



# THINK SMALL

Maximizing minimal space, a local architecture firm is designing micro homes for those in need. **BY MADELINE HOLLERN**

**W**hen McKinney York Architects offered to create a tiny house for Community First! Village, the small project was actually a tall order: making a livable 120-square-foot dwelling that could withstand the Texas heat sans air conditioning.

The idea originated in 2014 when the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Austin had a competition for local architects to design a tiny home for Community First!—a supportive community that provides sustainable, permanent housing for the chronically homeless in Central Texas—and McKinney York founding principal Heather McKinney served as a juror. Inspired to contribute themselves, the firm later reached out to the organization and offered to plan and build a house pro bono.

After studying wind and solar orientation, the team created a blueprint that promoted passive energy, with enough height for heat to rise, a screened porch to funnel air through the house, and an innovative roof design. “One of the creative things that we did was this double roof that reflects a lot of the sun off the top roof, which floats, and then the actual house has another roof below it that’s shaded by this upper roof,” McKinney says.

Featuring durable knotty pine walls, the home also includes a bed, closet, and small kitchen area in the interior. (Community First! has communal bathrooms and kitchen spaces on-site for its residents.) To maximize space, the team built in storage around the bed, closet, and counter areas, and they added a cantilevered bench on the porch that allows for outdoor seating.

The firm’s initial micro home (pictured) was completed in 2017, with four more of this prototype slated to be built. McKinney York has also designed a 265-square-foot model that will include a sliding barn door separating the bedroom and living room areas, providing more privacy. The first of these four prototypes began construction in May.

More than 20 local companies, including BEC Austin, Austin Shadeworks, Grand Openings, Eastside Lumber, Perfect Countertops, and Dan White Screens and Things, have contributed their time and resources to these two projects. “A lot of the materials in here—the millwork itself, the cladding on the inside, the curtains, the blinds, the stove on the countertop—were donated by people that we have relationships with around town,” says McKinney York architect Aaron Taylor. “It was a great groundswell of giving.”

▼ The screened porch captures prevailing south-east breezes for passive cooling. Because the micro home does not include air conditioning, McKinney York Architects also created a double roof design that deflects heat.

► The 120-square-foot home includes flexible built-in storage and low-maintenance walls made of durable knotty pine.

