

# Hobbitats: Small is the New Big

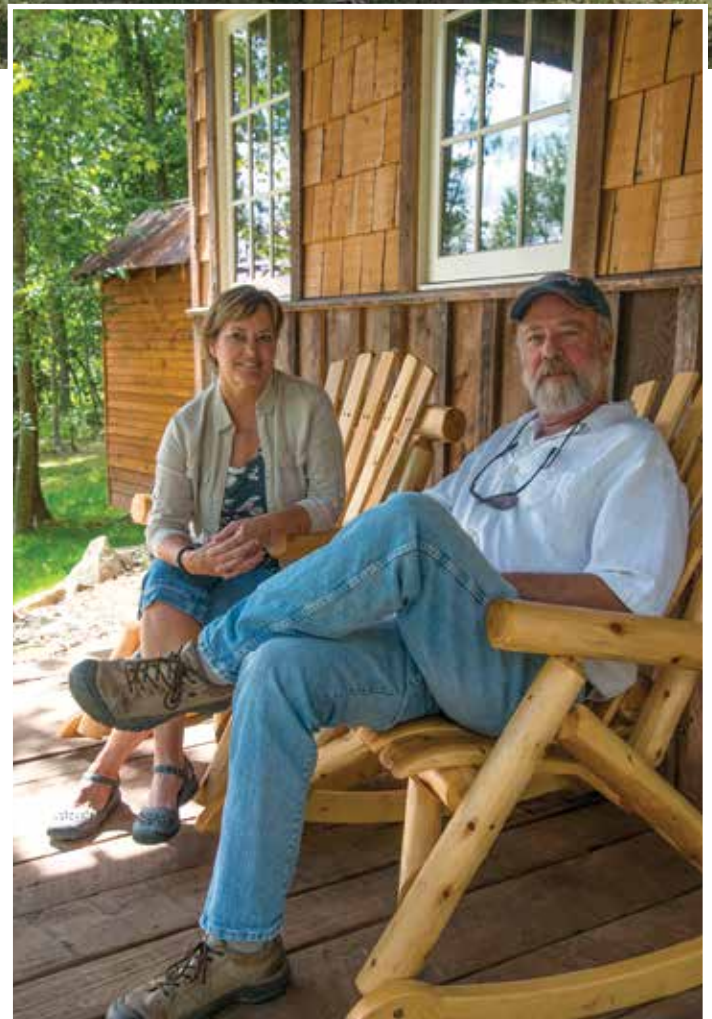


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## **Sue and Bill Thomas, owners of Hobbitat, relax on the porch of one of the “Hobs.”**

Sometimes good things come in small packages. In the case of Hobbitat, or “Hobs” as their creators have affectionately dubbed them, these wee buildings abound in craftsmanship, detail and personality. The Hobbitat motto says it all: “Think Big. Live Small.”

“Hobs are designed from the inside out to answer all needs, use every inch of space and sing to the style of the client,” says builder Bill Thomas, who owns and operates Hobbitat with his wife Sue, an artist and designer. With names like Sugar Magnolia, Walden and Funkomatic 513, each custom-built Hob tells a different story. The Hobs at Blue Moon Rising were designed to meet the needs of four occupants for a relaxing vacation within a 250 square foot space. For full time living, one or two people can be very comfortable – less than one-tenth the size of the average home built in the U.S. during 2013 – according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The result is a unique structure with a





**Hobs are unique structures manufactured for a variety of uses and constructed of recycled materials when appropriate.**

small footprint in terms of energy efficiency, maintenance requirements and use of recycled materials when appropriate. Using piers instead of foundations also reduces the environmental impact.

Why build a Hob? The answer is as limitless as a client's imagination. Possible uses include guest house, studio, in-law space, home office, man cave, writer's retreat, vacation home and even a permanent home for the truly committed small house devotee. Sleeping options include Murphy beds, lofts, sleeping nooks and bunk beds. Hobbitat also offers accessory buildings and outdoor showers.

"These are very personal spaces," Bill says. "We sit down with our clients to determine their needs and create custom designs. Each small structure has its own character, and each is truly a work of art, as well as being fully functional."



Recycled and repurposed items add unique, personal accents to each Hob. These range from doors and windows, to funnels and English laundry tools known as “pounces” that Bill and Sue have transformed into lights. “We’ve used truck air horns, factory lights... odd, eclectic stuff,” says Sue. “We go all over the East Coast ‘pickin’ to find unique pieces to incorporate into our designs. It’s kind of an adventure.”

Every Hob is built entirely indoors, year-round, in the Hobbitat shop. Currently Bill employs five workers. “We avoid pitfalls normally found with site-built construction, such as rain, snow, mud and vandalism,” he says. “It never gets wet – so we avoid issues like mold and get a better building.”

Once constructed, a Hob can be transported by a special trailer to the building site and placed upon prepared piers. Then the roof sections are lowered onto the main body and attached. Presto! The Hob is set and weather tight in a day’s time, without weeks of construction noise, debris and disturbance.

The actual building process, however, takes about eight to ten weeks. “We consider them as much art as construction, and that kind of commitment takes time,” Bill says. A Cocoon building style is used to ensure that all utilities are contained within the building envelope. All sides are wrapped in foam insulation to keep out heat, cold and noise. Unless specified by the client, each Hob is built according to Maryland’s stringent building and energy codes.

Hobbitat combines Bill’s extensive building and business experience as former owner and operator of Blue Sky Ventures, with his passion for small, artfully built structures. After a 12-year career in custom home building and historic restoration in the Westminster, Md. area, with several national magazine write-ups and a few awards along the way, Bill was ready for something new. Disenchanted with the relentless creep of development into Carroll County’s farm country, he and Sue decided to head west,



and settled in Garrett County about 18 years ago. In 2011, Bill collected materials from his grandfather’s barn and windows from his childhood cabin, found some reclaimed doors and materials, and went to work. The result was the prototype for Hobbitat, constructed on the couple’s Garrett County property.

Bill’s timing was fortuitous. Lisa Jan, a local entrepreneur, was looking for a builder to construct buildings for her Blue Moon Rising eco-tourism retreat on Deep Creek Lake. “We offered her the ‘hob’ alternative as a better fit for the Blue Moon Rising location, with 13 designs sized to sleep up to four people, with three-quarter size kitchens,” Bill says. A collaboration arose and Bill formed his new company in 2012.

It was time to find a distinctive name to identify and market these unusual buildings. “Since these structures were not necessarily going to be homes – maybe studios or offices – we were thinking of a more generic term for shelters and one of us said habitat, but they’re small...” says Sue, “Hobbitat!”

Now that the last Hob at Blue Moon Rising has been completed and all cabins are available for rent, Bill and Sue are engaged in building their Hobbitat business. Currently, they are working on plans that people can use to construct their own Hobs. Photos and updates can be found on the [www.hobbitatpaces.com](http://www.hobbitatpaces.com) web site and Hobbitat’s Facebook page.

This fall, Blue Moon Rising will “star” in a special Halloween episode of the FYI Network’s *Tiny House Nation*. Three design teams will compete to decorate three Hobs in their best, spookiest Halloween style – Hob-goblins, perhaps, for Hob-o-ween?

According to Bill, “Our goal is to design and build smaller space structures to benefit our clients, employees and the community. We’re doing something that isn’t done much – each one is truly unique. We want to keep doing what we’re doing. People are impressed and we are having fun!”