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Scaling down a retirement lifestyle

By [Sonya Stinson](#) • Bankrate.com

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Downsized retirement lifestyles



When empty nesters think about changing their [retirement](#) lifestyle, they usually consider downsizing to a place with fewer rooms to heat and cool, less grass to cut.

But some retired and semiretired boomers have changed their lifestyle to the extreme, ditching their fixed residences for homes on wheels, going off the grid and finding other ways to live smaller.

They're the kind of people Lloyd Kahn, editor-in-chief of Shelter Publications, features in his book, "Tiny Homes: Simple Shelter," such as the elderly man who fashioned himself a home out of a 120-square-foot garden shed, or the 70-something woman who lived in a converted school bus.

Kahn says the current tiny-homes movement is a bit of a throwback to the late '60s and early '70s.

"It's an idea that's been around, but all of a sudden a lot of people are thinking in terms of getting smaller rather than larger," says Kahn.

This trend doesn't apply to everyone, of course. But Bankrate found four examples of people who altered their retirement lifestyle, ranging from the fairly typical to the extremely frugal.

Retirement lifestyle: A cozy apartment



Priscilla Kleinman, a retired teacher and Kenner, La., resident, shrank her living space by about 60 percent when she moved from her 2,200-square-foot home to a 900-square-foot apartment. She later relocated to another similarly sized apartment in the gated community where she now lives.

Kleinman and her ex-husband sold their home in 2002 after they divorced. Because the house was paid off, downsizing for Kleinman has actually meant an increase in housing expenses. She says her current rent, which she would only give as "more than \$800 a month" for a one-bedroom, second-floor walk-up, is straining her budget.

"My rent is more than what we were paying in maintenance, insurance and taxes," says Kleinman, who nevertheless appreciates not having to worry about the upkeep of her apartment.

With her rent going up each year, Kleinman expects she'll eventually have to downsize yet again.

"The ideal scenario for me would be if my daughter and son-in-law had a house with a mother-in-law apartment," she

says.

Kahn has noticed a growing interest among boomers in building small accessory dwelling units to accommodate aging parents.

"Portland, Ore., and Santa Cruz, Calif., have ordinances that make it easier for people to build these additional units in their backyards," he says.

Retirement lifestyle: A remote cabin



Photo by John Barbara

For semiretired John Barbara and his wife, Sandra-Leah, scaling back their lifestyle was more dramatic than the reduction in their living space when they moved into a Philipsburg, Mont., log cabin in April 2012.

The couple had lived for 15 years in a 1,500-square-foot ranch-style log home about 90 miles from New York City. Their new cabin on their horse farm is somewhat smaller at about 1,150 square feet, but not exactly cramped. They spent \$230,000 to have the home custom built by Montana Mobile Cabins, one of more than a dozen prefab and kit home suppliers featured in Kahn's book.

Many of the book's cottages are much smaller than that of the Barbaras, including models starting at less than \$3,000 for about 48 square feet.

Before their move, Sandra-Leah Barbara owned a small printing business in upstate New York, and John Barbara commuted three hours each way to his job in the Manhattan financial district. The area's high property tax rates provided a big incentive to head West.

"Our taxes are about 10 percent of what they were in New York," John Barbara says.

Homeowners insurance premiums and income taxes are also lower, and Montana has no sales tax -- compared to New York's combined city and state tax of nearly 9 percent. The Barbaras are off the grid, too. After several weeks of using only a generator to power up when they first moved in, they installed solar panels.

Retirement lifestyle: RV living on the road



Photos by Lloyd Treichel

Lloyd Treichel was already living in a modest 900-square-foot house in Denver when he retired from his career in the computer industry at the end of 2000. Three months later he paid \$40,000 for a 24-foot by 8-foot fifth-wheel trailer, hitched it to his new pickup truck and started living on the road.

To fit into his tiny space, Treichel sold some of his household items to his children, but he says none of it was difficult to part with.

"I guess I've never been too much into things," says Treichel, who writes about his RV living and travels at his blog named Wandrin Lloyd. One splurge was the \$2,007 he spent on his cellphone, wireless Internet and satellite radio connections. In 2012, he spent

\$6,800 to rent parking spaces and hook up to utilities, \$3,700 on truck fuel and \$1,700 on household expenses and maintenance.

Think RV traveling may be the life for you? According to the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, current prices for fifth-wheel travel trailers that sleep up to six people range from \$18,000 to \$160,000 new. The largest and most luxurious RV category is the type A motor home (with the vehicle and living space in one piece) that sleeps up to six. Its prices range from \$60,000 to \$500,000.

Retirement lifestyle: Frugal living at sea



Gary and Julie Pierce experienced eight years of drastically downsized living -- spending six to nine months a year at sea -- before moving to their current home in a suburban Phoenix planned retirement community.

Two years after Gary Pierce took early retirement in 1990 from his job as a commercial real estate broker, the couple bought a used



35-foot Island Packet sailboat and set off to explore the Caribbean. They chose St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, as their home base. Pierce estimates the vessel's living space on the sailboat was about 50 square feet. Their previous two-story, 1,800-square-foot home near Houston was a mansion by comparison.

Provisions on board included two sleeping berths, a three-burner propane stove in the galley and a 90-gallon water tank. Today, you could probably expect to spend close to \$90,000 and up for a similar used cruiser.

The boat came with a wind generator, and Pierce spent about \$600 each for two solar panels in 1994. He says the boat's 12-volt refrigerator sucked up more than 80 percent of the power.

"When we were down in the Caribbean, we spent \$1,000 a month for everything, including food, normal boat maintenance, entertainment and fuel -- gas for the dinghy and diesel fuel for the in-board motor," says Pierce, who maintains a website called Frugal-Retirement-Living.com.

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