

# Small & Spacious



**WEATHER PERMITTING**  
*The house is sited to take full advantage of ocean views and to protect the homeowner's four-season gardens from offshore winds.*





**TURN UP THE VOLUME** A vaulted ceiling and a wall of glass combine to create the illusion that the living room, located in the center of the house, is twice its size.

# 5 ideas for making a pocket-size house feel like so much more

BY TIMOTHY GORDON

**E**vening is the best time to arrive at Leslie Gordon's house on the Oregon coast. The driveway cuts through a dense swath of spruce forest. At the crest of the hill, it opens to a clearing, revealing a sheltered cluster of hip-roofed buildings surrounded by a stone-walled garden. As you step onto the path, you can look into the windows and directly through the house to the setting sun and far below, to the Pacific Ocean.

It's a straightforward house, modest by most standards, but I know it was designed with a lot of thought, because I'm the architect, and the client is my mother.

After living and working as a professor in Fairbanks for nearly 30 years, Mom wanted to escape Alaska's cold, dark winters. She found the perfect site two hours from Portland, in a small beach community called Neskowin.

She wanted a small house (it is 1,500 square feet), that included an office, a quilting room, and a garden that was an integral part of the living space. I knew the local cottage style would be my inspiration and that I'd have to pack a lot into this small house. So I took my design cues from homes in the region, and I used the following five strategies to make the house feel bigger than it really is.



**DINING OUT** Leslie Gordon's house was designed for single living, but it adapts easily to company, thanks to a deck that invites outdoor living. Her son, Tim, was the architect.





**A ROOM FOR QUILTING**

*A serious quilter, Leslie needed a dedicated room to work in and a place to store her fabric palette. Custom cubicles in her studio make it easy for her to see her collection, and a sliding quilt wall allows her to pin up her designs as she sews.*



**A PLACE FOR LAUNDRY AND GUESTS, TOO**

*The room was designed primarily as a quilting studio, but much of the time it does double-duty as a laundry room. When need be, the appliances are hidden, the quilt wall slides over to act as a screen, the cantilevered table is tucked away, the sofa bed is made up, and the room is transformed into a comfortable guest suite.*



**1 Design multi-use spaces whenever possible**

*If they're planned with ingenuity, rooms can serve several functions without compromises.*

The heart of the house is the central common space (photo, p. 22). This 12- by 20-foot room with a 17-foot-tall vaulted ceiling functions as both the living room and the dining room. It's visually linked to the exterior with glass doors and windows that go down to the floor. I didn't have a lot of space to work with, so I separated the dining and living areas with subtle changes in flooring and lighting. The dining area floor is at the same level as the entry and kitchen on the other side of the fireplace. The living room area, however, is a step down, and the flooring changes from tile to wood (see illustration, p. 29). I emphasized the separation by placing each area on a separately controlled bank of lights.

We also combined the home office and master bedroom into one room. The office has its own distinct corner,





**CORNER OFFICE** A simple, uncluttered design, a built-in desk, and plenty of room for books and rolling files allow a separate work area to function independently within the master bedroom.

## Create a space for welcome and transition

*An entry, however small, makes a home feel welcoming and eases the transition from the outside.*

With such a small house, I was not able to devote much room to the entry, so I designed it as a glass breezeway between the quilting studio and the rest of the house and added covered porches on both sides to expand the space. Another trick I used to save space was designing the entry to open to the front garden terrace on one side and the back deck on the other.

Because of the wet Oregon weather and our proximity to the beach, the entry had to be a true mudroom, so we gave the entry storage closet plenty of room for coats, shoes, pet supplies, hiking boots, and backpacks. I also strategically placed the outdoor shower near the deck-side door, with the laundry area in the quilting studio nearby.



with a built-in desk located to take advantage of the view (photo above). Facing away from the rest of the room, with its own bank of ceiling lights and surrounded by shelving, the office area feels like a separate space.

We were still left needing a guest room, a quilting studio, space for mechanicals, and a laundry room. We managed to fit them all into one 13- by 14-foot pavilion on the other side of the entry.

First, we had to make sure the room functioned well as a quilting studio, its best and highest calling (photos left). The sewing machine sits on a removable cantilevered table next to a long work counter. Mom's fabric palette is in built-in cubicles on the wall. In front, a quilt-design wall rolls back and forth on a stainless-steel rail. The rolling wall usually sits in front of the door to a small mechanical room and moves out of the way when access is needed. The washer and dryer are tucked beneath the work counter, which makes a good surface for folding clothes. When guests stay over, the sewing machine is put away, cabinet doors block the view of the washer and dryer, and a sofa pulls out to become a bed, transforming the room into a private, comfortable guest suite with its own bath.

**A CLEAR PATH** Because the entry is tucked between the main house and the quilting studio, the way in had to be crystal clear. The entrance through the garden is flanked by stone columns capped with lights.







**LIGHT AT THE END OF THE GALLEY** The narrow kitchen has a wide ocean view at the end, making the room feel more spacious.



## Extend the living room with gardens and decks

*Outdoor rooms increase a home's living space and open up the interior.*

Besides quilting, Mom's other passion is gardening. She wanted a small, sheltered garden that she could tend 12 months of the year and see from inside the house (see sidebar, facing page). So when we designed the garden, we thought of it as a series of framed views from the house. Because you can see so much of the landscape from the house, small interior spaces expand as the lush colors and life of the garden are drawn in. In effect, the garden gives our eyes and minds more room to roam.

I think of a deck as an outdoor room, and an extra room of any kind is important in a small house. This deck is large—more than 1,000 square feet—with all of the rooms on the west side opening on to it. But even a small deck gives you another place to go. I designed a covered area just outside the kitchen for dining and entertaining (photo above).



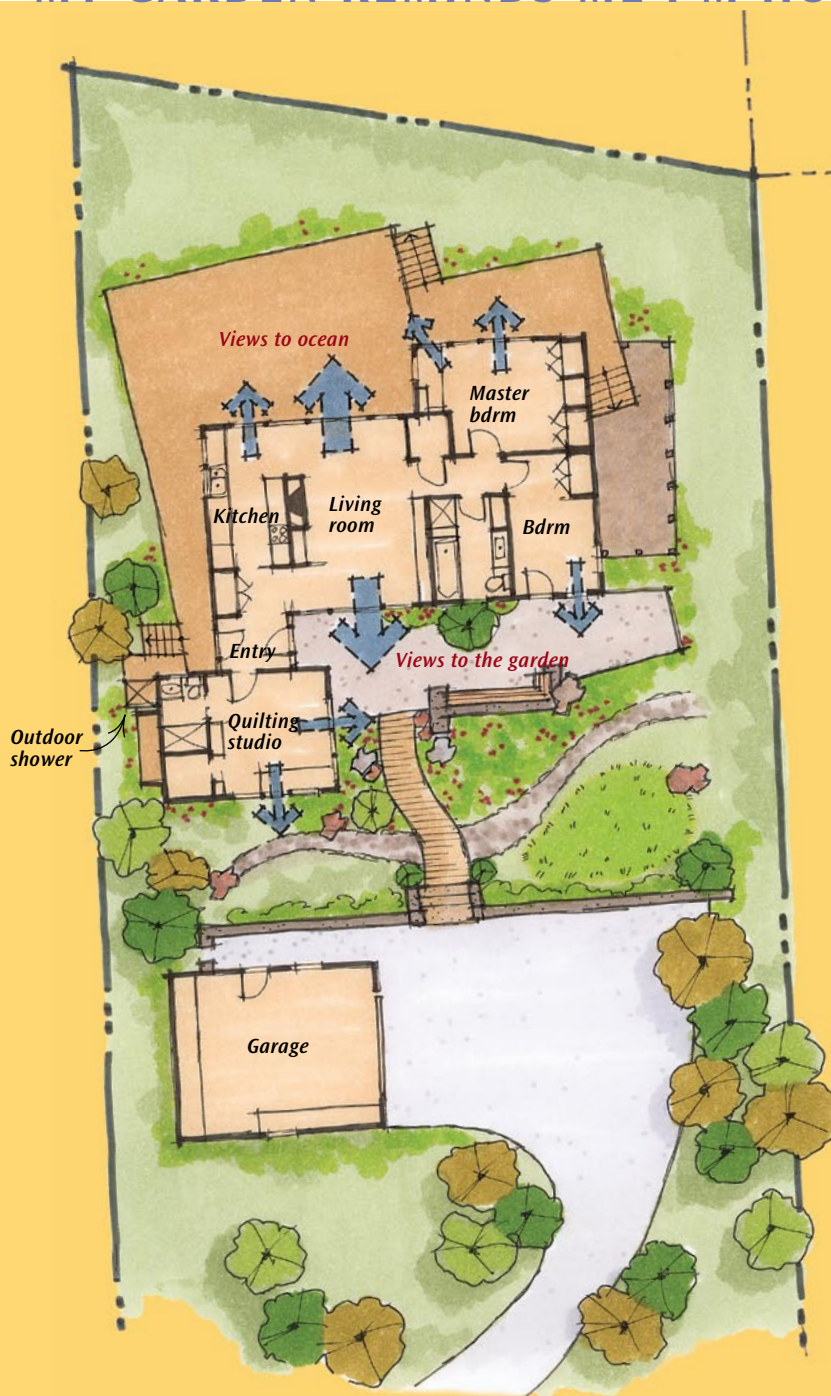


## MY GARDEN REMINDS ME I'M HOME AT LAST



**A ROOF WITH A VIEW** A distinct outdoor dining room is created by covering just part of the broad deck. It's a natural place for entertaining.

**DIVERSITY IN THE GARDEN** Low walls, decks, concrete benches, and strategically placed plantings all delineate spaces within the sheltered garden.



### DRAWING THE EYE OUTSIDE

The Gordon home is built on a narrow slice of a lot, with nearby neighbors, woods on three sides, and a spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean. The small house feels more expansive because its windows are strategically placed to take advantage of the ocean and garden views (indicated by the arrows), while keeping neighboring houses out of sight. The decks and many outdoor sitting areas visually extend the sense of space and provide “rooms” for activities beyond the house itself.

RECENTLY READ A research article about how gardening is good for the soul, and I believe it. The Fairbanks, Alaska, growing season is short but strong, and our front yard used to overflow with annuals, perennials, and vegetables. But for 30 years I reluctantly left my garden at the beginning of September after the first hard frost. With little snowfall for protection and cold snaps down to  $-50^{\circ}\text{F}$ , even the hardiest perennials often do not survive, and the garden process must begin from scratch every spring.

By contrast, in Neskowin, the garden is part of my every day. I can sit in my quilting studio 12 months a year and watch flowers bloom and hear my fountain gurgle. Even better, I can get out into my garden because it is sheltered from the elements by the wrap-around design of the house and garage and the giant Sitka spruce trees. I often spend entire days pruning, repositioning, and adding to the plantings. All of this with the knowledge that I am molding the garden over time and that what I leave in the fall will still be there in the spring. I feel that I have finally found the place I was meant to be.

—Leslie Gordon, homeowner



**SHELF LIFE** So the space under the hearth wouldn't go to waste, a narrow wood-storage bin was built into a shelf there.



**BUILT-INS GIVE YOU ROOM TO MOVE**  
Thoughtfully designed display shelves in the living room and the second bedroom eliminate the need for additional furnishings, so the spaces feel more open and roomy.



## 4 Simplify spaces and add storage with built-ins

*The more storage and function you build into the structure, the more room you have left to live in.*

In just about every room, we relied on built-in cabinets and shelves for storage and display. You might think that fixtures built in to walls would make spaces feel smaller, but the opposite is true. Built-ins allow the lines of the room to remain clean, and they cut down on the amount of furniture that takes up floor space.

The display wall in the living room is a prime example (photo left). We could never duplicate with furniture the amount of storage and display space this built-in affords us. We hid the TV in another built-in above the hearth. And below the hearth is a shelf to hold firewood (photo above left). This means that the only furniture needed in the living room is a chair, sofa, and side tables.

Recessed lighting also kept the areas uncluttered. Instead of lights suspended from the ceiling or lamps on tables or on the floor, I used directional recessed lights as both task and ambient lighting.



## Use similar materials to connect rooms

*One way to make a small house feel larger is to unify spaces with a consistent use of materials, colors, and detailing.*

I knew the house needed a personality or character that could be repeated throughout, because if you make each space in a small house different, the house will feel even smaller. I created a palette for the trim, tile, flooring, walls, and countertops that I could carry throughout. We trimmed around the doors, windows, and base of the wall with cherry and also used it for a number of the built-ins (photos above and facing page). To save money, we used cherry-looking melamine for the shelves in the quilting studio. We used hardwood veneer flooring in the living room, the hallway, and the quilting studio.

And throughout the house, wherever we put tile, it was uniformly applied. It's all porcelain stone, but the horizontal, or floor, tiles are one color, while the tiles on vertical surfaces, such as surrounding the fireplace in the living room, are another. Tying it all together is white linen paint, which makes the house feel light and airy.

Glass is another detail used throughout the house. Glass doors and windows that go down to the floor not only extend the interior space, but they also connect rooms by framing the spectacular views.

You can do more, experiment, and take chances with a larger house, but I think that by using fewer materials in a variety of ways, I was inspired to do some creative thinking. Looking back, that is one of the things I enjoyed most about the project.

Designing this house was an unbelievable learning experience for me. It allowed me to test some smart, space-saving strategies and stretch my imagination. I feel very lucky that I will be able to see how it ages—gracefully, I hope—over time. **H**

*Timothy Gordon lives in Portland, Ore., where he practices architecture at BOORA Architects. Whenever possible, he spends time on the Oregon coast, in the house he designed for his mother.*

**For more information, see Resources, page 86.**



**HOLDING IT TOGETHER** The rooms in a small house can feel crowded and disconnected unless they're linked by a color palette and similar materials. The architect used a neutral linen paint, cherry trim, and porcelain stone tile throughout.

