

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



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.



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