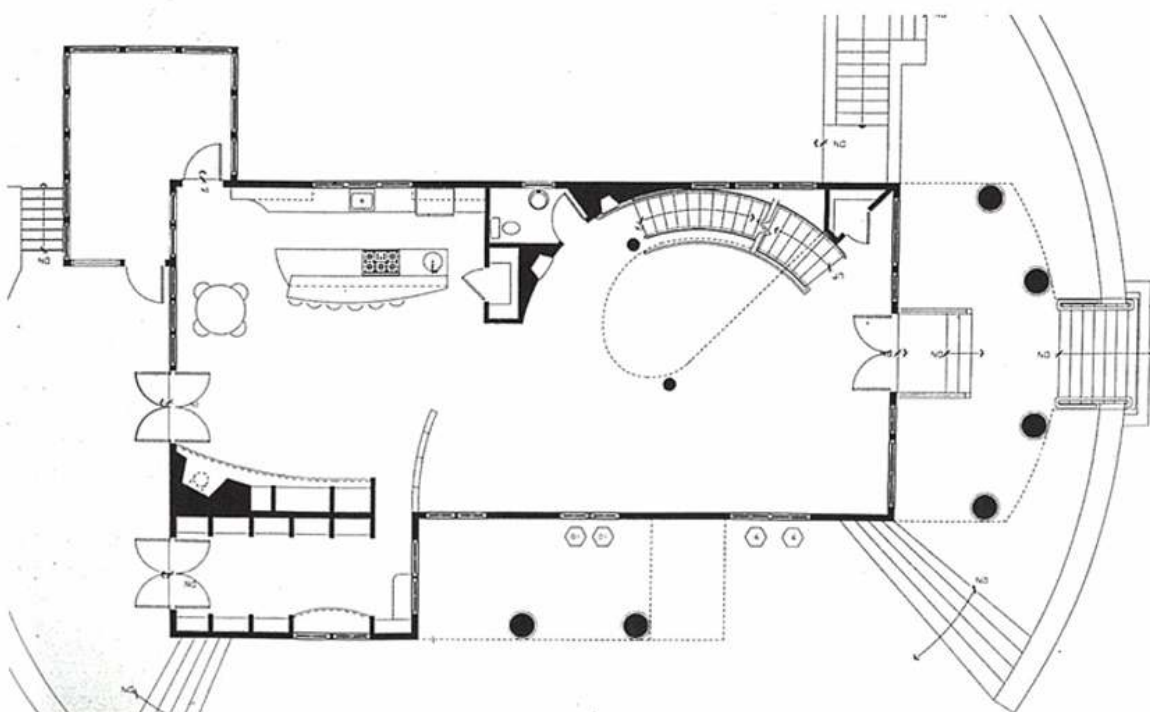


## ARCHITECT DUO DICKINSON

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT: An adaptive reuse of a barn on architect Duo Dickinson's property (photo courtesy of Dickinson); Dickinson (photo by Steve Blazo, blazo-photo.com); and the plan for a Dickinson design in Branford, Connecticut. (The finished home is pictured on page 112.)



BY REINE HAUSER

### THINKING SMALLER AND BETTER

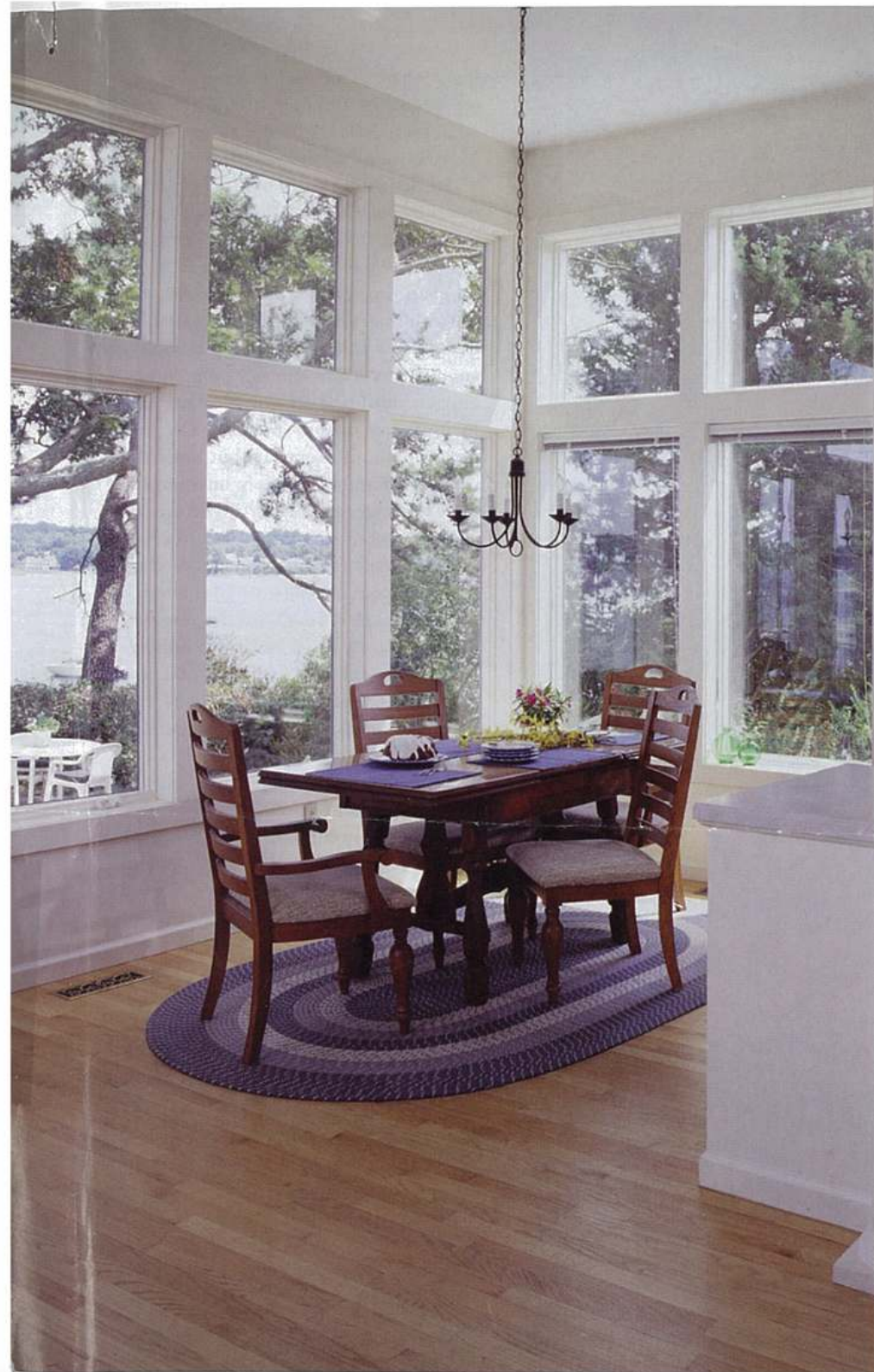
Size really does matter. Just ask architect Duo Dickinson, one of the founders of a tiny little architectural revolution, along with a wee handful of others like Jeremiah Eck, Dennis Wedlick, and Sarah Susanka. This movement promotes the idea of “just enough space” in residential design. It’s rethinking the conventional idea that, in building a dream house, one should just add room after room, each for a separate function, resulting in the behemoths we now fondly term “McMansions.”

Duo Dickinson, who now lives in Connecticut, spent his high school years in Buffalo and is a fervent admirer of Western New York and its architectural heritage. In the early 1980s, Dickinson and his compatriots came up with the revolutionary





TOP: A Dickinson design in Branford, Connecticut; RIGHT: The home of Michael and Nancy Johnston in Niantic, Connecticut.



idea that designing larger and larger homes (Aaron Spelling's 56,000-square-foot or Bill Gates' 66,000-square-foot homes are extreme examples) wasn't such a hot idea. Footprints of homes have grown exponentially in recent years, often for status rather than need. Dickinson realized that as rooms designed for a single use mushroomed, lot size and energy costs increased unnecessarily, while quality of workmanship and materials were often sacrificed for increased square footage. Family members wound up far apart in large, echoing houses.

Instead, Dickinson tries to design houses that actually meet the needs of the owners, and focuses on how owners live in a house. The cost savings of eliminat-



ing wasted space can be spent instead on beautiful finishes and solid construction. No more paper-thin walls! More custom hardwood trim!

In designing the not-so-big house, interior spaces are intelligently designed around the needs of the occupants. Do you throw a lot of large parties? Then entertaining spaces are spacious. Do you almost always have small dinner parties instead? Then focus on a smaller, luxurious dining room, which can do double duty for another use in between dinner parties. Do you play the piano everyday, but have the extended family over only once a year for Thanksgiving? Clearly, you'd need a comfortable room in which to practice your musical gifts and could adapt another room temporarily (if the space is designed that way), on the one day a year you need it, for your holiday spread. In other words, do you use your living room every day, or do you actually dust it more than you use it?

Obviously, designing small is not the only point here. Dickinson believes that homes should be the right size for their occupants, for the way they live, and the way they want to spend their lives. The architect has designed homes ranging from 1,100 square feet to 11,000 square feet, with budgets ranging equally widely from \$75,000 to \$6.5 million.

This postmodernist aesthetic doesn't advocate a particular "look." Each structure can look the way the owner desires—Cape Cod in New England, perhaps the ever-popular Tudor in Buffalo—rather than creating a specific design signature that says more about the architect than the owners.

Although Dickinson is known primarily as a residential architect, with projects ranging from additions to entire homes, he has also designed health clinics, churches, and camps. He has served as a consultant for municipalities and organizations, creating feasibility studies for senior housing, affordable housing, and even interfaith housing.

Dickinson is not a Buffalo native. But he spent his influential high school years here at Park School and returned on and off during weekends while he attended Cornell, so he figures he spent nine years in Buffalo

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in total. He says that "for [sheer] quantity and quality of architecture, Buffalo is, per square foot, the greatest city in the U.S." Now living in Connecticut with his wife and two sons, Duo Dickinson's career in architecture has been recog-

nized with numerous design awards. The author of six ground-breaking books about residential design (including *Small Houses for the Next Century* and *The House You Build*), Dickinson has taught at Yale and Roger Williams University and is a frequent lecturer on the subject of residential architecture. Dickinson's next book is *Saved by Design* (Taunton Press, 2009).

His work has been featured in publications including *Architectural Record*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Boston Globe*, *Home Magazine*, *House Beautiful*, *Interior Design*, *Metropolitan Home*, *New England Monthly*, the *New York Times Home Section* and *Sunday Magazine*, the *Old House Journal Catalogue*, *This Old House Magazine*, *Progressive Architecture*, and forty-one others. He is also one of the founders of the Congress of Residential Architects and a frequent commentator on television and radio programs. Dickinson's custom home designs have been built for clients in Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, New Jersey, California, Nebraska, Indiana, Massachusetts, and suburban Tokyo.

Duo Dickinson believes that we should focus on those things in life that bring us joy, by building the spaces we actually need. Good things come in the right-sized packages. ☺

REINE HAUSER IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S GRAYCLIFF, AND A WRITER. SHE BELIEVES THAT HER OWN PRIVATE RESIDENCE IS TOO BIG, HER YARD IS JUST THE RIGHT SIZE, AND THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS TOO MUCH CHOCOLATE.