

1,600

SQUARE FEET

A DESIGN TEAM
TURNS A
DILAPIDATED OLD
FARMHOUSE INTO
A COMFORTABLE
FAMILY RETREAT
WITH STYLE
TO SPARE





WHEN THEY FIRST VISITED THE LITTLE HOUSE on the banks of Montana's Yellowstone River, architect Brett Nave, residential designer Lori Ryker and interior designer Stephanie Sandston had to look past a few eyesores to see its potential. "It was leaning in six directions, there was purple shag carpeting on the stairs and a baby goat on the kitchen countertop," Nave recalls. An added wrinkle: Because of its location in a floodway and no-build zone, the structure couldn't be expanded beyond its original footprint.

But the more they contemplated the space, "the more obvious it became that something wonderful could be done with it," Sandston says. "The main room had a beautiful, simple shape that was worth saving." Homeowner Paige York wasn't deterred either, and gave the design team her challenge: Create a comfortable vacation retreat—complete with a master suite, bedroom and bath for her two young children, kitchen, living and dining rooms and plenty of storage space—all in just 1,600 square feet.

STORY BY **CHRISTINE DEORIO**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **AUDREY HALL**

CHOOSE COLOR WISELY

"If you've done the work to bring natural light in and then you paint the walls a dark color, you're killing the light," Nave says. "It's better to choose moderate to light colors that complement the color of the natural light." Throughout the house, walls are painted a sage green hue and the wood ceilings are painted white or lightly whitewashed. In the master bedroom (below), the wood ceiling is covered with a diluted version of the green wall color.

LET THE OUTDOORS IN

To make the most of the home's beautiful surroundings—and brighten the interiors with natural light—the design team created multiple connections to the outdoors. Thoughtfully placed windows capture views of willow trees, mountains and the river, and porches and decks offer additional living space in summer months.



scale back

To fit a lot of function in a little house, the design team whittled down the proportions. Walkways were trimmed from a typical width of 4 feet to just 2.5 feet, and some interior doors are just 24 inches wide. To squeeze in a dining room, they designed a 2-by-8-foot walnut table and built-in banquette. Easy-to-maneuver backless stools stand in for chairs.

get light right

"People often struggle with window size and placement," Nave says. "If every window is large, at some point the space begins to feel like a fishbowl. You need some windows that are bigger than you are to make you feel like you're outside, but you also need smaller windows for contrast."

build in storage

In a small space, corralling clutter is key. "This house doesn't have closets, which are actually pretty inefficient," Nave says. "Instead, we put in a lot of cabinetry." Bedroom built-ins offer cupboards at the top, drawers at the base and a hanging wardrobe in between. Near the kitchen, an 8-by-8-foot wall of wardrobe-style storage conceals pantry items.

master the mix

"My first inclination was to choose small-scale living room furnishings," York says, "but I did the exact opposite." Oversized chaises by Verellen stand in for couches and double as daybeds for the kids. A vintage chair upholstered in yellow vinyl and leggy lacquered tables lighten the look. "I love the contrast of a sleek modern piece with the 'crunch factor' of the wood floors and walls," York says.



FACILITATE FLOW

A round table placed at the center of the living room encourages traffic to circulate around it. A slipcovered club chair and two chaises—which provide as much seating as sofas, minus the bulk—are positioned around the perimeter of the room. “A more traditional furniture layout would have killed the action of the room, the cross views and the sense of open space,” Ryker says.

OPEN UP

"One of our design challenges was keeping the upstairs rooms from feeling enclosed," Sandston says. The solution is translucent resin wall panels by 3form that serve as a dividing wall and headboard, eliminating the need for a bed frame. The design team built a basic platform bed and slid it up against the wall, then added simple L-shaped bedside tables that are built right into the wall. "The 3form panels have reeds running through them," Sandston says, "and when light passes through, the effect is much like sunlight filtering through trees."



CHOOSE FURNISHINGS THAT "FLOAT"

The compact master bathroom features a five-foot-long bathtub and concrete sinks supported by a steel frame. "We floated the cabinetry above the floor so the space doesn't feel so packed," Nave says. A sliding barn-style door between the bedroom and bathroom (left and below)—one of the few doors in the house—is inset with frosted green glass panels to let light flow through. "We avoided closing off any space too much," Nave says. "Any time there's a window in a room, we want to let that natural light pass through to the next space."



KEEP IT SIMPLE

"When designing a small space, it's important to always ask yourself, 'What else can I take away?'" Ryker says. To minimize visual clutter, she suggests creating one concise palette of details and materials—and sticking with it throughout the house. Notice how the combination of steel and wood on the stair railing (left) repeats on the sliding barn-style door (right) and the vanity in the master bathroom (top). To keep this bare-bones palette from feeling cold, the design team incorporated lots of local and reclaimed materials, like the old pickle-vat wood used on the floors. "Materials like that add warmth without cluttering the space," Ryker says. ◻



"A THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED SMALL SPACE CAN FUNCTION AS A MUCH LARGER SPACE. IT'S ALL ABOUT PERCEPTION; IF WE FEEL CRAMPED, THEN WE ARE CRAMPED."

BRETT NAVE

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