

# Did Starting Small



**Phase 1** Bedrooms: 1 Bathrooms: 1 Size: 714 sq. ft. Cost: \$112 per sq. ft.

**Phase 2** Bedrooms: 2 Bathrooms: 2

## We revisit a house designed to grow over time

In the late 1990s, my firm designed two projects that tackled the problem of how to start using your land when you're not ready to spend the money for your dream house ("Building Smaller, for Now," *FHB* #141). This story is about how one of them, the little Greek-revival farmhouse that was phase 1 of a larger home, worked out.

When they bought their land, Chris and Bette Noble were committed to living part of the year in Maine, with an eye toward eventually living there full-time.

Initially, we designed a Greek-revival farmhouse that pleased all of us (drawing facing page). By our calculations, however, it was going to cost around \$350,000. Although that figure would be affordable for

the Nobles at some point, it wasn't in the cards in the late '90s, so we decided to build the house in two phases. Phase 1 (photo above left, drawing p. 54) consisted of a main room with a kitchen and space for sitting and a dining table. A ladder in this room led to a loft over the screened porch.

The bedroom/bath, known as the "dependency," sat on piers and was bolted to the south end of the main room. The plan was to unbolt the dependency during phase 2, move it into the woods, and expand it to become a guest cottage. Then we would convert the main room into a dedicated living room with a fireplace, and fill in the rest of the three-bedroom house as planned.

It didn't work out that way.



# Work Out?

BY ROBERT KNIGHT



Size: 1248 sq. ft. Cost: \$232 per sq. ft.

**Phase 3** Home office Size: 216 sq. ft. Cost: \$273 per sq. ft. Total: 2178 sq. ft.

## to see if it stuck to the script

Instead, the house went through the same kind of evolution that Maine farmhouses in the 19th century underwent. The family's needs changed, and indeed even the family changed (sidebar p. 55).

### Eight years on

The idea of getting on the land really worked. For eight years, the house was used on weekends and for longer summer stays. When it came time to go to phase 2, though, the new Nobles decided they didn't need three bedrooms and didn't want a guest house. We moved the dependency around to the east and added enough space to it to make a downstairs bedroom and office accessible by wheelchair (floor

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**Starting point, west elevation.** The original plan was to build the Greek-revival farmhouse shown below, but to do it in two stages beginning with the one-story portion.





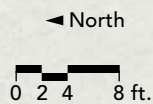
# CHANGES HAPPEN

## The starting point

Conceived as a three-bedroom house, the initial plan was prioritized into two phases to make the project more affordable.



Ground floor



Second floor

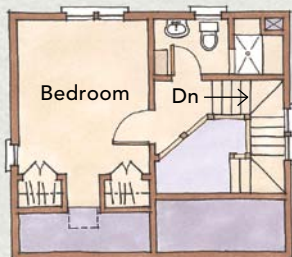


## Phase 2

Phase 2 deviated from the original plan. The dependency turned the corner, becoming a home office/guest bedroom.



Ground floor

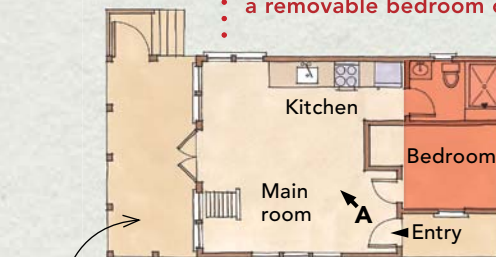


Second floor

## Phase 1



Phase 1 consisted of the living room/screened porch portion of the house, plus the "dependency": a removable bedroom on piers.



Screened porch

B →



Phase 3 added a dedicated office/studio, a concession to the fact that an office/guest bedroom just doesn't work once guests arrive.

## Phase 3





In the early '90s, I visited the Nobles on their newly purchased land and photographed their tent. Bette Noble, Chris's wife and my friend, died in 2002, and a year later, I returned to visit the warm, rustic *phase 1* house.

Love brought the major changes to our lives and the house. In 2004, Chris and I began redesigning *phase 2* with Knight Associates, my introduction to working with architects and contractors. I had no idea there was so much to say about so many details! Turning the corner with the new ell would provide a private first-floor bedroom and bathroom, an intimate outdoor space, and new views of the Bagaduce River. I had bonded with the dependency, so instead of setting it aside as a future guest house, we decided to incorporate it into the house as my home office.

Bob Knight had warned us about expecting a guest room to serve as a home office, and it wasn't long before I began to dream of having an area where I could continue working even when guests arrived. We sat down with the architects and designed a bright studio/project room with a high ceiling that links us to the woods and the nearby stream. One exterior door opens to the back porch, and an interior door goes into the guest room, eliminating the need for an additional bathroom. When guests are here, we leave the studio via the back-porch door and enter the door to the main house, preserving our guests' privacy. The resulting addition looks as if it has always been here.

—Christine Farrow-Noble,  
freelance writer and photographer



Phase 2

**Comfy camp for eight years.** The main room had a temporary kitchen and dining corner during phase 1 (left). People were so fond of this space and its unfinished quality that there was resistance to finishing the house. Photos taken at A on floor plan.

Phase 1





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plans, p. 54). The house got shorter and turned a corner, and the living room was dressed up and fitted with a fireplace (photos p. 55 and facing page).

The drawing above left shows the original version looking back from the water; the middle drawing shows what we ended up with at the end of phase 2 in 2006. Would I have done it exactly this way if we had built it all at once? Probably not, because this design is a bit more complex than it needs to be to accomplish the program. However, it created better exterior spaces and gave the house a stronger elevation from up the hill on the approach. It has more of that nice feel of an evolved farmhouse—and that’s because it did evolve—and I don’t think it looks like a house and an addition.

### **But wait—there’s more**

As the house became more “home” for the Nobles and as their place in the city started to recede into the status of the “other place,” they discovered that they needed to have more space. Not bedrooms—they were right about that—but they had underestimated the space and privacy they would need for work when they were here more of the time.

For some reason, many clients seem loath to admit their need for a real home office, and they say to me, “My office can double as the second guest bedroom.” Really?

Having house guests is not made more pleasant by having your ability to do your work canceled by their presence. Because the Nobles needed a dedicated workspace

for writing and other projects, we added another piece on the “ell” (floor plans, p. 54). The trick was to use this extension to give the ell an endpoint—and that mostly would be accomplished by how the roof was treated.

After first trying a simple extension of the hip (boring) and then removing the hip and putting a gable on the end (looked like a double-wide had run into the building), I realized that this new piece, rather than being hidden, needed to make its own statement. So we turned its roof perpendicular to the existing ridge of the ell and created a miniature Greek temple to end the building (photo above, drawing above right).

Of course, we’ll be in trouble if we need to extend this house again, but I probably can let my successor worry about that. □

Robert Knight is an architect in Blue Hill, Maine. Plans for this house are available at [www.luciaslittlehouses.com](http://www.luciaslittlehouses.com). Larry Packwood Builders constructed all three phases. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.



### **Phase 3 complete.**

*The new room at the far left of the house, a dedicated office and project studio, supplied the missing piece of the puzzle. The gable roof makes a proper conclusion to this one-story wing. Photo taken at B on floor plan.*







**It looks like it's always been this way.** Phase 1 and phase 2 come together at the columned wall between the living room and the kitchen/dining area (above). For the first eight years, the kitchen occupied the space now given over to the fireplace and its hearth (left). Photos taken at C and D on floor plan.