

LESS SPACE, MORE STYLE - TINY HOUSE LIVING MAGAZINE!

TINY LIVING



**Tiny House
Hub**

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**Returning Kiwi Seeks Land in Nelson to
Settle for a Tiny Home & Two Rescue Cats**

**FEATURED LAND
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WHY MORE KIWI WOMAN ARE GOING TINY WHEN LESS BECOMES EVERYTHING

By Anika Meyers

When Kathryn moved into her tiny home, it wasn't the lack of space that unnerved her. It was the Tupperware. Forty-three mismatched lids and containers, some cracked, others lidless, all of them stuffed into a cupboard she no longer had. "I stood there, holding this stupid plastic container, and just started crying," she laughs now. "I wasn't crying about the Tupperware. I was grieving the version of me who thought I needed that much kitchen."

Kathryn, 56, had spent decades accumulating. A four-bedroom house, a career in education, three kids, a linen cupboard full of spare duvets and towels for guests that never came. But after a messy divorce and her youngest moving overseas, the house that once held so much life began to feel like a burden.

"It was too big, too empty, and too expensive to heat," she says. "I didn't want to be that woman stuck in a cold house watching re-runs with a blanket on her knees." So she sold it. The house, the furniture, the too-many wine glasses. And she bought a tiny house on wheels and leased a patch of land outside Taupō. "I went from four bedrooms to one room. But I've never felt so free."

Across the motu, more women are doing the same. Choosing to let go of the big house, the mortgage, the 'just-in-case' clutter, and stepping into something smaller, but lighter, in every sense of the word.



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Shrinking the house, growing the life

Louise, 63, lost her husband to cancer, and with him, the only person she truly wanted to share her forever home with. "I tried to stay," she says. "But the house became a mausoleum. His things were everywhere. And the silence... it was deafening." At first, she looked at downsizing into a flat. But a friend sent her a link to a tiny house builder. "I thought, why not?" Three months later, Louise moved into her 8m tiny house and parked it on her daughter's rural section in Levin.

"The first night, I lay in bed and cried with relief. It was mine. It was warm. It was enough."

Now, her days are filled with morning walks, baking for her grandkids, and painting at a little fold-out table by the window. "There's not a thing I miss from the old house," she says. "Except maybe the lemon tree. But I planted a new one here."

Theresa's reboot in 27 square metres

Theresa, 49, was burnt out after years as an office manager. "I'd been holding everything together for everyone, work, ageing parents, the house, my

own expectations. But I was sinking."

She took a long weekend road trip to clear her head. "I didn't plan on it, but I just... kept driving. I lived out of my car and a chilly bin for nearly three months. That's when I realised how little I actually needed." Returning home felt like stepping back into a life that didn't fit anymore. So she sold her belongings, gave notice on her rental, and commissioned a tiny house to be built.

"I'd never imagined myself in a tiny house, I thought they were for backpackers or hipsters. But once I walked into one, it was like my nervous system calmed down."

Now her 12m home is parked at a quiet site near Napier, where she wakes to birdsong, drinks her coffee in bare feet, and knows exactly where everything she owns is.

"Tiny living gave me back my peace. I thought I was downsizing, but really, I was starting over."

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Nina: “My garage was a museum of my past life”

At 52, Nina had reached a point of quiet resignation. A three-bedroom rental in the Bay of Plenty. A grown son overseas. Boxes in the garage full of camping gear, broken photo frames, and shoes she hadn't worn in a decade. “My house felt like it belonged to someone else. Someone busier. Someone sadder.”

When her lease ended, she decided not to renew it. Instead, she bought a second-hand tiny house and leased a space on a farm with two other women in similar stages of life. Her greyhound, Sarah Jessica Barker, moved in too. “It was chaos at first, you don't realise how many mugs you own until you have nowhere to put them. But the clarity came quickly. I only kept what made me feel good.” She gave away 90% of her stuff. Her weekends, once full of vacuuming and errands, are now spent gardening, cycling, and reading library books in the sun. “The clutter stole my time,” she says. “Getting rid of it gave it back.”

It's not just about stuff, it's about permission

For every woman interviewed, moving into a tiny home was not simply a downsizing. It was a letting go of shoulds, of guilt, of the weight of other people's expectations.

“I looked around and thought, why am I still carrying this?” she says. “These weren't heirlooms. These were obligations.” In the end, she kept a few letters, a photo album, and a ceramic teapot shaped like a chicken, “just because it makes me smile.” The rest went to op shops, recycling, or the tip. “I thought it would be sad,” she says. “But it was liberating. It felt like I was clearing space for my actual life to begin.” Theresa remembers sitting in her storage unit, surrounded by a sea of boxes labelled wedding gifts, Mum's stuff, Year 12.

What do you really need to feel at home?

Tiny homes are not a magic fix. There are practical challenges: limited storage, composting toilets, and learning to live with less. But for the women in this story, none of those things were dealbreakers. In fact, many said they wish they'd done it sooner. Kathryn, who now lives debt-free with her vegetable garden and a dog called Frankie, puts it like this:

“I used to live in a house where I couldn't afford to fix the roof. Now I live in a home where I can afford to say yes to myself.”

What she gave up in square metres, she gained in freedom. And freedom, it turns out, doesn't need a walk-in wardrobe.

It needs a place to breathe, a window with a view, and the courage to say: this is enough.



5 COSTLY TINY HOME ERRORS (AND HOW YOU CAN AVOID THEM)

It was supposed to be her dream home. Cosy, cleverly designed, and mobile. But just six months after moving into her custom-built tiny house, Sarah* noticed something odd. “There was a strange smell coming from under the bathroom floor,” she recalls. “It turned out the builder hadn’t sealed the wet area properly. The entire subfloor had started to rot.”

The remediation cost her over \$10,000, money she’d saved for a greywater system and solar upgrades. “It was devastating. And the builder refused to take responsibility.”

Sarah isn’t alone. As the popularity of tiny homes grows, so too do the stories of costly mistakes made during the buying process. From shoddy workmanship to legal blind spots, many first-time buyers are learning the hard way that “tiny” doesn’t always mean “simple.”

An Unregulated Industry

Unlike traditional housing, tiny homes, especially those on wheels, fall into a grey area of regulation in New Zealand. Depending on their use and how they’re classified, they may be considered vehicles, buildings, or something in between.

Consumer NZ spokesperson Jessica Wilson warns that this legal ambiguity makes it easier for disreputable operators to take shortcuts. “There’s no formal register of builders, no mandatory warranties, and no consistent building standards across the board,” she says. “It’s essentially a buyer-beware market.”

That’s something Christchurch resident Dave learnt after purchasing his first tiny house from a well-known builder. “They advertised it as ‘certified,’ but it turned out the certification was just for the trailer, not the house itself.” When Dave tried to sell the home a year later, the lack of a Code Compliance Certificate became a sticking point with buyers. “I had to knock \$20,000 off the asking price.”

Mistake #1: Not Doing Due Diligence on the Builder

One of the most common regrets among tiny house buyers is rushing into a build without properly vetting the company behind it.

Megan, who lives in a 11-metre tiny home in Christchurch, says she was drawn in by slick marketing and a fast turnaround time.

"I checked their Facebook reviews but didn't ask to speak to previous customers," she admits. "If I had, I would've found out about the delays, the dodgy wiring, and the roof leak that affected several of us."

Tiny house consultant Rebecca McLean says a few simple checks can save buyers thousands. "Ask for recent client references, not just testimonials on a website," she advises. "Request proof of insurance, check the company's registration status, and get clarity on warranties. If something feels off, walk away."

Mistake #2: Overlooking Legal and Site Requirements

Another trap is buying a tiny house without fully understanding where you can legally place it. Councils vary widely in how they treat tiny homes, and even mobile homes can require resource consent in certain areas.

Shane, who bought a tiny home for his daughter to live in on his property outside Nelson, was blindsided by local zoning rules. "We were told by the builder we didn't need consent because it's on wheels," he says. "But the council said that because she was living in it full time and connected to services, it counted as a building." The result? A \$12,000 compliance bill. Many buyers assume that tiny homes automatically fall under the building code exemptions, but that's not always the case. Sharla May, founder of Tiny House Hub, says it's essential to understand your council's stance. "We see this all the time, people buy the home first and figure the land out later. It needs to be the other way around."

Mistake #3: Blowing the Budget on Aesthetics

From cedar cladding to high-spec benchtops, the tiny house movement is no stranger to luxury

finishes. But several homeowners we spoke to said their biggest regret was overspending on looks rather than functionality.

"I spent \$6,000 on bifold doors and then realised I had no money left for a composting toilet," laughs Anna, who lives in her tiny home near Taupō. "They look amazing, but it's not exactly practical when you're peeing into a bucket."

Industry professionals recommend prioritising structural integrity, insulation, ventilation, and smart storage over fancy upgrades. "Tiny homes are subject to a lot of movement, especially when towed," says Angus Hamilton from Tiny Towing Solutions. "What looks good in a showhome doesn't always hold up on the road."

Mistake #4: Not Future-Proofing the Design

Life changes, and so should your tiny house. But many early adopters say they wish they'd thought more carefully about long-term needs. Gill and her partner moved into a 8-metre tiny home in their late 50s. "It was perfect at the start, compact and cosy," she says. "But as we aged, the ladder to the loft got harder and harder. Now my husband has a knee issue and can't sleep up there at all."

Other regrets include limited kitchen bench space, no provision for pets, or lack of privacy when living as a couple. "Tiny living magnifies every little inconvenience," Gill adds. Designers recommend choosing a layout with future adaptability. Ground-floor sleeping, space for a washing machine, and room for a desk or second occupant are all worth considering.

Mistake #5: Skipping a Contract or Formal Agreement

A surprising number of tiny home buyers enter into handshake agreements or vague email chains, assuming goodwill will carry the project.



It's a risk that can backfire badly.

Wellington-based buyer Helena paid a \$30,000 deposit for a custom build, only for the company to go into liquidation before completing the frame. "Because I didn't have a proper contract outlining milestones or a refund clause, I was at the bottom of the list of creditors."

Industry professionals say a watertight build contract is non-negotiable. "At the very least, it should specify payment stages, a build timeline, materials, and what happens if there are delays or disputes." They also recommends using a third-party land lease agreement when parking your home on someone else's property. "It protects both parties and outlines responsibilities—power, water, notice periods. We have [templates people can download on the Tiny House Hub](#)."

Lessons Learnt

Despite the challenges, most tiny homeowners say they don't regret the move, only how they went about it.

"I'd do it again in a heartbeat," says Sarah. "But next time, I'd ask more questions. I'd slow down.

"I'd treat it like any other major investment, because that's exactly what it is."

Buyer Checklist Before You Sign Anything

- Research at least three builders and speak to past clients
- Check the company's legal status, insurance, and refund policy
- Confirm what certifications your house needs and who provides them
- Talk to your local council about compliance and site use
- Ensure your contract is comprehensive and signed
- Budget realistically for both build and land setup costs
- Think long-term: accessibility, storage, and lifestyle shifts
- Don't pay large deposits without clear terms

*Name changed to protect privacy.

For more advice, downloadable checklists, and lease agreement templates, visit www.tinyhousehub.co.nz.

THE REBUILD PROJECT - PART 2

DIGGING IN, THE FIRST THREE MONTHS ON THE LAND

Surreal, exhausting, slightly terrifying... but also exactly where I'm meant to be.

When I first walked onto the land after settlement, it felt oddly split in two, like it hadn't decided what it wanted to be yet. A neat, grassy entrance, trimmed like it was expecting guests. And then beyond that, a full hectare of overgrown grass and gorse. Wild. Unapologetic. Very Northland.

I knew it was going to be a lot of work. I just didn't realise how quickly it would all begin.

Paperwork, Permits & Plans

Those first few weeks were full noise.

I worked with my builder to get the geotech report done so we could submit the building consent application. At the same time, I had to arrange a formal valuation on what the first house would be worth once completed, just to keep the bank happy and reassure them that I wasn't building some elaborate treehouse with fairy lights and no resale value.

I finalised the house layout, chose the materials, and got lost in the obsessive details of designing the kitchen. There were about four hours where I spiralled over which exact shade of oak the cabinets should be. (Do you want warm oak? Cool oak? Slightly regret-your-life-choices oak?) It's all fun and games until you realise the one you picked in daylight looks completely different under LEDs. Once all of that was in council hands, I turned to the other part of the dream: getting the tiny house sites ready.



Author: **Sharla May**



From Gorse to Grounded

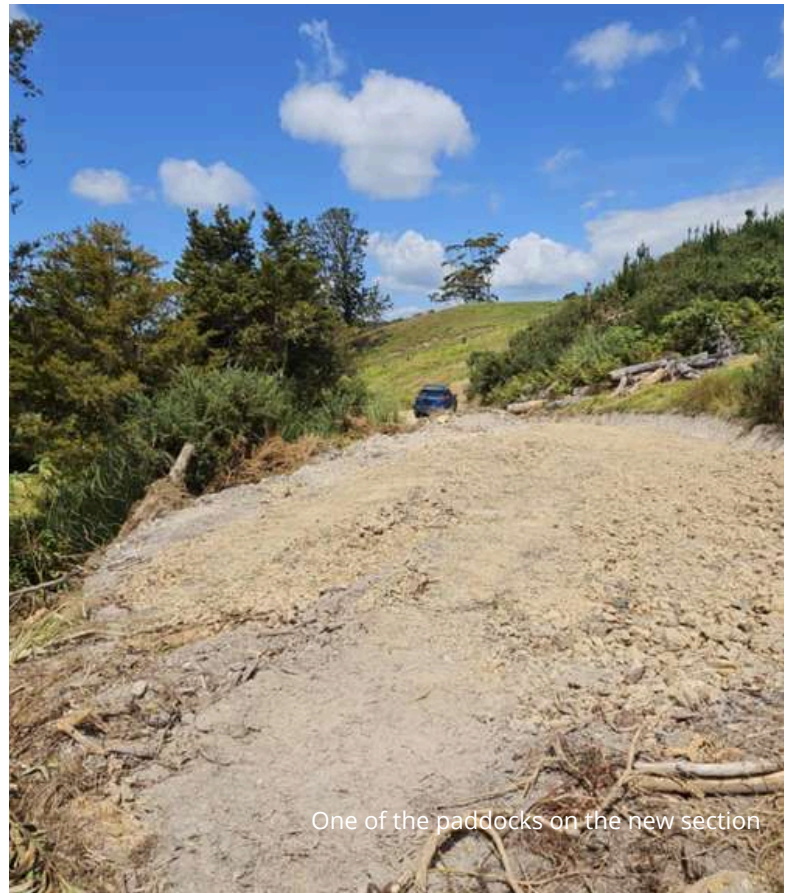
Site One was feral. Gorse everywhere. I hired a local guy with a digger to come in and carve out a driveway, clear the land, and level a spot for parking. That section now has its own completely separate entrance, tucked away in a corner of the property where the tenant can come and go without us even seeing each other. It's entirely off-grid—just how they like it. Site Two is further up the hill and looks out over gorgeous rural views. Hidden behind a screen of mature trees, it's peaceful and private, and it has both power and a large water tank. The plan was always to offer two different setups, one off-grid, one semi-serviced, and give each tenant proper space. I didn't want this to feel like a campground. I wanted it to feel like home. Both of my tiny house tenants moved in not long after the sites were prepped (obviously, I found them via [Landshare](#)). And in one of those strange, cinematic moments, both tiny homes arrived on the same day. It felt huge. Like a shift in the land, and in me.

The Driveway, the Neighbours & the Fear

One of the first things I did after buying the property was walk the boundaries and introduce myself to the neighbours. I wanted them to hear the plan from me, not from whispers or assumptions. I explained that I'd be leasing land to a couple of tiny house tenants, building two modest homes, and aiming to keep everything respectful and low-impact.

A few raised eyebrows turned into warm conversations. Most people just wanted to know I wasn't setting up a caravan commune or doing something dodgy. Once we'd talked through things, you could feel the worry dissolve.

And I needed that good energy, because the fear? It's real. Some mornings I wake up thinking, *What have I done?*



I'm still paying rent elsewhere. I've got a mortgage. I've got a build ahead of me. And like any self-respecting woman who's watched too many episodes of *Grand Designs*, I know exactly how quickly budgets can get blown. Kevin McCloud's smug, concerned face lives in my head rent-free.

But when I pull up to the driveway of the section, I feel something else too: grounded. Happy. Peaceful. It still doesn't feel quite real, but it does feel like mine.

Running on Spreadsheets & Stubbornness

I've realised something important about myself through all of this: I don't make impulsive decisions. I *can't*. I get overwhelmed if I have to choose something on the spot. I need time. I need options. And yes, I need a spreadsheet. If something's not on a list or in a document, my brain can't process it. It might not be glamorous, but it's how I've made this work. Every driveway quote. Every timeline. Every contingency plan.

They're all laid out in cells and colour-coded tabs. That's where my sense of control lives. And when the decisions feel too big? I break them down until they feel small. Because at the end of the day, this isn't just a house build. It's a full-blown life rebuild. And the last thing I want is to recreate the same financial stress and burnout I went tiny to escape.

Progress, But Also Patience

Right now, the land is changing. Slowly. Tangibly. There's still more landscaping to do, especially once the wetter months arrive and I can actually get plants in the ground. I've got big dreams for a lush, tropical garden that wraps around the houses and frames the driveways. But without the water tanks installed and filled, I've had to hold back. Clay soil and full sun don't exactly

scream "thriving banana grove."

But I can see it. I can *feel* it. The future I've been planning for years is unfolding, tentatively, stubbornly, beautifully.

The tenants are happy. The land is quiet. The paperwork is moving (slowly, as it does). And me? I'm still scared sometimes. Still overwhelmed. But I also feel proud. And ready. And like for the first time in a very long time, this plan might actually work. Out of respect for my tenants' privacy, I won't be sharing any photos of their tiny homes on site, but trust me, they're there, and they've settled in well.

Next up: Building begins, choosing materials, budget fears, and why no one warned me about the emotional rollercoaster of picking lights.



Wondering how to find land for your tiny house or motorhome?

Landshare: New Zealand's online directory connecting tiny house owners and land owners.



NEW

LAND FOR LEASE



Land Lease Opportunity for Tiny House in **Whangarei, Northland**



 [Click here to view the full listing](#)

 \$200 per week

- **Available:** Now
- **Site foundation:** paddock
- **Driveway:** concrete
- **Water connection:** Yes
- **Power connection:** No
- **Off-street parking:** Yes
- **Pets:** Yes
- **Child Friendly:** No
- **Smokers:** Yes
- **WiFi connection:** Yes
- **Private location:** No



NORTHLAND

Discover this serene flat paddock nestled in rural Whangārei. Accessible via a secure concrete driveway with electric gate access, the site offers filtered tank water, Wi-Fi connectivity, and optional power hookup at an additional cost. Parking is available both on the main driveway and within the paddock behind a private gate. Located just 12 minutes from the hospital and 15 minutes from the city center, this peaceful setting is also close to a local tavern, providing a perfect balance of rural tranquility and urban convenience.

NEW

LOOKING FOR LAND

Nelson, Tasman



 [Click here to view the full listing](#)



NELSON

Looking for:

- **Power connection:** No
- **Water connection:** Yes
- **Off-street Parking:** Yes
- **Pet Friendly:** Yes
- **Child Friendly:** No
- **Smokers:** No
- **WiFi Connection:** No
- **Private Location:** No

Amanda-Jane Fairey, a Kiwi-born global nomad, seeks a long-term (2–5 years) land lease within 30 minutes of Nelson, Tasman. After 30+ years abroad, she has returned home and now tutors students in literacy. She lives with her two senior rescue cats, who enjoy sunny outdoor spaces. She is open to sharing land with other tiny house owners.



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