

www.120SquareFeet.com

Basic Stats:

- What is(are) your name(s)? **Laura M. LaVoie (And Matt)**
- What do you do for a living? **Writer**
- How many people do you/will be living in your tiny house? **There are two adults and one cat.**
- What part of the country do you live in? **Near Asheville, North Carolina**
- How many square feet is your house? **120 Square Feet**
- When did you start your build? **April of 2009**
- Is your house complete? **Yes**
- Have you been documenting your tiny house build and if so, where can people find that information? **Yes, at www.120SquareFeet.com**

Background:

- Why did you decide to build? **Matt has always wanted to build his own house but didn't quite know how to start. We were interested in alternative building and researched several options before discovering tiny houses. We liked the small scale because we were building for the first time.**
- What was your life like before your tiny house? Were you fairly active, have you always had 'projects' going on? Were you fairly sedentary and looking for a change? Did you tend to work too much? (This question is an effort at trying to figure out WHO gravitates to the tiny house lifestyle). **We have always been people who liked to do things. We would travel or start projects. Matt was very active and I would say I was less so. I worked too much but wanted to change my life so I could work less.**
- How did you come to hear about the movement, figure out it was right for you and get started? **A good friend knew we had bought some land and wanted to build something. She happened to see Jay Shafer on Oprah and told us about his adorable teeny house and thought it would be perfect for us. She was absolutely right. Shortly after that, Tumbleweed Tiny Houses offered their first East Coast Workshop in Asheville North Carolina. We attended that and knew we could build the house.**
- What is/was your design inspiration? **We really liked the designs that Jay Shafer had created. We selected the Tarleton because of the interior layout and the simple**

roof line. We designed the exterior to be somewhat rustic and rural and to match a barn already on the property and the interior to be sort of a modern/rustic hybrid.

Technical:

- How do/did you find the time to work on your house with a job, kid(s), relationships, AND building a house? Did you do anything special to keep the balance? **The key for us is that we have always worked great as a team. This doesn't mean everything is always easy, but we are good at working with each others strengths. The hardest part is that we were still living and working in Atlanta and only traveling to Asheville on weekends. We usually made it up to Asheville twice a month and with the three hour drive we often had less than 24 hours to work before we had to drive back.**
- Have you run into any problems with your local codes? How did you solve them? **We decided to build out in the country where there is a more relaxed sense of codes and permits.**
- Where did you get the tools that you use? Were they yours, borrowed, rented etc.? **We bought all the tools we used, but we tried to get things that we would have for a long time and use for any other projects. Since we had no electricity at our building site we got a lot of Ryobi rechargeable tools. We would just take the batteries back to Atlanta with us to charge up. We also got a compound miter saw from Harbor Freight because the prices are good. In spite of being cheap it worked like a trooper. It was very abused and stayed outside for most of three years but still worked well. (We powered that with a generator.)**
- How long did (are you expecting) construction to take? **It took us three years total - but that is because we were driving from Atlanta to Asheville about twice a month to work on it. The building was part of the adventure for us so we wouldn't have changed it. If we add up the time we spent working it would have been about 6 months or so.**
- Have you/were you able to stay on schedule? **No way. Things always took longer than we anticipated.**
- What is/was the most time consuming portion of your build? **In our case the most time consuming part of the job was to get building materials up to the site. We chose a clearing on our mountain that does not have road access so everything had to be carried by hand or on a semi-reliable ATV.**
- What is/was the most limiting factor for your build? **The travel to and from the build site.**

- Is your house on a trailer? If yes, how do you attach to the trailer? How do you move your tiny house? (Do you have a truck, do you hire it done?) **We are trailer-free. We decided on a foundation because of the location of the house. We didn't want it to roll off the mountain. Plus, there would be no way to drive it up and down without a road.**
- Do you have accessory houses/dwellings that you use to supplement storage/working/living? **There was an existing barn on the land that wasn't considered usable by the original owners. We used it for everything- including camping inside it while we were building. We were very lucky to have it.**
- Where did you get your plans? **Tumbleweed Tiny House Company**
- Have you consulted any 'professionals'? (structural, mechanical, plumbing, design etc.)? **We did most everything ourselves except for the roof and the electrical. Our neighbor, who does handyman work, helped us with the roof and a friend who is a master electrician did all the wiring for us.**
- Are you insuring your house? With who? **No insurance.**
- Have you been using any sponsorships to help fund your house? How do you go about finding that sponsorship? **No**

Specifics:

- What sort of items do you have for cooking? **We have two butane burners. We also have a Camp Chef Camp Oven that we use outside only. Oh, and a charcoal grill.**
- Are you tied to the power grid or are you off grid? **We are 100% off the grid.**
- Are you going to have a washer and/or dryer? **Nope. We go to a place here in Asheville called Bar of Soap. It is a laundromat and a bar! As far as I am concerned, that is better than having my own washer and dryer.**
- Where does your water come from? **All of our water comes from a spring on the land.**
- What kind of toilet are you going to have? **We use a dry composting toilet (the bucket and sawdust method made popular by the Humanure Handbook)**
- What do you use for a heat source if anything? **We do have a small propane vent-less heater that is designed to be used in tents and RVs. We don't use it much.**
- What are some of the space savings tricks you used? **We did a few built in shelves around the house for small items. We also have a small loft dedicated to storage. Otherwise, we don't have anything in the house that doesn't get used.**
- What do you have for insulation? **We used 4 inches of extruded polystyrene foam insulation. This is the white stuff. It is our understanding that the bugs don't eat it.**

- Where are you planning to park your tiny house? **It is permanently fixed on our mountain.**

Personal:

- How much will/did your tiny house cost? **The cost of our house, including all tools and mistakes, is about \$20,000**
- What is/was the most expensive part of your house? **The Windows. We were originally told the window frame measurements were standard, but they weren't. But it was too late by the time we figured that out.**
- 'Best' injury story (worst injury)? **I have thankfully not sustained any injuries in the house. Matt fell off the loft, but he was fine.**
- What has been your biggest accomplishment with your tiny house? **I just love to say that I live in a comfortable, adorable house that I built myself.**
- What is/will be the biggest benefit to living in a tiny house? **Lowering my cost of living so I could quit my full time job and become a writer.**
- Is there anything you'll miss about living in a standard house? What will you miss the most? **The only thing I miss is not being able to brew beer. I really enjoyed brewing. I could technically still brew here but we don't have room to store the equipment or to put the carboy of fermenting beer. We have thought about making the barn a brewery but it isn't the most sanitary or sterile environment.**
- What has been the scariest part about building your own house? **Nothing, really. It is always scary to drastically change your lifestyle.**
- If you could change one thing about your house what would it be? **Nothing at all.**
- Did you have cash in hand to complete your build, pay as you go or take out a loan to construct your house? **We were able to pay cash for the process.**
- Have friends and family been skeptical or supportive of your ideas? **Everyone has been very supportive. Lots of friends helped us on the build and camped out at our land.**