



big love ♥ for small houses



(LEFT TO RIGHT)

Stephanie and Scott Holman have maximized the sense of space in their 900-square-foot home by flooding the interior with light from large windows, vaulting the ceiling in the main living area, and defining rooms subtly, instead of with conventional solid walls.

Linda Oblack has embraced the diminutive proportions of her 750-square-foot house, painting the rooms in saturated colors and limiting her furniture to carefully chosen pieces that complement her home's early-20th-century style.

The 1,200-square-foot bungalow of Gregg "Rags" Rago and Susan Bright is typical of many near Bloomington's downtown.

BY NANCY HILLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANNON ZAHNLE

SMALL HOUSES ARE IN VOGUE. Google "small house trend" and you'll discover page after page of stories and pictures of houses in all shapes and (small) sizes.

The smallest are tiny and portable; starting at 50 or so square feet, they serve as house-like campers or handy quarters for visiting family members. From there, sizes increase to houses that still seem tiny by contemporary U.S. standards, such as the Tumbleweed Tiny House Company's "Sebastarosa," with three bedrooms and a full bathroom in a mere 847 square feet. At the other end of the small-house spectrum are those designed by architect Sarah Susanka, whose series of *The Not So Big House* books have helped make small houses a mainstream phenomenon—even though some of Susanka's "not so big" houses exceed 2,000 square feet.

Bloomington is well endowed with small houses in a rich variety of architectural styles. The most common—double pens, gable-ells, and bungalows—date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and as they predate the era of automobile-based sprawl, most are clustered near downtown.

Here we present three single-family homes, ranging from 750 square feet to just under 1,200. The first, built in 1993, is located near Spencer. The other two, built in the early 20th century, are in Bloomington.

1. Stephanie and Scott Holman painted their house gray with green and purple trim to create a storybook look.



2. With tall windows facing south and east, the dining room just off the kitchen is warm and inviting.



3. Scott had the tall oak cabinet on the left custom built. Later, he and Stephanie hired Stone Cabin Design to craft their kitchen cabinets to match. The unusually tall, narrow refrigerator is by Liebherr, and the counters are soapstone.



4. Scott and Stephanie with their dogs, Isis (left) and Mona Lisa. The stained-glass window that contributes so much to the house's façade was made by local glass artisan Kelly Cunningham. Scott has collected artwork from around the world; the piece above the door, titled *Angel*, is by dianna. *Fractured Elephant*, above the couch, is by N. Foraita. The piece over the window, *Foxes*, is by RAE.

'A small house is easy to heat, easy to cool, and easy to clean. Small space, small chores.'

The Holman Home in the Woods

Stephanie and Scott Holman moved into their custom-built house immediately after their wedding in 1993. "Why would you go anywhere for a honeymoon when you just had a house built?" Stephanie quips in mock bemusement.

Surrounded by wooded hills, with a breathtaking view across a 17-acre lake, it's easy to imagine this place just north of Spencer as the ideal spot for anyone's honeymoon.

When the Holmans first approached contractors about building a 900-square-foot house with just one bedroom, one bath, and no closets, the contractors wondered why anyone would want to build so small. "I don't take up much space," says Scott, a retired shop teacher at Edgewood High School who now works at Bloomingfoods. "A small house is easy to heat, easy to cool, and easy to clean. Small space, small chores."

Adds Stephanie, a librarian and storyteller, "To live in a small house, you have to like each other very much." Fortunately they do, and they have perfected the art of small-house living—along with their two dogs and three cats.

One secret is to make each room multitask. The sleeping loft is large enough to accommodate a bed, rowing machine, and small desk. Instead of using closets, Stephanie and Scott store clothes in antique chests and a small armoire so that the loft feels like a space for living as well as sleeping. Similarly, a utility room houses pet food, birdseed, coats, cat litter boxes, and the couple's shoes, in addition to a water softener and stacked washer and dryer. There is no space for anything else. "This room epitomizes life in a little house," says Stephanie. "It's one in, one out. If you're going to bring home something new, you have to get rid of something that's already here."

With generous windows to the east and south, the kitchen/dining room is a welcoming space for reading and reflection as well as for cooking and engaging with guests.

A vaulted ceiling in most of the rooms enhances the sense of spaciousness; only the kitchen and bathroom, both located immediately below the sleeping loft, have flat ceilings. The bold vertical lines of staircase balusters and a massive chimney made of stones gathered from a Monroe County creek emphasize the open, airy feel. Decks on three sides extend the living space outdoors.



5. When they decided that their house would have just one bathroom, Stephanie and Scott decided to go all out. A forest view, along with a handsome glass shower (not visible here), vanity by Stone Cabin Design, distinctive light fixtures, and cast bronze basin make the bathroom a place as inviting as it is functional.

6. A view across the foot of the bed to the stained glass over the front door. While everything is closely spaced, huge helpings of creative thought have gone into bringing the space alive, thereby focusing attention on quality rather than quantity.





Although Bloomington has many bungalows dating from the 1920s and '30s, few have the distinctive "wings" that initially caught Linda Oblack's eye.

Linda Oblack's Sweet Old Bungalow

The first time Linda Oblack saw her house, a bungalow on West 12th Street, it was covered in sheets of crumbling faux-brick asphalt siding. The friend who told her about the house described it as a dump, but at \$250 a month the rent was seductive. She took it.

In the 12 years since then, Oblack has transformed the 750-square-foot house into a warm, comfortable home furnished with antiques and art, some of it related to her work as sponsoring editor for regional and railroad publications at IU Press.

Oblack initially rented the house from one of its original owners, Jean Walls. Walls and her husband, Fred, had purchased the lot just north of downtown in the 1930s. Fred built the house himself. With a bedroom, living room, and kitchen packed into 500 square feet, it did just fine for a Depression-era family. A privy in the backyard and a movable tub in the kitchen provided bathroom facilities. As the

family grew, eventually to four children, Fred added a 250-square-foot addition with a second bedroom, dining room, and bathroom.

By the time Oblack moved in, the drafty house had fallen into serious disrepair. The kitchen was cold, dark, and poorly equipped. The bathroom was tiny by modern standards, with leaking fixtures. Austere white paint covered all of the walls and trim. But beyond these depressing features Oblack saw the unmistakable lines of a sweet old bungalow with sturdy plaster, original woodwork, and old wooden windows that were still in decent shape.

When the house failed a rental inspection in 2004, Walls offered Oblack the chance to buy it on contract (no lump-sum payment, no bank loan needed). Delighted, she had the house rewired, painted the rooms, and fixed up the kitchen as part of an extensive renovation. The most dramatic improvement she made was to the exterior. She hired a contractor to



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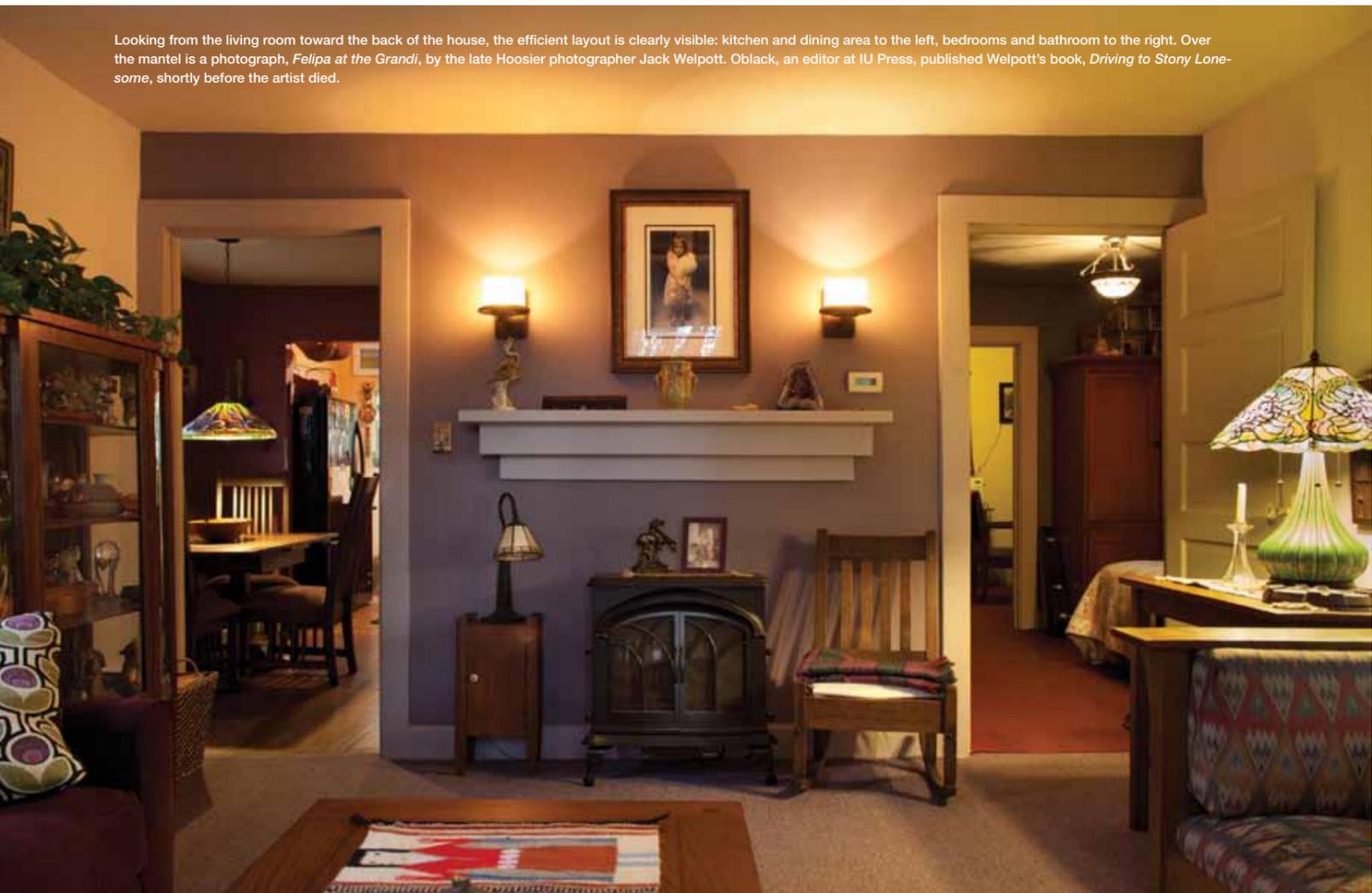


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Looking from the living room toward the back of the house, the efficient layout is clearly visible: kitchen and dining area to the left, bedrooms and bathroom to the right. Over the mantel is a photograph, *Felipa at the Grandi*, by the late Hoosier photographer Jack Welpott. Oblack, an editor at IU Press, published Welpott's book, *Driving to Stony Lonesome*, shortly before the artist died.



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1. Oblack has transformed her house from a rundown "dump," as a friend first described it to her many years ago, into a jewel.

2. The house has two bedrooms, one of which, just visible through the door, Oblack uses as a home office.

3. Oblack restored the cabinetry, laid a new floor, augmented the storage, and filled the walls with artwork to create a kitchen that is practical and a pleasure to use.

4. With windows facing three directions and a glazed front door that Oblack installed, the living room fills with sunshine.

install fiber-cement siding, a dead ringer for traditional wood, and had a friend paint the house, adding a dash of her favorite color, purple.

Like the Holmans, she keeps her home from feeling cluttered by adhering to a self-imposed rule: When something comes in, something goes out. "Most of us," she believes, "have far more stuff than we require."



Susan Bright and Gregg "Rags" Rago on their bungalow's front porch with Emma and Lucy.

Rags and Susan's 'Big Enough' House

With its open porch, original windows, and diminutive front yard, the South Lincoln Street home of Gregg "Rags" Rago and Susan Bright shares distinctive architectural features with countless other bungalows near downtown Bloomington. The Bryan Park neighborhood was originally developed in the 1880s to house workers in the town's limestone, furniture, and railroad industries and today is home to artists, students, IU faculty, and other townspeople.

Rago is the co-owner/chef and Bright the co-owner/financial analyst of Nick's English Hut, Bloomington's iconic bar and restaurant. While some prefer rural or suburban living, these two consider their home's location in a core neighborhood ideal. "One of my goals is to have a small environmental footprint," says Bright. Living a mere dozen blocks from work allows her an easy bicycle commute. And being

near the park is ideal for exercising their two large dogs.

At just under 1,200 square feet, the house's size, too, is well suited to a couple convinced that, as they put it, "less is better." For Bright in particular, this is no mere platitude; she points out that small houses encourage family members to spend time together, a practice that has become less common.

The house started out even smaller than its current proportions. When it was built in 1927, it had a dining room, living room, kitchen, and one bedroom—although unlike many small houses dating from that era, it apparently had an indoor bathroom. A second, larger bedroom was added in the 1930s. Forty years later, new owners embarked on a typical '70s remodel, vaulting the ceiling of the large bedroom and adding a small loft overhead, which was



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1. While relatively narrow, the living/dining area does not feel small. Colorful furnishings, plentiful plants, and sunlight from south-facing windows emphasize the space's lively, eclectic décor instead of its dimensions.

2. The kitchen, remodeled by Steve Percy, is warm and colorful. Percy increased the room's size by incorporating the original cold porch at the rear of the house.

3. A subdued palette combined with the warm, golden tones of near-century-old wood makes for a comfortable corner.



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accessible by ladder.

Rago purchased the house in 1989. Since then, the couple has made some dramatic changes. Early on, they finished the loft over their bedroom, replacing the ladder with a staircase to create handy additional storage space as well as a cozy spot for reading. In 2004 they made more extensive changes to the house, stripping the woodwork and painting the back rooms. They also completely remodeled the kitchen, extending it into an area originally occupied by an enclosed porch. As part of the same project, they redid the bathroom—

though they kept the original 1920s plumbing fixtures, whose period character they relish.

The couple doesn't mind not having space for a lot of furniture and other possessions. They consider it more important to surround themselves with objects that are useful and beautiful, emphasizing quality rather than quantity. "A lot of people in the United States want everything big," notes Rago, "but our house is big enough for us." *

4. A loft over the master bedroom adds useful space.

5. This single-story bungalow with its original front porch is typical of homes in many Bloomington neighborhoods.