



Photo by Karen Anderson

Little
Big
House

Barrie Rose greets visitors at one of two tiny Habitats homes she and her business partner Johanna Tilbury designed and built. The portable homes on wheels offer an affordable, sustainable alternative for living lightly on the earth and can be custom designed to suit any style. For information, visit: habitatshawaii.com.



Photo by Karen Anderson

Inside, the little “mouse house” has enough room for a day bed, a sliding pullout table, two chairs, a desk and a small kitchen with running water.

Tiny homes on wheels offer charm and sustainability

By Kristina Anderson

Proving the theory that you can do a whole lot with a whole little, homeowners Barrie Rose and her business partner Johanna Tilbury design and build small, portable houses that are not only cute and cozy, but also practical and affordable.

At a very compact 120 square feet, a 9x16-foot home parked in Barrie and Johanna’s Waimea backyard features a dining nook, loft bedroom, kitchen, shower, water heater and self-composting toilet. Solidly built, it does not require a building permit and can be towed anywhere with a V-8 pickup truck.

Outside the abode, a small lawn, vegetable garden, chicken house, trellis, arbor and outdoor patio table expand the home’s environs, while a rainwater catchment system and photovoltaic solar panels allow for total off-the-grid living.

“These homes are designed to encourage sustainability and promote the indoor/outdoor concept so ideal for Hawaii’s climate,” says Barrie, co-owner of Habitats Hawaii, a locally based venture that she and Johanna launched a few years ago. Community members offered their ▶



Photo by Karen Anderson

The 100-square-foot, solar-powered home features fanciful touches such as awning windows, shingle siding, a Dutch door and an outdoor shower. Like the other Habitats home, it is surrounded by an orchard and supported by a small vegetable and flower garden.

“The Habitats offer a different dimension of expression. They make it possible for you to live lightly, even in a town setting.” — Barrie Rose



Photo by Karen Anderson

A small redwood catchment tank provides water for basic needs like gardening and showering.



Barrie Rose relaxes in the kitchen of the mobile ohana. The designer-style interior includes bamboo flooring from Tile Warehouse; sapele wood cabinets salvaged from Kukio; and reclaimed wood from the Tako Taco remodel. An ergonomically designed ladder leads to the loft upstairs.

support, including Bryan Hilman, a talented craftsman from Waikoloa.

She adds that because they are affordable, the homes solve many problems in today's changing, complex world.

"For extended families, the homes work well as studios, or vacation or ohana quarters. And they can be moved quickly and easily at moment's notice, for instance, in the event of a tsunami warning or lava eruption."

A single custom-designed, fully equipped Habitats home starts at about \$25,000 for the basic model, including kitchen, appliances, plumbing and wiring. The team can complete one in about a month to six weeks. Saving the client even more, Barrie and Johanna have done all the legwork in sourcing the most economical and practical materials and appliances. Bank financing is even possible with a collateralized loan.

Technically referred to as "travel trailers," the street legal homes are engineered to move on the road efficiently and safely. Johanna builds everything up to code standards, bolting the structure permanently to the trailer and cross bracing with plywood to give them support against wind (shear). In fact, Waimea's occasional gale-force gusts do little more than rock the home gently back and forth.

A veteran of the building industry, Johanna was the second woman in the state of Hawaii to become a licensed building contractor. She oversees all the construction details while innovating alternative technologies such as steam-generated electricity. Meanwhile, Barrie focuses on design and décor, having learned the ropes as an apprentice of her grandmother, a renowned Denver interior designer. Barrie's talents in mixing textures, patterns, colors give the homes their charming characteristics, making them so much more than just a "box on a trailer."

In their floorplans, Barrie and Johanna make use of every square inch. Storage abounds under the dining nook, inside the loft, under the counters and anywhere else they can squeeze it. Says Barrie: "We're very frugal with space. We make every bit count. It's very much like a land yacht."

Yet there is still enough room to entertain comfortably: "I once served a four-course meal for eight in here," Barrie says. "It was kind of tight and cozy but we did it!" ▶



Deluxe storage makes use of every available space. The judicious use of lightweight materials includes Wilsonart Formica counters that resemble granite.

A sitting area with bay window provides plenty of room for small gatherings. Barrie upholstered the seats with scraps of leftover fabric from Sun Upholstery in Kona.



A demonstration home for Barrie and Johanna's Habitats Hawaii business, two-story, 120-square-foot home includes a composting toilet, indoor shower and loft-bedroom. The home will be featured on the upcoming Grand Green Homes Tour on Sunday, May 1 (see story, page 16).

Economy of weight also factors into the outfitting of the movable homes. Lightweight linoleum flooring in the bathroom, Wilsonart (a granite lookalike) counters and super-efficient, featherweight appliances help keep the home's weight to under three tons, which Barrie says is about equal to a horse trailer loaded with two horses. ("No cast-iron cookware in here!" Barrie laughs.)

In addition, the use of reclaimed or scrap materials upholds the company's mission of sustainability, featuring such materials as renewable bamboo flooring, lauhala or salvaged sapele wood cabinets.

"It's an amazing challenge to create something so unique, user-friendly, sensitive, conscious and practical as the Habitats," says Barrie. "They are a wonderful experiment in living light on the Earth with very little."

"I love the alchemy we have created together with these projects," adds Johanna. "The homes are unbelievably comfy to live in. You just get happy when you walk in the door." **AH**

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