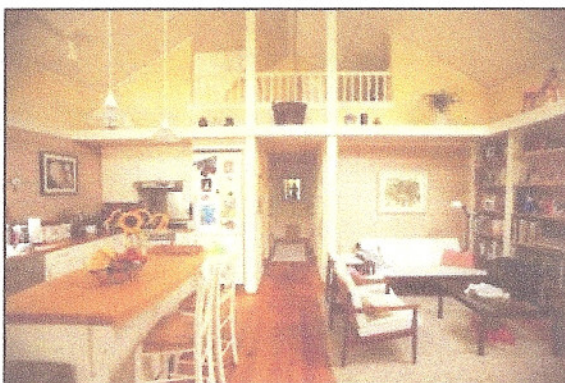
That smaller average size is partly owing to the number of bungalows and small houses that were built before 1950; the average Seattle house was built in 1949, as opposed to the national average of 1974. Twenty-six percent of Seattle houses were built between 1940 and 1959, the highest percentage of any time period for the city, also according to [Zillow.com](http://Zillow.com).

The national average size of houses being sold is decreasing in the recession. In 2009, the average square footage of single-family houses fell to 2,434 from 2,508 in 2008, census data showed. That's still much larger than the average size 30 years ago â€" 1,700 square feet.



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Todd Staheli, his wife and two young daughters moved into the Greenwood Avenue Cottages in Shoreline from Ballard in 2008. Staheli thinks living in smaller home helps with parenting. "Being close together and sharing space is a better thing than not," he says.



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Todd Staheli's 1,000-square-foot home features tall ceilings and an abundance of natural light. From left, is the kitchen, loft and living room.



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The upstairs loft offers a view of the kitchen, breakfast nook and living room (not pictured) in the Shoreline cottage that's home to Todd Staheli and his family.



Seattle's suburbs can be a different story. In Bellevue, for instance, 23.3 percent of houses are 1,800 to 2,400 square feet; 25.4 percent are 2,400 to 3,600 square feet; and 8.8 percent are 3,600 or more square feet.

"Maybe a third of the people I meet don't want the 3,000- to 4,000-square-foot house," says Laura Westlund, of Laura Westlund Realty in Kirkland. "They come in and say, 'It's just my wife and me, and we don't want too much space.' But that can be hard to find, because large houses have been built instead."

Westlund said small houses sell well in downtown Kirkland. Recent sales include a 900-square-foot cottage on Third Street, and a house of "around 700 to 900 square feet" off Market Street that sold for \$795,000, both of which had been "dolled up" and painted.

People are buying smaller homes for a variety of reasons other than financial cost-cutting.

Moving into a smaller floor plan can be freeing, says Jones. "It forces you to go through your things and keep only what you really love. I have to sell or pass on to other generations what I won't need and can't fit in this house. It's a good thing, because we â€" as people â€" don't need a bunch of stuff."

Small sometimes means using less energy in the case of new, green-fitted houses, notes Staheli.

In 2008 when he and his wife were house hunting, they especially wanted an energy-efficient house, says Staheli. At the time they lived in a 1923, 2,200-square-foot house in Ballard.

"It needed new electrical work, new plumbing, better light exposure, and new kitchen appliances," says Staheli.

They paid \$390,000 for their Shoreline cottage in 2008 and have saved a lot on their gas and electric bills, says Staheli.

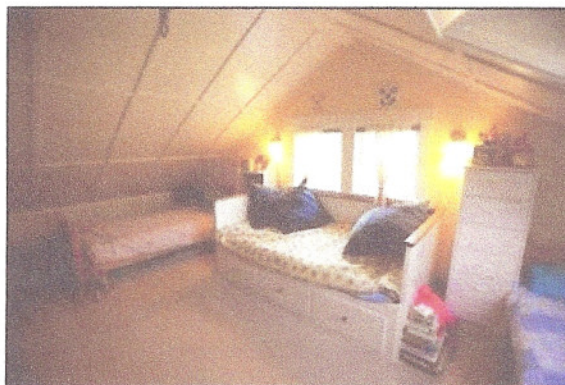
"Because everyone in the courtyard community shares water, we save on that, too. We save by fourfold what we paid in our larger Ballard house."

Feeling crowded hasn't been a problem, either, says Staheli.

"There wasn't a concept that we'd all need separate, large spaces â€" a 'man cave,' or a two-car garage." By man cave, Staheli means separate rooms in the basement that hold a big-screen TV and weights.

The small-scale house was high on design and beauty, says Staheli.

"After moving in, we really fell in love with it. We just loved our space â€" it was well-built, had high ceilings and skylights; and we loved the light exposure. It's a really pleasant place to be."



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Todd Staheli enclosed the loft to create a cozy bedroom for his two young daughters. The Stahelis moved into the home in 2008.