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Editor's Picks: 10 Coolest Houses of 2009

Looking for a terrific house? BUILDER design editor Jenny Sullivan shares her favorites from the past year.

By: Jenny Sullivan

*Credit: Jim Bartsch***Urban Crash Pad**

Santa Barbara, Calif.

What's to love: A tiny footprint loaded with space-saving features and tons of style.

When it comes to luxury, size doesn't really matter. It's the little things that count. Case in point: this 894-square-foot "crash pad," which replaces a 1,400-square-foot dwelling that previously occupied the same .08 acre spot in a neighborhood dating back to the 1880s. It's

an efficient plan predicated on multi-use spaces akin to those seen in small sea-going vessels. And the open, loft-style configuration eliminates unnecessary circulation spaces that eat up precious square footage and result in extra heating and cooling costs.

*Credit: Jim Bartsch*

The key to making it all work was using height and light as a counterbalance to the small footprint, according to architect Barry Berkus. The tidy interiors feel plenty airy, thanks to ceilings stretching 14 feet in the living area, 12 feet in the bedroom, and 10 feet in the kitchen, combined with skylights and north/south glazed openings. Ceiling-high cabinets in the cooking and sleeping areas maximize storage space and are accessible via a custom-designed (by the architect), sliding ladder chair.

Even the outdoor space is multifunctional.

Sometimes used as a "car arbor," it doubles as an entertainment pavilion with track lighting and a sculptural fence.

This home's tiny size alone is enough to render it sustainable (it doesn't require much energy to stay running) but it also features recycled countertops, low-VOC paints, environmentally rated insulation, Energy Star appliances, and a tankless water heater.

Builder: Jack'n Toolbox, Santa Barbara, Calif.**Architect:** B3 Architects, a Berkus Design Studio, Santa Barbara**Land planner:** Earthform Design, Santa Barbara

A 2009 Gold Nuggets grand award winner in the custom home under 7,500 square feet category.