



# COZY

A Brattleboro tiny house suits this entrepreneurial couple to a T.

Story by Marisa Crumb/Photos by Carolyn Bates

Walking up to the stained shiplap-and-corrugated-metal-wrapped home, one could wonder how an active, industrious, and energetic couple could possibly live in such a small space and make it all happen. But Erin Maile O'Keefe and Kevin O'Keefe definitely do...and then some. The conscious choice to down-size their domestic footprint—they came from a huge rent-stabilized, 1,800-square-foot apartment in New York City with 11 huge closets—while also deciding what to permanently toss, was a process that wasn't especially difficult for this enterprising couple.

Stepping inside the 30-foot-long, 8-foot-wide, 11-foot-high (at the angled end) dwelling however, it was quite apparent that this husband-and-wife team not only make it work, they genuinely thrive here and derive joy from their tiny house. At just 300 square feet, the challenge could potentially be to pare down too many belongings and necessities, causing regret, or the opposite temptation, keeping too many things, making the space feel cramped and claustrophobic. Neither was the case for Erin and Kevin, who both work out of their home as well as take their projects on the road.

Their venture, CircusYoga, teaches children and families circus arts, movement, and connection through workshops; in-school residencies culminate in students performing an authentic circus for their community. Erin and Kevin have taken the program as far as India (and are planning another trip there soon), training other educators as well as implementing movement arts curriculums that Erin has developed; teacher training is her specialty, she says. As artistic director of Circus Minimus, Kevin has traveled the world teaching and studying theatre, yoga, and circus; the One-Man Circus-in-a-Suitcase works together with community centers, theaters, and schools worldwide. Their tagline, "Giving communities a chance to join the circus, discover their gifts, and still be home for dinner!" inspires one to sign up their children for this entertaining adventure that's geared toward families.

Erin's background in architecture (she studied at Cornell) started early—at age 7 to be precise. "I always knew I was going to design my own house," she beams. She took—and taught—design courses at Yestermorrow Design/Build School in Waitsfield. Construction began in fall 2016 and took two years to build.



The structural insulated panel (SIP), a tiered composite made with an insulating layer of a solid core sandwiched between structural boards, was manufactured off-site at Green Mountain Panels in Brattleboro and adds to the high R-value, energy-efficiency of the home. The rest was built on-site at the half-acre property that borders woods and an open field, at the edge of town on a winding picturesque road. As if 2016 wasn't busy enough, Erin also co-founded Tiny House Fest Vermont, whose mission is to host meaningful community conversations about sustainable, responsible, and innovative housing and public spaces. The intention is also to promote education about "right-size housing" and that there is no one-size-fits-all solution in the aspiration of good design.

French doors open to the combination living/dining room and the adjoining kitchen. It's easy to forget the space is just 300 square feet (actually, that includes the sleeping loft), as even on the rainy, dreary day I visited the space was light and airy. Erin mentions that she very much designed and constructed their abode to be their "forever home" and that she "paid so much attention to how they move" to maximize the various areas and their corresponding functionalities. For example, she designed the angled walls at either end to circulate people, as she describes it. And it definitely adds to the spaciousness of the home; in such a small scope, every single area and function must be thoughtfully and thoroughly calculated. For Erin, she embraces and proficiently grasps how to best work with the limited square footage and storage.



The color palette in the couple's home is an intentional base of neutrals with bold splashes of color. White walls throughout blend seamlessly with light-colored wood; Baltic birch cabinets and storage systems meld with local maple windowsills and trim that in turn complement the dean, modest countertops. The deep, wide kitchen sink is fabricated from composite stone and fiberglass, which handsomely meets their food prep and cleaning needs. The flooring is a durable, medium-tone composite cork/vinyl material that runs the length of the home that ties the spaces together with a continuous, unbroken look. It all amalgamates to bring a quality of lightness, which attests to Erin's ability to execute an inviting, yet pragmatic, space-beautifully. But not boring. The plaster walls provide texture, and while the flow is light and bright-low windowsills bring the outside in, in a subtle way - there are big statements and earthy touches of nature. Erin pays tribute to her native Hawaiian roots in assorted places throughout. The kitchen has an array of the indigenous rocks, plants, pottery, artwork, and shells from



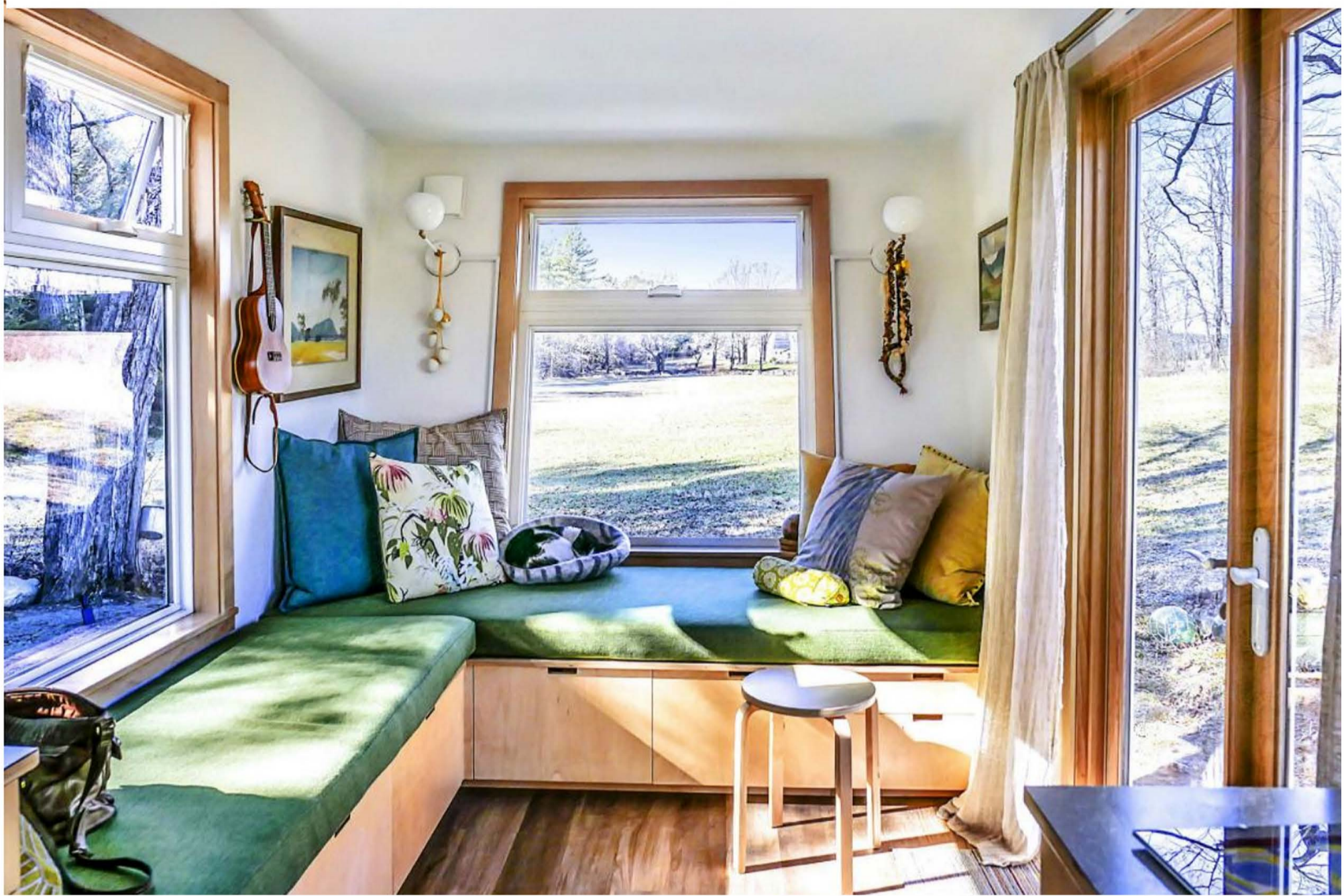
her home state. Sliding pocket doors that separate the bathroom from the hallway and laundry area highlight Hawaiian flora, cut leaf protea, that Erin's sister painted there and on opposite walls in the bathroom. For additional texture and personality, Erin purposely left a raw, exposed "end sandwich" on the edge of the kitchen countertops, which to her has "a lot of honesty!"

During the design process, Erin and Kevin dubbed the home the "Paper Boat," nicknamed as such for the nautical, almost whimsical, shape. It has a bow and a stern, so to speak, and a "fold" at one end (sleeping loft), reminiscent of a childhood paper vessel. Not such a stretch to envision this tiny house bobbing along on the water.

Erin designed and built the "Paper Boat" to require minimal materials; it was crucial to her to have very little waste, she emphasizes. "It's like high-end camping," she chuckles. "Everything needs to be done bite-size!"

Although there was a two year planning process, the couple didn't have to make too many compromises. Because of zoning, a traditional oven/stovetop wasn't allowed. That doesn't





hinder them from making "full-size" meals on their induction cooktop and in the Breville smart oven. "Just last night I made a full rack of ribs," Kevin boasts. "The smart oven is three times faster and does 17 things!" Well, maybe not 17, but close, and pretty impressive.

From the kitchen area, a stackable, three-quarter-size washer and dryer share space with storage for cleaning supplies; in a natural, practical progression, the shower area is a waterproof cocoon where instead of feeling tight or cramped is actually cozy and calming. His and her closets are at the far end, abutting the shower/bathroom areas. In Marie Kondo style (literally), Erin and Kevin have arranged their clothes and shoes in such a way that their respective closets and storage areas provide plenty of room for their accoutrements and possessions. Erin was resolute and unwavering in her design decision to have the access to the sleeping loft be on one end of the home, unlike many tiny houses in which the stairs or ladder are centrally located. This, to Erin, breaks up the flow and inhibits how they and guests would move throughout the home. A deep ladder at the far end—the stern—leads up to a comfortable and roomy sleeping loft. There is even a reading/sitting level before reaching the bed and bookshelf. A triad of unadorned windows brings natural light to both the reading area and



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the bed. The upstairs walls are an envelope of neutrals punctuated with lively, colorful artwork nesting with soft, lush textiles on the bed and cantilevered seating. Many summer nights find the couple enjoying dinner al fresco, steps away from their beautifully functional Paper Boat. Outdoors, too, carefully thought-out elements meet their every need and aspiration. Erin laughs and says, "We bon-sai-ed ourselves!"

Erin also likens a tiny house to a short story... where every word matters.

Erin Maile O'Keefe  
(architectural design and co-founder of  
Tiny House Fest Vermont)  
422 Meadowbrook Road  
Brattleboro, VT 05301  
(808) 469-1303  
rocksaltsisters.com  
tinyhousefestvermont.com

Kristin Mele Bortles  
(interior wall treatments)  
2347 Botolph Road  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
(505) 670-9996  
rocksaltsisters.com

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