



# LEAH PALMER Spreads Her Wings on a Tiny House

Leah Palmer begins with a sketch and creates renderings and marketing materials in a variety of mixed media, Photoshop renderings, as well as physical and virtual modeling in order to further visualize her projects.

an interior view offers a peek into Ms. Palmer's professional philosophy of efficiency and environmental responsibility for this project.



By Vicky Moon

It's safe to say that tiny houses are popular not only as a weekend retreat but also as a second home or even a main residence. Leah Palmer, a designer based in the Middleburg area, has done several.

"In a footprint of only 576 square feet," she said, "you have to be creative to get the most out of it."

Ms. Palmer is a familiar face in Middleburg as an accomplished equestrian and a creative designer. She's a graduate of Catholic University's School of Architecture, a member of the U.S. Green Building Council and a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) accredited professional. She's also committed to the demands of design and architectural aesthetics.

When a client approached her asking Ms. Palmer for a "tiny house" to replace a falling-down rental she owned in The Plains, "I was all in," she said.

"We did our research and went to see a manufacturer near Potomac. Most tiny houses that are constructed on a flat bed are only 8 1/2 feet wide. We found one that was done on a 12-foot wide bed. We thought this was even better. The house would be a full-time rental property and the extra width made it something with which we could all live."

First though, it would take six months from deposit to delivery. There were certain limits on finishes when constructing a building that has to be moved. Ms. Palmer and her client went to see the 12-foot model that had been moved since its construction. They noticed some wear and tear on the interior finishes from a bumpy drive down the



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road. The structural plywood on the exterior also showed signs of weathering, and not in a good way.

"There's a reason that RVs all have plastic walls and covered joints," she said. "It allows the building to shift without cracking during transport."

Ms. Palmer then heard from Fauquier County and was informed they would need to inspect the building during construction at an added cost for having to go to Potomac to do it. It also had to sit on a foundation, not just on wheels.

"This tiny house in The Plains would need well and septic, which for this job was easy since it's on town water and septic," Ms. Palmer said. "However, if it had not been, we'd be drilling a well and installing a septic field, too."

If it had been built in Potomac, they'd have to hire a trucking company to deliver it to The Plains. Driving the little house around the beltway and up Interstate 66 required a wide load permit, with flashing lights and flagged cars.

"But once it got it to The Plains the tractor trailer would have to navigate narrow town roads and into our tiny site," Ms. Palmer said. "Not all driveways can accommodate a tractor trailer and this certainly could not."

After considering all the details, it made far more sense to build it in place, on a foundation, with all the drywall finishes and no fear of cracking. Sticking to the "tiny house" program, Ms. Palmer got to work designing her own "small living solution" for her client.

"For someone to actually live there for an extended time, it would need things like a washer and dryer, a pantry, a linen closet, a large coat closet and plenty of storage," Ms. Palmer told Country ZEST. "High ceilings, large windows and a deck would make it more livable and less claustrophobic. We were able to use a steep roof pitch and vault the ceiling, something we couldn't do with a tractor trailer's height."

Ms. Palmer has done many renovations of homes and barns in the area, including a 24-stall barn complete with eight wash stalls and a polo arena; a complete renovation of the 1807 manor house at Greystone in The Plains, and the Piedmont Fox Hounds Kennel, hailed by many as an outstanding, innovative structure.

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