



TINY: A Story About Living Small

A documentary by Merete Mueller & Christopher Smith
62 Min.

What is home? And how do we find it? One couple's attempt to built a 120-square foot Tiny House with no building experience raises questions about sustainability, good design, and the changing American Dream.

US Sales Agent:

Josh Braun, Submarine Entertainment
525 Broadway, Suite 601
New York, NY 10012
212-625-9931
info@submarine.com

Publicity contact:

Merete Mueller
382 12th St, 3L
Brooklyn, NY 11215
303-910-0897 (cell)
speakthunderfilms@gmail.com

Canadian Distribution:

Michael Boyuk, FilmsWeLike
24 Mercer St, Second Floor
Toronto, Ontario M5V 1H3
416-971-9131
mike@filmswelike.com

US Distribution:

Marc Mauceri, First Run Features
630 Ninth Ave, #1213
New York, NY 10036
212-243-0600
marcm@firstrunfeatures.com

<http://www.tiny-themovie.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/tinythemovie>

<http://www.twitter.com/TINYtheMOVIE>

Film trailer on Vimeo (preferred): <http://vimeo.com/28422870>

Film trailer on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/jTCKt4mDNSE>

High-res Press Images: <http://www.speakthunder.com/presskits/TINY-Press-StillS.zip>

SHORT SYNOPSIS

TINY is a documentary about home, and how we find it.

The film follows one couple's attempt to build a Tiny House from scratch, and profiles other families who have downsized their lives into houses smaller than the average parking space.

Through homes stripped down to their essentials, the film raises questions about sustainability, good design, and the changing American Dream.

LONG SYNOPSIS

After a decade of travel, Christopher Smith approaches his 30th birthday and decides it's time to plant some roots. He impulsively buys a 5-acre plot of land in hopes of fulfilling a lifelong dream of building a home in the mountains of Colorado. With the support of his girlfriend, Merete, he sets out to build a Tiny House from scratch despite having no construction experience.

From 1970 to 2010, the average size of a new house in America has almost doubled. Yet in recent years, many are redefining their American Dream to focus on flexibility, financial freedom, and quality of life over quantity of space. These self-proclaimed "Tiny Housers" live in homes smaller than the average parking space, often built on wheels to bypass building codes and zoning laws. *TINY* takes us inside six of these homes stripped to their essentials, exploring the owners' stories and the design innovations that make them work.

When Christopher decides to build his own Tiny House, he dives into the tension between settling down and staying adrift, between preserving a parcel of land that he loves and developing it. Merete begins to ask her own questions about settling down, and both walk away with unexpected lessons about the meaning of home, the importance of place, and the personal impact of sticking with a project that would become bigger than they'd ever imagined.

TINY is a coming-of-age story for a generation that is more connected, yet less tied-down than ever, and for a society redefining its priorities in the face of a changing financial and environmental climate. More than anything, *TINY* invites its viewers to dream big and imagine living small.

ABOUT THE FILM

Making *TINY*, a documentary film about people who live in houses smaller than the average parking space, was a huge undertaking. But it began with a simple, on-the-spot decision, when Christopher Smith bought a plot of land in the mountains just a few months before his 30th birthday.

“Christopher’s an impulsive person,” co-director of *TINY*, Merete Mueller laughs, “so I wasn’t that surprised when he told me he’d put an offer down on the land. I knew that owning a house in the mountains had been a lifelong dream for him. But still, I was surprised! He was still in grad school and working as a freelance graphic designer on the side. He didn’t have any savings. Christopher’s way has always been to take a leap and figure the rest out as he goes along.”

After purchasing the land, Christopher researched his options for building a small cabin on the plot and discovered that his county—and most counties in American—has a minimum house size included in its building codes.

“I wouldn’t have been able to build a larger house on my own and I would have had to save up the money for a long while before I could get started.” He remembered a magazine article that he’d read years before about Tiny Houses, small structures built onto flat-bed trailers. Because the houses are built on wheels, they count as temporary structures and local building codes do not apply. He adds, “Being an environmentalist, I liked the idea of building a house that would have a very minimal impact on the land.”

Christopher wasn’t the only one who had big ideas. In his final months of graduate school for public administration, he was daydreaming about a creative project and hoping to return to filmmaking after competing his degree. Merete, a writer by trade with a knack for recognizing a compelling story, suggested that he film himself building the house.

“I saw Christopher planning this project and knew that building the tiny house was his way of working through questions about what kind of a home he wanted to create for himself, what kind of a life he wanted to build. Questions that most people our age are wrestling with,” Merete recalls, “I realized that following his story would be a great way to explore some of these larger issues around home: how we define it and what we value most.”

Christopher agreed to take on the film project and asked Merete to join him as a writer and co-director. As the couple began tapping into the online community of people who are building and living full-time in these tiny abodes, they expanded the film to include tours of other Tiny Houses as well as their own.

The couple filmed other “Tiny Housers” in a variety of locations across the country. The film includes tiny house tours from Massachusetts; Portland, Oregon; Longmont, Colorado; Olympia, Washington; Boise, Idaho; and Sonoma County, California.

Just as Christopher taught himself to build his house from scratch using blogs, YouTube videos and countless trips to the hardware store, the couple dove into DIY indie filmmaking and learned as they went. Christopher explains, “In the early days I would set up a camera on a tripod and just let it roll while I was out there building by myself. That was the biggest challenge: focussing on building the house, and also thinking about how to capture that process on film.”

They launched a successful Kickstarter campaign and built a strong following through social media and the internet, blogging and sharing photo updates of their house construction. As their following grew and they collected more information on the subject, Christopher and Merete realized that the story of the tiny house movement was larger than the simple short film they had originally set out to capture.

“When we began this project, our goal was to make a short film and show it at our local mountain film festival,” Christopher explains, “But when we sat down to edit, we realized the story had outgrown our ambitions, and the film needed to be a feature in order to touch on all the aspects of this issue that felt important to us.”

This expansion wasn’t without growing pains. Both Christopher and Merete held full-time day jobs throughout the making of the film. Merete says, “There were plenty of moments when we didn’t know if we had the money or the energy to keep going. The highs and lows were really extreme. Being accepted to premiere the film at SXSW was definitely one high point.”

Though they had no idea what they were getting into when they first decided to build a house and a film at the same time both Christopher and Merete agree that the rewards have matched the sweat and tears. Christopher says, “I think that not knowing how much work this would be was a blessing. We may never have started the project if we knew how big it would become. But really all you have to do is start. Once you throw yourself in and commit to seeing it through, amazing things can happen.”

FILMMAKER BIOS

Merete Mueller (Writer, Co-director/Producer)

Merete is a writer and award-winning filmmaker based in Brooklyn, NY.

With a background in fiction writing and journalism, Merete has worked as the Managing Editor of *elephant journal*, a former print magazine that she helped transition to an online publication, now with a monthly reach of over four million readers. In 2010, she worked with environmental journalist Simran Sethi on a book and multimedia project, *The Green Brain*, which looked to behavioral psychology for insights on how to better engage people around environmental issues. A freelance journalist throughout, Merete has published essays and articles in a number of print and online magazines and continues to be a regular columnist on *The Huffington Post* and *elephant journal*.

Merete's skills as a writer and instinct about story proved useful while making her first feature documentary (in collaboration with Christopher Smith), *TINY: A Story About Living Small*. In addition to co-directing and producing the film, Merete also managed the film's online outreach, writing blog posts and curating an online following for the project on facebook and other social media networks.

As a writer and filmmaker, Merete is drawn to stories of people living "close to the bone," which she defines as people not only living simply, but also honestly and often in vulnerable situations. Merete is currently living in New York City, where she is completing a novel about her grandmother's larger-than-life childhood in Greenpoint, Brooklyn during the 1930s. She also works as a freelance video producer and is developing a number of documentary shorts.

Christopher Smith (Cinematographer, Co-director/Producer)

Originally from the Washington, DC area, Christopher currently splits his time between New York City and Boulder, Colorado, where he has lived for the past 12 years. He studied Cinematography and Producing at the Sydney Film School in Australia, and previously worked as a graphic designer, cinematographer and editor in Colorado and Los Angeles.

Christopher uses his experience in media to call attention to issues of social justice and the environmental degradation of the American West. In 2009, he founded Speak Thunder Films, a production company dedicated to producing creative film and video content for a meaningful impact on our society and environment. Speak Thunder has produced projects for congressional candidates, non-profits and businesses.

In addition to his certificate in filmmaking from Sydney Film School, Christopher holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Colorado, Denver, and a

BA in Philosophy and a certificate in non-profit management from University of Colorado, Boulder.

He is currently producing and directing a feature documentary, *American (ESP)ionage*, which chronicles his father's involvement with the US military's psychic espionage program during the Cold War.

Timothy Cleary (Original Score)

Timothy Cleary is a musician and composer based in Brooklyn, New York. In addition to *TINY*, his music has appeared in *Don't Let Me Drown*, which premiered at Sundance in 2009, and *Helena from the Wedding*, which premiered at SXSW in 2010. As an on location sound mixer, Timothy is a regular member of the Saturday Night Live production team and is also working on a soon to be released documentary on Phillip Glass and Robert Wilson's groundbreaking opera, *Einstein on the Beach*.

A talented song-writer and multi-instrumentalist, Tim frequently collaborates and performs with friends in New York. Currently, he is scoring *A Connecticut Barn Burning*, a short documentary told through a combination of Super 8 footage and audio-only interviews.

CREDITS

Director/Producer: Merete Mueller & Christopher Smith
Cinematography: Christopher Smith, Kevin Hoth, Merete Mueller
Writer: Merete Mueller
Editor: Christopher Smith
Original Score: Timothy Cleary
Sound Design: Elliot Thompson
Consulting Editor: Hye Mee Na
Additional Videography: Blake Pound
Aerial Videography: Cedar Beauregard

AWARDS AND SCREENINGS

Green Planet Environmental Award, Rhode Island International Film Festival, 2013
Social Change Award, Topanga Film Festival 2013

World Premiere, SXSW Film Festival 2013
International Premiere, Hot Docs Canadian International Film Festival 2013

Official Selection:

Independent Film Festival Boston 2013
Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival 2013
San Francisco Green Film Festival 2013
Mountainfilm in Telluride 2013
Berkshire International Film Festival 2013
Indianapolis International Film Festival 2013
Gimli Film Festival 2013
Rhode Island International Film Festival 2013
Sidewalk Film Festival 2013
DocUTAH 2013
Edmonton International Film Festival 2013
Port Townsend Film Festival 2013
Bend Film Festival 2013
Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival 2013
Tallgrass Film Festival 2013
Ojai Film Festival 2013
Napa Valley Film Festival 2013
DOC NYC 2013
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival 2014
Boulder International Film Festival 2014
DC Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capitol 2014

TINY HOUSE FAQ

Where are Tiny Houses?

Tiny Houses are popular across the US and Canada. Some of the regions with the highest concentrations of people living in Tiny House include the Pacific Northwest, the San Francisco Bay Area, Vermont, Texas, Colorado and North Carolina.

Globally, we've found high concentrations of interest in Tiny Houses in Japan, northern Europe, Australia and Great Britain.

What is a Tiny House?

Tiny Houses, as referred to by the media and in the documentary, *TINY*, are typically less than 200 square feet, slightly larger than the average parking space.

Why are Tiny Houses Built on Wheels?

Tiny Houses are often built on wheels as a way to bypass building and zoning laws. Though codes vary by county, many counties in America have adopted the International Residential Building Codes, which state that houses must be at least 600 square feet. When Tiny Houses are built on wheels, they count as temporary structures and these laws do not apply.

How do people make Tiny Houses?

There has been a proliferation of companies that custom-build Tiny Houses, but most people who live in these structures prefer to build their own. Some people purchase plans or kits. Others, like Christopher Smith in *TINY*, learn construction techniques on the fly from the many blogs, e-books, and youtube videos about Tiny House construction that are available online.

Why do people live in Tiny Houses?

Most people who live in Tiny Houses are motivated by financial factors. It's common for a "Tiny Houser" to own their home outright with no monthly mortgage or rental fee, which is appealing to many people in the wake of the housing crisis. Others are motivated by living simply to decrease their environmental impact. Whatever their reasons for choosing this lifestyle of minimalism, most "Tiny Housers" claim that their quality of life has increased as they are able to focus more of their time and energy on relationships and experiences instead of on home maintenance or their physical belongings.

What are some of the drawbacks to living Tiny?

Drawbacks to living in a Tiny House include a lack of options to insure the house. Options for financing the up-front costs of buying or building the house are also limited. It can be difficult to find a location to park a Tiny House in many urban centers and in some suburbs because of local zoning laws.

How many people live in Tiny Houses?

In an article published in 2011, *The New Yorker* estimated the number of people living in Tiny Houses to be "a few thousand." Yet the movement is surrounded by a much larger community of curious onlookers. Blogs devoted to Tiny Houses and "Downsizing" garner hundreds of thousands of hits each day.