

5 minutes with Johanna

Interview by: Andrew Odom

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Andrew Odom: When did we first meet? I don't even remember. Was it at a festival or did I just call you?

Johanna Elsner: I think we scheduled a call. I'm pretty sure I was cooking dinner during that first call...which is my usual mom/work evening. I just know we were fast friends from that point on.

AO: So I obviously wanted to find out about Perch & Nest. How long has P&N been building tiny houses anyway?

JE: It's been about 4 years now which has flown by.

AO: And it is owned by you and your husband Tom. Did y'all start the business specifically to build tiny houses or did y'all do something before then?

JE: Tom had worked professionally as a carpenter for about 15 years and we flipped houses together for a few years before "going tiny". We still work in foundation spaces but have limited it to less than 1000 sq ft.

AO: So I've heard you talk about college. Did you go to college and major in architecture or construction management or anything like that?

JE: Funny story! I went to Culinary School which then led me to restaurant accounting and subsequently working in public accounting for 15 years before we started Perch & Nest. That education does help me a great deal with kitchen design and managing the back office of our business, but truthfully, since I was little, all

I ever wanted to do was design and construct Barbie houses. * big laugh * I remember visiting friends houses as a kid and mentally re-designing their houses. As an adult, I would hobby myself in reorganizing and decorating friends houses. Flipping houses with Tom fed my need to design and reclaim "what once was" but it wasn't until we discovered tiny building that I felt I had found the thing I always wanted to do.

AO: And so P&N is based in North Carolina. Are you a Carolina girl through and through? How do you feel North Carolina regards tiny houses? Are we pretty far off the mark?

JE: I am a born and raised North Carolinian but I wasn't raised by Southerners so I don't know where that puts me in the ranks. For us, I feel tiny houses have been well received in NC. We have certainly built a lot more NC based tiny's in the last year and are speaking with a lot more tiny curious folks in NC these days.

AO: I know y'all have built some outstanding houses and are known for pretty large interiors. What do you think the secret is to maximizing a small space?

JE: Obviously avoiding wasted space is key but starting with a list of "must haves" for everyone is the key starting point. Designing around only what you need is the quickest route to an efficient space. For me, I can take that list to create a layout that flows well and maximizes the space. It's like working a little jigsaw puzzle.

AO: And so is that what you primarily do for P&N? Do you work directly with the clients?

JE: As of now, I still handle all of our back office functions but my primary function is customer service and design. I work directly with each client from their initial contact to moving in. It's a pretty amazing process both in design and getting to know some awesome folks.

AO: Would you say the majority of your clients are North Carolinians or do you build for folks across the nation?

JE: So far, many of our tiny's have left the state. We have some as far as California and Vermont but we are seeing a lot more stay in NC and have one staying in our home town under construction as we speak.

AO: Can I shine a spotlight on you and ask you what your favorite build has been?

JE: I hate to play favorites. I love them all so much, the houses and the clients that is. It is really fun to see the clients ideas take shape and the excitement they feel throughout the process but since you asked, I'm choosing two! * big laugh * My favorite "big" tiny would have to be No4CottonBurrow and my favorite tiny tiny would have to be Roost18.

AO: Where do you see P&N in the next 5 years?

JE: We plan to keep designing/building as long as our bodies will allow. Tom and I both agree we do not want to grow in a way that would take our hands off design or construction. We are really right where we want to be. But we have a few things in the works for some tiny rentals in the near future so stay tuned on that.

So, you realize this wouldn't be a proper '5 Minutes' interview without the following questions fashioned after James Lipton's closing questions on "Inside the Actor's Studio". You ready?

•**What is your favorite word?** Mom

•**What is your least favorite word?** So my family teases me because I have words I don't like and this is where you're going to find out how weird I am. I don't like the word "slacks" and I could live without hearing the word "granite" again in my lifetime.

•**What turns you on creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?** Honestly, hearing clients ideas and reasons for their tiny's inspires me the most. I am ready to start sketching almost immediately after meeting with most people. I realize I have to pace myself most days. But having said that, this design process is such a spiritual and emotional journey each time and all the time. There is so much excitement on both sides of the build being us and the client. There are times of tough decisions and sometimes tough conversations. But in the end, we see our hard work and new friends leave the farm which is always bitter sweet.

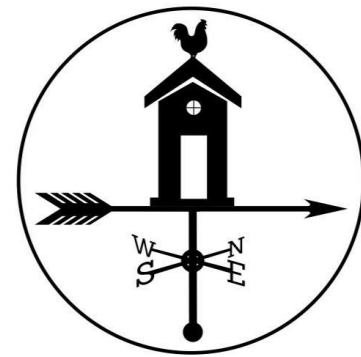
•**What turns you off creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?** Bad attitudes. We love what we do but it's not for everyone and we respect that each person is on their own journey of discovering what works best for them in regards to housing and lifestyle. And we're just one tiny flavor. We know we're not always the right fit for everyone either.

•**What sound or noise do you love?** Wind chimes and chickens. Home.

- **What sound or noise do you hate?** Oh, this one's going to get my in trouble. My husband chewing when I'm watching TV or working. Ha!
- **What is your favorite expression?** What is done in love, is done well. -Vincent Van Gogh
- **What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?** I would like to open a drive-in movie theater and have some ideas about doing this with tiny structures.
- **What profession would you not like to do?** Accountant! 15 years was enough. I learned a great deal that I use in our

business but they work very long days and don't get outside much this time of year. Thank your accountant or bookkeeper!

- **If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say?** This one is hard for me. As you know, we have a disabled child which presents a great deal of internal struggles about this type of thing, but I think all I would need to hear are reminders of what we know. "It's going to be ok" and "slow down".



The Roost36 built by Perch & Nest