The New York Times

LIVING SMALL

This 300-Square-Foot Cabin Can Stretch to 500, Solarium Included

Post-pandemic, a lawyer decided she wanted a new life raising sheep. She bought land in Vermont and hired a Dutch designer to build her a shape-shifting home.

Yvette Lanneaux, a former lawyer, started Sajima Farm in Pomfret, Vt., during the pandemic. She recently added a cabin from Cabin ANNA, a company based in the Netherlands. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

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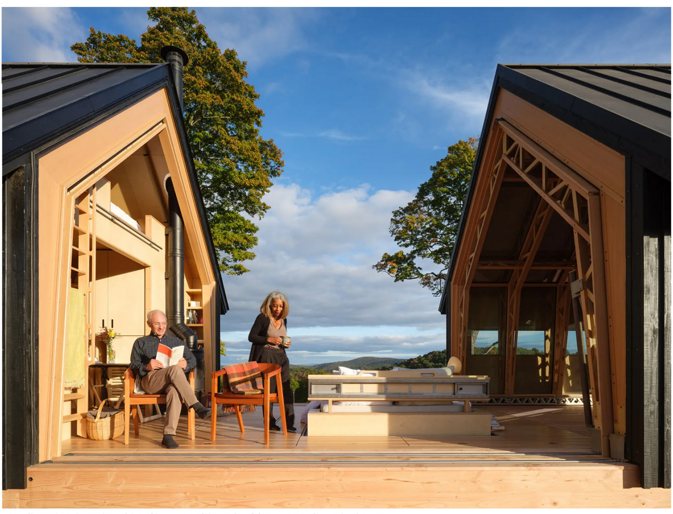
The pandemic caused many people to reconsider what they wanted out of life. And for some, like Yvette Lanneaux, that introspective moment inspired dramatic change.

After years of working as a lawyer, “I’m not practicing anymore,” said Ms. Lanneaux, 58. “I’m now a shepherd.”

Her journey began in the summer of 2020 when she was stuck at home in Princeton, N.J., with her husband, Michael Nissan, 69; their two grown children, who had returned home; and Ms. Lanneaux’s mother.



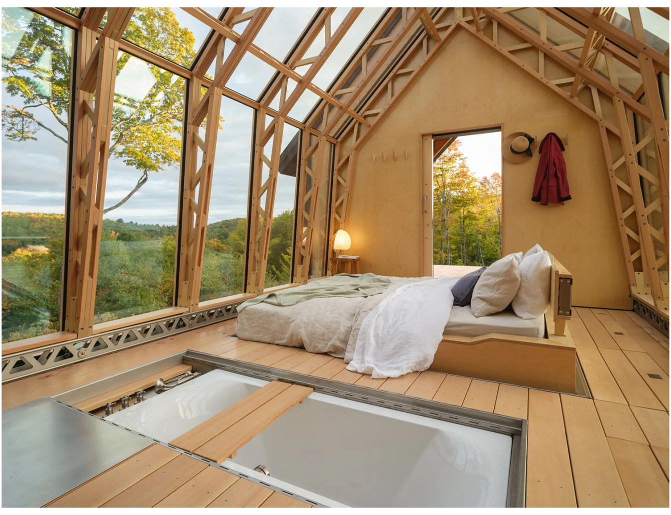
Depending on how the sections of the cabin are moved, it can closed down or opened up to the elements.
Oliver Parini for The New York Times

Thinking about her next move, she became intrigued by sheep. Specifically, “I decided I had to have a Babydoll Southdown lamb,” Ms. Lanneaux said. “They look like a stuffed animal come to life. They’re adorable. I thought it would be a really nice pet.”

She had never worked with farm animals, but she was suddenly determined to learn and enrolled in online classes from providers such as the Cornell Small Farms Program, University of Vermont Extension and Michigan State University Extension.

It didn’t take long for Ms. Lanneaux to realize that looking after sheep required more time and resources than a family pet did, as well as a farm. But, she was undaunted. “It just struck me as a good challenge,” she said. “Once I started to dig into it, I was fascinated.”

At the end of 2020, she closed on 60 wooded acres in Pomfret, Vt., for $385,000, sight unseen, with a plan to establish a small sheep farm, now named Sajima Farm. Over the following months, she took stock of the property and cleared five acres to seed a pasture.



Sliding panels in the floor reveal a sunken bathtub and queen-size bed. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

Today, she has not one, but six sheep — two Babydoll Southdowns, and four Merinos. She also acquired a llama to guard the flock, and chickens, all of which require constant care.

In the early days, Ms. Lanneaux slept in the back of her Ford F-150 truck. But, that was “obviously not a year-round proposition in Vermont,” she said.

Ms. Lanneaux and her husband, Michael Nissan, in the cabin. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

In the fall of 2021, she bought a Bowlus travel trailer. In 2022, she dug a well. In 2023, she built an equipment shed and brought in electricity, a septic system and internet service.

As her sheep farm became more established, she began wanting a real home. With an interest in design, Ms. Lanneaux saw a story about Cabin ANNA — a shape-shifting cabin developed by the Dutch designer Caspar Schols and is built from prefabricated parts — and was smitten.

Ms. Lanneaux chose a building site that would take maximum advantage of the view. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

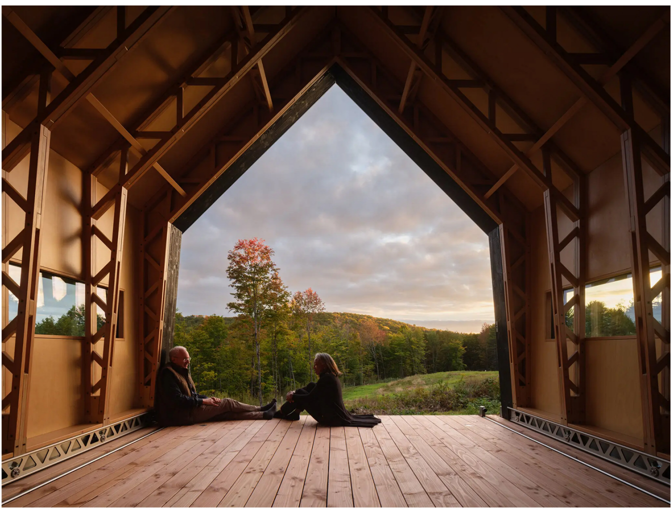
The cabin is assembled from prefabricated components and includes a compact kitchen. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

The cabin has roof-and-wall modules on tracks that allow the structure to function as a cozy 300-square-foot shelter when closed, or to expand to a larger, 500-square-foot structure with a glass-walled solarium or open-air section, depending on the weather. Panels in the floor also slide back to reveal a sunken bathtub and a queen-size bed. A loft measuring about 80 square feet provides space for a second bed.

Cabin ANNA is the creation of the Dutch designer Caspar Schols. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

Mr. Schols said the idea for Cabin ANNA came from a cabin he designed for his mother, to help her reconnect with nature.

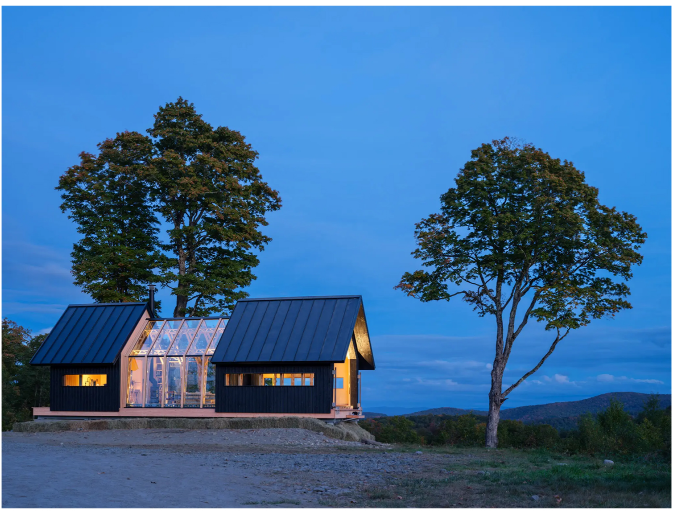
“Cabin ANNA is a receptacle for the environment,” he said. “It’s a tool to listen, look, feel, smell and take the environment in.”



“To be mindful of your body in space, quiet your mind and be aware of your surroundings, the cabin is perfect for that,” Ms. Lanneaux said. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

Ms. Lanneaux ordered her cabin this past February. After building and shipping it, Mr. Schols traveled to Vermont to personally oversee assembly in September. The base cost of the cabin was 437,000 euros ($470,000), but Ms. Lanneaux said building the foundation, shipping and installation expenses, and running utilities brought the total to $777,000.

Each unit is crafted in the Netherlands from metal and wood. Ms. Lanneaux’s cabin has a black-stained European Douglas fir exterior and Oregon pine interior. Most people place the cabin on a helical pile foundation, Mr. Schols said, but Ms. Lanneaux chose a full concrete foundation to contain a heat pump and water heater and to help keep the cabin from freezing in winter.



One section, with glass walls and ceiling, can make the center of the structure a solarium. Oliver Parini for The New York Times

Ms. Lanneaux is not alone in finding Cabin ANNA intriguing. Mr. Schols said he has built 15 so far, including some that are available for short-term rental in the Netherlands, and a recently completed project in Turkey. Ms. Lanneaux’s cabin is the first in the United States, but Mr. Schols is already at work on more, including one cabin currently being assembled in South Carolina, and upcoming projects in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Texas, California and Hawaii.

Now that Ms. Lanneaux’s cabin is in place, “it’s even better than I imagined,” she said on a recent morning, while awaiting the final connection of utilities. “It’s going to work so well here. It looks like it was meant for this.”

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