



PHOTOS COURTESY CENTSATIONALGIRL.COM

# Affordable Oasis

A design-loving, bargain-hunting blogger remade her backyard on a budget.

WITH THE MOTTO “FABULOUS FOR LESS,” Northern Californian Kate Riley, writer of the design and remodeling blog Centsational Girl, knows the value of combining DIY elbow grease, thrift-store finds and wise shopping to create beautiful home makeovers on a dime. To transform her backyard patio from drab to darling, she combined her penchant for secondhand shopping, a knack for clever reuse and a few American Express points to create what her family now refers to as their “outdoor oasis.” Use her example as inspiration to make over your backyard on a budget.

Wine enthusiasts, Kate and her husband grow grapes in their backyard vineyard, a lovely view they hoped to enhance by making their patio more appealing. Their goal was to create an outdoor room that was protected from the sun and offered the feeling of an enclosed space but still felt open and breezy.

Using American Express points, Kate ordered a 12-by-12-foot cabana and indoor/outdoor seat cushions from Home Depot. The durable cushions match the house exterior and allowed Kate to reuse her formerly lackluster patio furniture. Rather than using the utilitarian mosquito netting that came with the cabana, Kate made her own breezy white curtains out of linen sheets she found on clearance at a local outlet for just \$5. She simply hemmed them to the height of the cabana and hung them with curtain rings, making it easy to take them down in rain storms.

### CREATIVE FURNISHINGS

When it came time to furnish the outdoor room, Kate started the hunt for repurposed and responsibly made items. She found a wine barrel from a nearby vineyard for \$20 at her local Ace Hardware (the joys of living in wine country!) and cut it in half to create inexpensive rustic side tables. For the coffee table, Kate searched her local antique and thrift stores and found a wood trunk for \$15. Although the trunk was covered in stickers, it was made of solid wood and had a great shape, so Kate took it home, peeled off the stickers, and sanded and whitewashed it (find her how-to instructions at right; read more at centsationalgirl.com/2011/06/basic-whitewashing-technique). Now she has a beautiful hardwood coffee table that doubles as storage for outdoor supplies. She rounded out her furniture collection with a Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood bench from West Elm.

### UNIQUE ACCENTS

To add the finishing touches to her outdoor room, Kate found eco-friendly accent pillows made of hemp and jute and handsome lanterns made of weathered pine and aged tin at Pottery Barn. She made a few additional outdoor pillows by sewing together and stuffing some patterned placemats she’d found on clearance. Finally, potted outdoor plants tie the room with its earthy surroundings, and a bowl of limes offers a splash of color and comes in handy for cocktails or fresh-off-the-grill fish.

Kate Riley offers beautiful and affordable projects with easy-to-follow instructions on her blog, Centsational Girl (centsationalgirl.com). Read more about her cabana makeover at centsationalgirl.com/2011/06/our-patio-cabana.



Before she created her cabana oasis, blogger Kate Riley had a drab patio overlooking gorgeous views of her backyard vineyards. She and her husband wanted to transform the 13-by-16-foot space into a spot for relaxation and entertainment, creating an open, breezy outdoor room.



Kate adorned a steel gazebo with curtains she made from linen sheets she found at a local outlet. Indoor/outdoor cushions allowed her to reuse her outdoor furniture set. She added an FSC-certified wood slat table, a coffee table she made from a secondhand trunk, side tables made of two reclaimed wine barrels and handmade accent pillows.

### Whitewashing Primer

Blogger Kate Riley whitewashed a vintage wood trunk to create the coffee table for her outdoor cabana. Whitewashing uses white paint to brighten wood while allowing the grain to show through. It’s simple, inexpensive and works well indoors and out to create a coastal, cottagey vibe. Here are Kate’s basic whitewashing steps:

- **Sand the wood.** Kate used a power sander and 80 grit (medium) sandpaper. You’re not aiming for perfection, just more even tones in the wood. Sand opposite the grain to enhance ridges, nooks and crannies.
- **Mix 2 parts zero-VOC white latex paint to 1 part water.** Dip brush in mixture, wipe most of it off, then paint in the opposite direction of the grain, allowing the diluted paint to grab onto rough edges.
- **When paint is dry, protect it** by spraying it with a water-based, fast-drying clear UV protectant.



# All Decked Out

Decking materials billed as green aren’t always all they’re cracked up to be. Here’s the lowdown on the most sustainable options.

**SEVEN YEARS AGO I BEGAN BUILDING** my dream house, intent on making it both low-maintenance and energy-efficient. I loved the idea of a large deck facing my expansive westward mountain views. However, having had wood decks on a previous house, I knew I didn’t want to spend half my summer weekends staining and waterproofing. I settled on composite decking made of recycled wood fiber and plastic, which I believed would cut down on maintenance and reduce my home’s impact on Mother Nature, as composite materials are said to last 20 years or more.

Little more than five years later, however, I found my composite deck disintegrating where it was exposed to sun and rain. I felt like I had been taken for a ride. My experience isn’t unique, unfortunately. Selecting decking material that is responsibly produced, durable and reliable can be difficult. “‘Green’ has such a large definition,” says Rick Goldstein, co-owner of MOSAIC Group Architects and Remodelers in Atlanta. “There are no perfect metrics. When it comes to decking, I don’t know of any products that are truly green—they just have green aspects.”

So how do you know which material to choose when you’re getting ready to build or remodel a deck? It can be a tricky process, so doing your homework is paramount.

## WORKING WITH WOOD

Wood is strong, easy to work with, and can be painted or stained any color. But it can be difficult to discern which wood is sustainable. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certifies lumber that was sustainably harvested, but FSC-certified wood may not be the greenest option if it’s shipped from afar. If you must choose between FSC-certified lumber from South America or Asia and non-certified local wood, choose local, Goldstein recommends. Transportation emissions are a major contributor to greenhouse gases, and if you use a local harvester, it’s easier to track where the lumber came from and how it was harvested.

While there is no centralized resource for finding locally harvested lumber, a search for lumber companies and your city name should get you started. Look for companies that directly sell the products they harvest. You can search for local retailers of FSC-certified lumber at fscus.org. When discussing options with companies, make sure to ask about durability and weather-resistance.

Brooks Utley, design expert for the OWN network’s “Home Made Simple,” says salvaged lumber can be an excellent decking option—he made his own deck out of salvaged lumber. Salvaged wood decks make use of a material that would otherwise go to waste. However working with salvage can present challenges. If you can’t pick pieces yourself, you may get boards that are partially rotted or discolored. And because salvaged wood isn’t likely to be uniform, installation can be more difficult. The best way to source salvaged lumber is to search online or to find local builders who are familiar with salvage. You can search for salvage yards at the Building Materials Reuse Association website (bmra.org). You can also order ready-to-install salvaged wood decking, but shipping the wood increases its environmental impact.

## The Cost of Decking

Raymond Desper of Valley Building Supply in Staunton, Virginia, provided price estimates for various decking materials. Prices vary by region (prices don’t include fasteners).

**WOOD:** \$1 to \$2 a square foot for treated lumber; \$12 a square foot for ipe (a high-end wood product)

**SALVAGED WOOD:** Prices vary widely; check local building codes to ensure salvaged wood decks are allowed in your area

**ALUMINUM:** \$7 to \$9 a square foot

**COMPOSITES:** \$4 to \$8 a square foot depending on brand

**PVC:** \$8 a square foot

## ALMIGHTY ALUMINUM

Aluminum decks are an excellent option for durability and sustainability. Generally made with recycled content, aluminum is also fully recyclable, so any scrap from construction can be reused. Should you replace your aluminum deck one day, the deck boards, which often have the look of wood, can also be recycled instead of going to the landfill. Aluminum is likely the toughest decking product you can buy. It’s entirely water-resistant and stays cooler than many other deck materials in summer, meaning you can comfortably walk across it barefoot. LockDry and AridDek offer aluminum decking products.

## CONSIDERING COMPOSITES AND PLASTIC

Composite deck boards are usually made with a combination of recycled plastic and waste wood fiber ground into sawdust. In the last couple of decades, composite decking has increased in popularity because it tends to be low-maintenance (if you purchase a reliable and proven product) and offers design flexibility. You can mix colors and create curved features easily.

However, composite decking has seen its share of troubles. “Not only do they fade, but there have been more failures with composite decks than any other type of decking material,” Goldstein says. He only uses EverGrain composite decking, which he’s had reliable success with. Utley recommends ChoiceDek or Trex, the company that pioneered synthetic alternatives to standard wood decks and whose products have been used on boardwalks in harsh, damp climates such as the Florida Everglades.

Although PVC is a petroleum byproduct, Goldstein prefers PVC decks such as those made by AZEK and Gossen for their efficient production process and durability. He points out that, although composites use recycled products such as milk jugs and wood fiber in their manufacture, finished composite products are not recyclable. “PVC is fully recyclable,” Goldstein says. “If there is waste, it can be put right back in the hopper.” Because few retailers currently stock composite decking, orders for composite materials are often sent individually, which is less efficient than large-scale shipping of PVC decking to home

## RESOURCES

### WOOD DECKING

**AltruWood**  
altruwood.com  
ready-to-install salvaged wood decking

**EarthSource Forest Products**  
earthsourcewood.com  
ready-to-install salvaged wood decking

**Forest Stewardship Council**  
fscus.org  
search for FSC-certified local lumber in your area

**Perennial Wood**  
perennialwood.com  
durable wood decking harvested in the U.S.; currently only available in New England

**ALUMINUM DECKING**  
**AridDek**  
ariddek.com

**LockDry**  
lockdry.com

**COMPOSITES & PLASTIC**  
**AZEK**  
azek.com  
PVC decking

**ChoiceDek**  
choicedek.com  
composite decking

**Gossen**  
gossencorp.com  
PVC decking

**TAMKO**  
tamko.com  
EverGrain composite decking

**Trex**  
trex.com  
composite decking

**DECK TREATMENTS**  
**Benjamin Moore**  
benjaminmoore.com

**Cabot**  
cabotstain.com

**CedarCide**  
cedarcidestore.com

**Sherwin-Williams**  
sherwin-williams.com

## Treat Your Deck Right

While deck installation is a job for a professional (unless you have substantial building experience), you can save on labor by doing your own staining and preservative treatments should you choose to install a wood deck. In the past, oil-based stains and preservatives were the only ones guaranteed to withstand the ravages of pests and weather, but a lot has changed in the last decade.

Almost all paint and stain manufacturers offer low-VOC (volatile organic compound), water-based stains and wood preservatives that are equally effective as oil-based options. While most stains and preserving treatments must be reapplied every couple of years, CedarCide is a 100 percent nontoxic sealant and preservative that lasts 20 to 30 years. It’s pricey at \$50 per gallon, but over the lifetime of your deck, you’ll save a bundle.

stores. PVC decks also tend to have the longest warranties in the business, though homeowners should be aware that PVC shrinks and swells in cold and heat. If you choose a composite or PVC deck, keep in mind that synthetic decks still require a treated lumber frame. Composite decking products buckle if not installed properly, and manufacturers don’t honor warranties if installation guidelines aren’t followed to the letter.

The decking materials you choose are largely a matter of taste, cost and your willingness to perform maintenance. The most important element of sustainability is to thoroughly research a product from its materials sourcing to its delivery and durability. Then balance the elements of sustainability with your desires.

DEBORAH R. HUSO, a builder’s daughter who constructed her own home with sustainable features seven years ago, is a columnist for *Today’s Diet & Nutrition* and contributing editor with *The Progressive Farmer* and *Blue Ridge Country*. Visit her online at drhuso.com.



EverGrain composite decking is made of recycled wood and plastic and offers a 25-year warranty. PHOTO COURTESY TAMKO BUILDING PRODUCTS



# Fab Floor

If you’re looking for low-cost and unconventional flooring options, consider these unique DIY ideas that put everyday salvaged materials to good use.

**TODAY, IT’S EASIER THAN EVER** to find eco-friendly flooring options. From FSC-certified hardwoods and bamboo to natural linoleum, cork and recycled-content tiles, a wide range of light-on-the-earth materials is available to cover the ground beneath your feet. But for those of us who are looking for something out of the ordinary or hoping to cut costs, the eco-friendly options might still leave us searching for options outside the box. Lucky for us, a good, durable and eco-friendly floor can be made from a variety of upcycled materials—although it may take a bit more creativity, planning and time than traditional options. We’ve picked our brains and searched the country for innovative ideas, and we’ve come up with six inspiring examples that will have your artistic nature (and your bank account) thanking you.



Brown paper bag floors look chic in the upstairs of Lovely Crafty Home blogger Rachael Evans’ Asheville, North Carolina, home.

## IN THE BAG

Maybe you tore up your old carpet hoping to find beautiful hardwood underneath, but were disappointed to find plywood. This stunningly beautiful remedy for that dilemma involves everyday brown paper bags. Much like a decoupage project, these paper floors are made by gluing down scraps of paper in a random organic pattern, then covering everything with a layer of polyurethane. Rachael Evans of the blog *Lovely Crafty Home* used brown craft paper to transform the upstairs floors of her Asheville, North Carolina, home into something that looks like a cross between hardwood, cork and leather—all for a superlow price. **INSTALLATION:** Rachael provides excellent instructions in her blog post “Ultimate Brown Paper Flooring Guide” about how she papered her floors. Basically, she soaked the scraps of paper in glue, laid them on the floor, let them dry completely and then covered the floor with a couple of coats of clear polyurethane. To make this project eco-friendly and fume-free, use either old paper bags or recycled-content craft paper. Instead of the Elmer’s glue, whip up a watered-down recipe of wheat or rice glue (get recipes at [solarcooking.org/wheatpaste.htm](http://solarcooking.org/wheatpaste.htm)) and use a low- or no-VOC polyurethane such as those available from AFM Safecoat ([afmsafecoat.com](http://afmsafecoat.com)). **COST:** Approximately \$1 a square foot

## POP A CAP

Want something more colorful and fun? Start collecting bottle caps from your favorite sodas or beers. This project requires some dedication—you’ll need to collect about 120 caps per square foot. If you can’t collect them all yourself, enlist help from a local bar or restaurant that sells bottled soda and beer. A great example of a bottle cap floor is at the eclectic Bone House in Huntsville, Texas. Built by affordable home-building organization Phoenix Commotion, the Bone House is home to three artists and a wide variety of recycled and reclaimed materials, including a bottle cap bathroom floor. **INSTALLATION:** Treat bottle caps much as you would small mosaic tiles. Prepare your floor with thin-set mortar, then place your caps in any arrangement you like—random or in a pattern. Let the floor dry, fill in gaps with grout and finish with sealer. **COST:** Less than 50 cents a square foot

## PAINT POWER

If you have sturdy wood floors but hate the way they look, don’t be afraid to jazz them up with a coat of paint. Paint allows for a wide variety of colors, patterns and styles, and it’s a great way to dramatically change the look of a large area. A solid color can be very effective, but you could also paint patterns such as

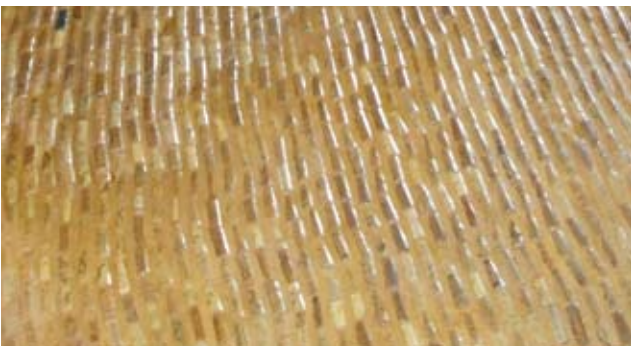
stripes, checkerboards or chevrons. Denise Sabia from the blog *The Painted Home* brightened up her kitchen with a chic checkerboard pattern. Keep in mind that high-traffic areas will wear over time, so be prepared to touch up floors to keep them looking fresh. **INSTALLATION:** Start by lightly sanding your floor to get rid of any varnish or rough patches and level off any high spots. Clean the floor with a damp cloth and let it dry completely. Select a durable, zero-VOC paint and create patterns using painter’s tape or stencils. Start in a far corner and paint yourself out of the room, being sure to keep everyone out until it is completely dry. Cover with a coat of water-based polyurethane for longer protection. **COST:** Less than \$1 a square foot

## A PENNY SAVED

A penny saved is a penny earned and, in this case, it’s just one small step toward covering your floor with the shiny likeness of Abraham Lincoln. Pennies may not be worth much these days, but for this floor you are throwing down cold hard cash, literally! For inspiration, look at the fabulous floor at Revolver shoe store in Noblesville, Indiana, which features more than 340,000 pennies. After a month of collecting pennies, the owners enlisted the help of friends to meticulously glue the coins down one by one. This rich floor required a bit of patience and close to 200 pennies per square foot, but the result is spectacular. **INSTALLATION:** To install, glue the pennies down with a low- or no-VOC, nontoxic construction adhesive or epoxy glue. Start on a clean, level surface and spread the adhesive thinly in a small area, then lay the pennies close together. The key is to use only as much adhesive as is necessary to keep the penny down. **COST:** Approximately \$3 a square foot

## A REAL CORKER

Cork floors are beautiful and feel great underfoot, but they are not the cheapest option. A less expensive way to go for cork is to cover your floor in wine corks. Hold a few wine-tasting parties and enlist an army of oenophiles to help you collect corks. Otherwise, ask a local restaurant to save corks for you. Treat them like tiles and lay them lengthwise in an undulating wave like Phoenix Commotion did for one of the bedrooms at the Bone House. You’ll need around 72 corks per square foot, which shouldn’t cost you a dime. If actual wine corks look too organic for you, try Missouri-based company Yemm & Hart, which recycles wine corks into tiles that cost just under \$8 a square foot. **INSTALLATION:** To install a wine cork floor, Phoenix Commotion founder Dan Phillips recommends gluing the corks down first, then nailing them together into the subfloor before grouting between the edges. He offers more complete instructions on the Phoenix Commotion website. Click the “Info” tab and select “Wine Cork Floors.” **COST:** Less than \$1 a square foot



CLOCKWISE: A bottle cap floor adds fun to the “Bone House,” designed by low-cost homebuilders Phoenix Commotion. Wine corks make a low-cost flooring material. Vintage leather belts create the look of lush leather floors for less. More than 300,000 pennies make up the floor of Revolver shoe store in Noblesville, Indiana. Denise Sabia of the blog *The Painted Home* used stripes to glam up her living room floors and a checkerboard pattern in her kitchen.



LEATHER FOR LESS

Have you ever seen a rich and luxurious leather floor? They’re absolutely gorgeous, but far from inexpensive. Create your own for much less by hunting vintage shops for leather belts and gluing them down to the floor. Look for men’s leather belts, which give you the most material for the cost, and try not to spend more than \$3 to \$4 per belt. You’ll need approximately three belts per square foot and a utility knife to cut them. Leather is best suited for areas that won’t get wet, so plan to use leather floors in a hallway, study or bedroom, but never in a bathroom or kitchen. If you’d rather splurge, check out London-based TING, which makes beautiful tiles from leather belt scraps. **INSTALLATION:** After you’ve gathered enough belts, cut off the buckles and recycle them. Square off the edges of the belts and arrange them in either a straight, zigzag or chevron pattern. You can attach the belts to a prepared floor with either carpet tape or a zero-VOC adhesive. TING recommends carpet tape because it causes less damage to the floor underneath. **COST:** Approximately \$10 a square foot, depending on price of belts

There are plenty of ways to get amazing and unique floors at a low cost, but you do have to be willing to put in the time to collect the materials. And don’t be afraid to jump into an artistic endeavor! As Dan Phillips often says, “repetition creates pattern, and pattern creates design.” With enough of any material, you can create a beautiful, unique and eco-friendly low-cost floor.

—BRIDGETTE MEINHOLD

RESOURCES

INSTALLATION  
SUPPLIES

**AFM Safecoat**  
afmsafecoat.com  
*nontoxic sealant,  
low-VOC polyurethane*

**DAP Products**  
dap.com  
*low-VOC sealants and  
construction adhesive*

**Laticrete**  
laticrete.com  
*Greenguard-certified  
thin-set mortar  
and grout*

**Liquid Nails**  
liquidnails.com  
*low-VOC construction  
adhesive that contributes  
to LEED points*

**Solar Cookers  
World Network**  
solarcooking.org/  
wheatpaste.htm  
*recipes for wheat  
and rice pastes*

**LEARN MORE**  
**Lovely Crafty Home**  
lovelycraftyhome.com

**The Painted Home**  
paintedhomedesigns.com

**Phoenix Commotion**  
phoenixcommotion.com

**Revolver shoe store**  
revolverindy.com

**TING London**  
tinglondon.com

**Yemm & Hart**  
yemmhart.com

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# Design Notes

A homeowner puts her love of re-envisioning the past to work in a kitchen remodel that features reclaimed items beautifully remade.



**WHEN CONCERT PIANIST** Lara Downes and her husband, Rick, a marine biologist, wanted to open up the dark, narrow galley kitchen in their 1962 home in Davis, California, they did so with character and sustainability in mind. A vintage clothing and décor enthusiast, Lara searched in secondhand stores and on eBay and Craigslist for treasures she could incorporate into her newly brightened kitchen. Guided by her own sense of style and artistic nature, Lara used creativity and open-mindedness to design a kitchen that offers a modern point of view with a link to the past—much as she does in her musical career. Her most recent concert and record, “13 Ways of Looking at the Goldberg,” is Lara’s re-imagining of Bach’s classic “Goldberg Variations,” one of the most famous works in all of classical music history.



Concert pianist Lara Downes decorated her renovated kitchen with reclaimed materials including powder-coated vintage bar stools, a 1930s wall-mounted school clock, an old stainless steel medical table, and vintage sign letters and a mid-century light fixture she found on eBay. PHOTOS BY RIK KELLER

## What inspired the design of this kitchen?

### What were your main objectives?

We were inspired by the light and open feeling of our house, which felt contradicted by the original dark, narrow galley kitchen. We wanted to make the kitchen more consistent with the rest of the house, as well as acknowledge its role—especially in our house—as a family hub and center. We wanted to create a flexible space that could serve as a gathering/dining/work/crafts area; an entertaining center; and a serious cooking zone. Our family life has been tremendously enhanced by the ability to congregate in this beautiful space.

### Which items are reclaimed or antique?

The free-standing wall cabinets are 1940s medical cabinets salvaged from a veterinary hospital; our barstools are vintage stools we outfitted with new seats and had powder coated at a local autobody shop; our center island is a stainless steel medical table; and the corner “office” desk is an old elementary school desk with a top made out of bowling lanes from a condemned 1950s bowling alley in Sacramento.

### Some of the standout décor items include the light fixture, the clock, the “Eat” sign and the stools. Where did they come from?

The light fixture is a wonderful mid-century piece we found on Craigslist years ago. It hung in our living room for quite a while, and now hangs in a place of pride over the bar in the kitchen. I love its color and shape. The clock is a double-sided 1930s Cincinatti school clock. I found it on eBay and had to have the crazy old wiring removed (these clocks were made to run off of a central clock in the principal’s office!) and replaced with a simple battery mechanism. I assembled the “Eat” sign from individual vintage letters I found piece by piece on eBay. I wanted a mix of styles and colors, and I’m really happy with the result. We also found a wonderful 1930s butcher or candy shop scale on Craigslist, which we keep out on the island where it serves both a decorative and functional purpose.

### What aspect are you happiest with?

I love the fun of it—the unexpected, quirky things like the occasional blue doors on the

cabinets, the orange stools, the “Eat” sign.

I think our kitchen is both efficient and irreverent, just like we are!

### What part was most challenging?

It was surprisingly easy! My husband is the head chef in the family, so he had the main input on appliances and fixtures, and I got the fun job of thinking about color, finishes and furnishings. We collaborated really well and found a balance of roles and responsibilities. I guess the hardest part was simply being kitchenless for about five months. We had a tiny kitchenette (microwave and minifridge) set up in the living room. Dishes were done in the bathroom. Luckily a big Trader Joe’s opened up four blocks from home just before we started the job. But with two kids, the eating out and “camping in” got old pretty fast.

### How would you describe your personal design style?

I love mixing old and new, delineating spaces with color, and finding the connections between industrial and softer materials, vintage and cutting-edge. This goes back to my music and my fascination with the dialogues that exist between older and newer pieces of music, and between pieces with different styles and backgrounds. I love to create a continuum between the past and future by finding common references and letting a harmonic balance develop.

### What elements of this kitchen design could readers use in their own homes?

I think the vintage industrial pieces we found are absolute treasures. The school and medical furniture from the ‘40s and ‘50s is so beautiful in its lines, indestructible, and a fantastic way to recycle materials and give them new life. I think giving some of the pieces a bright powder-coat finish was a great choice. Sometimes we had to cover up badly dinged or rusted metal bases, and now with the bright color accents, the pieces look really lively and fresh, while keeping the reference to the past. Found objects can be incredibly inspiring. Using a reclaimed piece—for example the school clock on the wall—often turned around other ideas and sent us in new directions in a very happy way.

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➔ Read an extended version of this interview at [nhandg.com/lara-downes](http://nhandg.com/lara-downes).



# Home Floats

A floating houseboat combines good design with natural surroundings to create a simple, quiet retreat.



Michael and Charlotte Green can watch kayakers and river wildlife from their floating home’s deck or through its many windows. PHOTOS BY ART GRICE

**FROM THE DECK** of their floating guest house on the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon, Michael and Charlotte Green can dine with beavers and ducks, watch the occasional kayaker float past, and soak in the beauty of the nature preserve around them. Located about 20 minutes from downtown Portland, the 433-square-foot home is part of a larger community of houseboats called the Oregon Yacht Club. The marina’s rules for guest houses restricted the size of its floating foundation, and the fire code, which requires the home to be accessible from all sides, called for a spacious deck. That left little square footage to build a fully functional home, which the Greens needed because they planned to live in the home full-time until their nearby main house could be built.

To make the tiny home comfortable to live in, architect Russell Hamlet of Studio Hamlet Architects used several space-saving features

and design tricks. High ceilings and an open floor plan provide expansive views and a feeling of spaciousness, while built-ins, floor level changes and varying ceiling heights help differentiate the space into different “rooms.” Ample windows provide natural lighting and connect the home to nature. “Even on a miserable rainy day, we still have that link to nature,” Michael says. From their living room sofa, Michael and Charlotte can watch birds in the trees across the river or simply enjoy the patterns of the light that reflect off the water and the home’s corrugated metal roof.

But living in such a central location, the couple doesn’t stay home for long. With biking trails nearby, the river at their doorstep and downtown Portland just a few minutes away, the couple describes where they live as the best of both worlds. “One of the best parts is that at a moment’s notice you can just throw

- 1. Instead of traditional logs, which can rot and require continual maintenance, the Greens’ floating foundation is made of durable expanded polystyrene blocks encased in concrete, which will last 80 to 100 years.
- 2. The corrugated metal roof, which will require little maintenance over its long lifetime, was chosen to mimic the rippling river and its reflecting light.
- 3. A kayak rack and spacious deck expand the living space and make outdoor living easy and enjoyable.

your kayak in the river or jump on your bike and ride along the trail right by the river,” Charlotte says.

The Greens moved full-time to the main house two years ago, but the change wasn’t easy. “It was very difficult for us to move over to the main house,” Michael says. “It was a big empty house, it wasn’t decorated, and it was intimidating. We went through some withdrawal leaving our little guest house.” The Greens decided to list the house as a vacation rental on Craigslist to ensure its continued use. Eventually the couple came to an agreement with a photographer who rents the cabin for two weeks a month, meaning the cabin gets plenty of use, and the Greens still get time to enjoy their riverside retreat.

—SUSAN MELGREN

➔ LEARN MORE: [studiohamlet.com](http://studiohamlet.com)



- 1. Vaulted ceilings and high windows make the tiny space feel taller.
- 2. The home’s sleeping loft is accessible by a ship’s ladder, which also helps section off the living room from the rest of the home.
- 3. Windows on two sides of each “room” provide ample daylight and long views, which draw the eye outward and create a feeling of spaciousness.
- 4. The floors were milled from salvaged logs dredged from the Columbia River.

Our mattresses are made with natural latex, certified organic wool and certified organic cotton.

What’s inside your mattress?

Savvy Rest®

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