

small but perfect

DETAILS

Faced with a steep site and a low budget, Andrew Simpson turned to a Japanese design system for inspiration in creating his tiny Wellington home.



BIO

ARCHITECT

Andrew Simpson,
WireDog Architecture.

PREVIOUS WORKS

Simpson recently left Wellington's Parsonson Architects to set up his own firm. The home on these pages is his first new-build project – and also serves as his office at the moment. The home, designed by Simpson for himself and his partner, Krysty Peebles, is attracting attention for its ingenious spatial planning and the way it makes a steep site seem perfectly habitable.



Clockwise from left: Clever siting hides neighbouring properties; the home is essentially a cube with a pitched roof; a sliding door opens to the deck.



It is often said that constraints are a vital part of creating good architecture – that without any limitations to frame a project, an architect's task is akin to finding direction in a void. But when a building project is already up against the odds, it is surely insane to add another layer of complication. And yet, confronted by a tight budget and a steep, scrub-covered Wellington site, Andrew Simpson decided to do precisely this, by adopting a mid-century Japanese system for small homes to inspire his design.

Simpson had worked for a summer in Japan as an architecture student and attended an exhibition in Kyoto that, a decade later, was a valuable guide to designing his own home. The exhibition focused on the "Nine Tsubo House", a prototypical dwelling designed in 1952 by architect Makoto Masuzawa as a proposed solution to Japan's post-war housing shortage. A *tsubo* is a square made up of two *tatami* mats; nine of them together form a floor area of 50 square metres. Paradoxically, Simpson found the application of Masuzawa's small-home design principles made his task easier. "It was a way of imposing a discipline on the design, and it was a place to start," Simpson says.

A home measuring 50 square metres might seem intolerably small for many people, but it wasn't an issue for Simpson or his partner, Krysty Peebles, who had lived in a succession of petite spaces before creating this one.

After years of renting, the couple wanted to purchase their own home, but they couldn't afford a house in Wellington and weren't interested in living in a distant suburb. As a possible solution, Simpson created an early design based on Masuzawa's Nine Tsubo system and had it priced by a quantity surveyor. The results were promising. "It looked like it was doable as long as we