

TINY HOUSE Pros and Not-So-TINY Cons

Can we talk, truth?

The tiny-house lifestyle makes good financial and environmental sense. Still, before you convert your paper books to digital, donate your porcelain puppy collection, pare down your wardrobe, and hit the open road - we should talk. Come in, sit down. Make yourself comfortable on the storage chest / convertible sofa there.

FIRST, THE PROS.

BIGGER, (NOT) BETTER, PAYCHECK WRECKER

In 1900, the typical American home contained 700 to 1,200 square feet of living space, likely a two-story floor plan, including two or three bedrooms and a single (or equally likely, no) bathroom. In 1950, post WWII, the average new build, now single-story, had not grown at all, averaging about 1,000 square feet. However, by 2000, average home size doubled, at 2,000 or more square feet, with three or more bedrooms, at least 2 1/2 baths, and a standard two-car garage.

Why? Because we can afford it. Median family incomes in 1900 were \$490 per year, in 1950 -



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\$3,319. Today, a typical American family has a household income over \$45,000. Those rising incomes directly correlate with average new housing prices, which have risen from \$11,000 in 1950 to more than \$195,000 today.

But do we need them? Not surprisingly, the average American debt per household has risen steadily as well. The current average debt in the US breaks down into mortgage: \$213,700, student loan: \$36,500, auto loan: \$10,100, credit card: \$5800 and personal loans: \$7200, for a grand total of \$273,300 – per borrower.

The Tiny House Movement, has long recognized that more does not equal more, and strives to at least downshift, if not break entirely from a consumerism-driven mindset. It offers the benefits of low to zero mortgage, lower utility costs, lower maintenance, and decreased burden of “stuff.”

CARBON, CARBON, EVERYWHERE

The tiny house and environmental movements go hand in hand. Tiny houses require less material to build and less energy to power, but what does that translate to earth-wise? Homes sized from 100-400 square feet produce about 2,000 pounds of CO2 emissions per year compared to 28,000 pounds produced by an average-sized home. Happy Earth, happy hearth, right?

CAUGHT THE TRAVEL BUG?

Increased financial freedom may translate into increased time for other endeavors. Travel is a popular choice. Many small houses are built on trailers, so their owners can enjoy life on the road without giving up the comforts of home.

In addition to RV parks, tiny home communities are starting to pop up all across the nation. Many

include things like community fire pits, collective gardens, walking trails, and other social spaces.

SIMPLE LIVING AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Tiny Houses are perfect options for off-grid or homesteading aficionados. Nothing describes the desire for simple living and self-sufficiency espoused by tiny house dwellers like *Walden*, or *Life in the Woods*, published in 1854 by American transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau. The text reflects upon simple living in natural surroundings, a declaration of independence and a voyage of spiritual discovery. Some would call it a manual for self-reliance.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

~ Henry David Thoreau

AND NOW... THE CONS

No, I didn't call you in here to discuss your off-grid bathroom challenges, potential utility issues, zoning law nightmares, investments risks, or the Not-In-My BackYard (NIMBY) activists, although those are all a pretty significant "thing."

No, sweetheart, your nearest and dearest (suddenly and unexpectedly entering from stage left, filing in silently, taking seats to your right and left, front and back, concern tugging at their mouths, and eyes brimming), just wanted to talk to you. About this. This notion that you're having. You know, all of us who love you (heads bobbing 'round in unison) enough to say:

"Sweetie, are you (*whispers*) homeless?"

If it hasn't happened yet, it will.

Maybe it's come out as, **"Ok, this might be fine when you're twenty, but..."**

...followed by the more direct approach: **"Seriously, what the - - - are you thinking?"**

Someone may dial up the concerned face with a, **"Are you having financial troubles?"**

...or slather a layer of fear over their anxiety: **"Is this (YOUR PARTNER'S NAME HERE)'s idea?"**

Now comes your irrational uncle's voice, booming from the corner: **"You're not turning into one of them *PREPPER'S* are you?"**

Finally, the message is neatly summed up and driven home with my personal favorite: **"Is this a cult?"**

Before you "Whaa, what?" and climb into my storage sofa: inhale, exhale. I got ya.

As you might have guessed, the "Cons" I'm describing are the less talked about negative social reaction, not just from the local zoning commission, but from your own family. Yup, those people. The same family who previously admired glossy images of free-spirited adventurers in magazines, or praised the choices of the young and unattached, suddenly feel one of their own begin to detach, and don't know what that means. It's scary for them.

Current figures suggest there are approximately 10,000 tiny house structures in the United States; hardly mainstream culture. While sentiment is shifting in some cities toward acceptance as transitional housing for homeless veterans, unique vacation sites, or housing communities for the elderly, tiny house living – or any alternative, non-mainstream lifestyle – can feel threatening to people who want to see the ones they love make traditional achievements. It doesn't matter if you make six figures or don't have six dollars to rub together, it's not a "regular" home.

IS THERE A SOLUTION?

Yes! Go, completely off grid, live in a bus, and don't leave a forwarding address. Kidding! I'm kidding! Don't do that third part.

It goes a long way toward allaying fears if you detail:

**your reasoning,
any anticipated gains,
a potential timeline,
and end game (if applicable).**

It is also important to reassure these people who love you enough to show up (and grenade blast you with good intentions) that you aren't detaching from family, and no matter how *TINY* you go, you will always have room for them.