



HOUSE CALLS

We (might) own the smallest house in the Hamptons

But these architects are hardly roughing it, having made the most out of a compact space

BY **MARY JO BOWLING** | JUN 26, 2017, 9:30AM EDT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **PERNILLE LOOF**

Architects Paul Rice and Ward Welch don't actually know for a fact that they possess the smallest home and the most petite pool in the Hamptons, the New York enclave known for its affluence and oversize glamour. But the couple thinks their 520-square-foot former fishing shack in Amagansett could be a serious contender for the title.

"This is an area that's known for larger homes that are done to perfection," says Rice. "Although we entertained ideas of expanding this house, building codes kept us from going up or pushing out. We decided to keep it simple."



In the living room, the couple changed the roofline from flat to gabled, lining the ceiling with Carolina Pine. The furniture is almost exclusively vintage and second hand, including the coffee table, which is crafted from a ship's hatch.

They decided to work with the home's existing footprint, but make it more livable and open to the lot.

Demolition began much sooner than anticipated—to the shock and dismay of both architect-owners (Rice founded [Paul Rice Architecture](#) and Welch is a principal at [CWB Architects](#) and [Fearins Welch Interior Design](#)).

“We had just purchased the place, and we had no concrete plans or ideas about what we wanted to do with it,” says Rice. “We removed a small piece of wall trim, and then something took us over—some kind of architect desire or a condition? Within two hours, we had demo’ed the entire place and rendered it unlivable.”

Their spate of unexpected handiwork left them stunned, but motivated. “It forced us to work together to come up with a plan,” says Rice.



Ward Welch (left) and Paul Rice (right) relax with their dog Pepper.

Before the impromptu gutting, the home was a mere three rooms: a combined kitchen-and-living room, a very long, very awkward bedroom, and a small bath. The architects relocated the kitchen-dining, removed much of the low ceiling, divided the bowling alley of a bedroom into a duo of sleeping quarters (master and guest), and added a fireplace.

Now, a soaring vaulted ceiling floats over the living room and is lined with Carolina pine and rough-hewn, white-painted tie beams. “Many think that wood ceilings make a small space feel smaller. But for us, the opposite is true, it draws the eye up and makes it feel larger,” Welch says. “As for the rustic nature of the beams and ceiling, this house is a jewel of sorts, but we didn’t want it to feel too precious.” Rice adds: “I think a wood ceiling gives you a lot more bang for your buck.”



Although the pool isn't Olympic in its proportions, its lush, green setting and fountain give it a serene feeling.

The new galley kitchen is just 12-feet long, but it doesn't sacrifice luxuries. "We were careful to leave prep space between the sink, the cooktop, and the refrigerator," says Welch. "Our appliances are small, but we got the best we could afford—including an 18-inch-wide Miele dishwasher and a 27-inch-wide SubZero refrigerator." (Rice describes the proportions as appropriate for "Barbie" or "Ken.")

Two design features make it work and help with prep: The uppermost shelf serves as a open pantry—it's hidden by an encased beam—and the backsplash incorporates a ledge for the perfect *mise en place* staging area. "It's just right for putting down your knife or ingredients," says Rice. "We now try to include this feature in many of our projects, because it frees up the prep area."



Left: The kitchen isn't expansive, but the architects outfitted it with high-end appliances from [Miele](#) and [Sub-Zero](#). Right: A shed was remodeled to become a pool house with a ceiling crafted from wood salvaged when a neighbor tore down a garage. The wallpaper is from [Phillip Jeffries](#), the rug is from [HomeGoods](#).

The adjacent dining room sits under a dropped ceiling. “This is a nine-foot ceiling, and it hides the mechanics for the HVAC,” says Rice. “But it is also a design element, as it makes for a better conversation space.”

In the living room, [the Rumford fireplace](#) was a must for both men. “We use this space all year round,” says Ward. “And we use that fireplace in nearly all seasons.”

The couple also uses the garden year round, so it’s an extension of the living space. “The first thing we do when we arrive is open the house up, and we can move between the house and yard easily—and that’s one reason the house feels more expansive than it really is,” says Welch.



Left: The architects added a fireplace in the living room. It’s topped by a painting they nicknamed “Kevin Kline,” because the man it depicts and Ward Welch resemble the actor. The master and guest bedrooms flank the mantel. Right: In the bedrooms, the headboard are by Prestige Furniture & Design Group, the fabric is by [Tyler Graphic](#), and the wallpaper is from [Phillip Jeffries](#).

The 322-square-foot pool is the star of the yard. “Many people who have a large lot install a simple rectangular pool,” says Rice. “With the size and restrictions of our property, everything had to be much more considered.”

The pool has several tiers; and the architects say everyone from 90-year-old relatives to young children love the feature. “The level changes mean you can easily wade into it and get out of it,” says Welch.

The lot is surrounded by a green “fence” in the form of large privet and Leyland Cypress trees. The towering greenery becomes a design statement and provides excellent privacy.

A year after the project unceremoniously started, the first phase was complete and the couple felt more connected than ever—against all odds. “We started at the beginning of our relationship, and it’s not always easy for two architects to work together. There’s no doubt that if either one of us did this on our own, it would look much different,” says Rice. “There’s no denying that there were some brutal arguments, but I think they brought us closer together and the collaboration made for a stronger project.”

It’s also made for a social life that’s as large and robust as the house is small. “We always have friends and family over, and it’s a constant stream of people going in and out Welch says that part of the appeal may be the home’s size.

“It seems like we are always the site of the party,” he says. “The small size is so intriguing, we have friends who bring their guests here just to see and experience it.” ■

