


# Backfill

## When Small Was Beautiful

In 1927, Calvin Coolidge was in his last full year as president. Babe Ruth batted .356 for the New York Yankees, with 60 home runs and a .772 slugging percentage. World War I, still known simply as “the World War,” had ended less than a decade earlier. And a Chicago publisher, the Home Builders Catalog Co., brought forth a hefty 1,200-page volume of house plans.

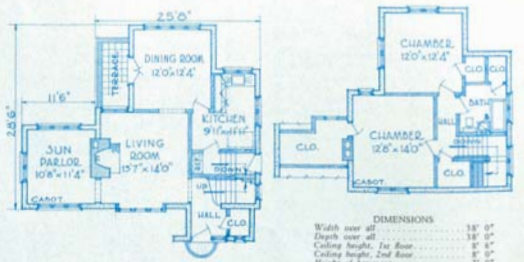
To an early-21st-century builder, the 1927 *Home Builders Catalog* is a real page-turner, a rich blend of the outdated and the surprisingly modern. Many of the product ads display slogans straight out of *A Prairie Home Companion* (“Signal Mountain Portland Cement: It Reigns Where It’s Poured”). A few tout bizarre insulating materials, like Cabot’s Heat-Insulating and Sound-Deadening Quilt (dried eelgrass stitched between layers of kraft paper). But how many of today’s green builders would have guessed that energy-saving demand water heaters (the Dahlquist Aquatherm) were standard catalog items 80 years ago?



Size 22'0" x 38'0"

**The CABOT**

A UNIQUE and captivating effect is obtained through the combination of stucco and cedar blocks, multi-colored wood shingle roof and a colored brick detail. The half timber effect over the entrance would indicate that this house is a descendant of the splendid homes of Elizabethan England.



DIMENSIONS


Width over all	38' 0"
Depth over all	22' 0"
Living height, 1st floor	8' 0"
Living height, 2nd floor	8' 0"
Height of basement	7' 0"

Two Complete Sets Blue-Print Working Plans  
One Sixteen Page Classified Guide for Lining Materials  
Two Sets of Specifications and Two Blank Contract Forms

TWENTY DOLLARS

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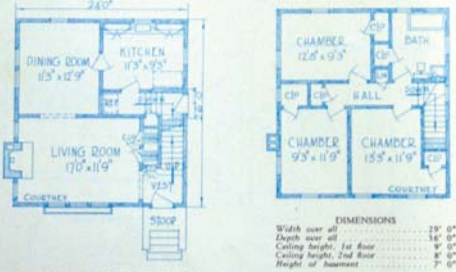
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Size 24' 0" x 24' 0"

**The COURTNEY**

A SQUARE home which provides for the largest amount of room at the lowest cost. Modern conveniences such as a built-in kitchen cabinet, medicine cabinet, telephone cabinet, linen cabinet and adjustable closet fixtures are shown.



DIMENSIONS

Width over all	24' 0"
Depth over all	24' 0"
Living height, 1st floor	8' 0"
Living height, 2nd floor	8' 0"
Height of basement	7' 0"

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The real meat of the book is its 657 sample plans: 593 houses (all of which, for some unexplained reason, have names starting with the letter “C”), 11 camps and lodges (named after Indian tribes), and 53 garages. From American foursquares (left) to pocket-size editions of the half-timbered “stockbroker Tudors” popular with the era’s wealthy (above), most designs feature nice trim and well-thought-out architectural detail.

True, these middle-class houses were a bit cramped by current standards. At 22 feet by 20 feet, the five-room, story-and-a-half Case model, for instance, could fit inside some of today’s great rooms. But with energy prices rising, families shrinking, and a glut of McMansions on the market, 1920s-scale housing may be due for a comeback. Just don’t expect 1927 prices. In one section of the catalog, the anonymous editors offer this timeless take on housing economics: “The principal reason why homes cost more today than formerly is because each generation demands more home comforts and conveniences. If you are content to live in the kind of house that was considered satisfactory 50 years ago you can still build one for very much less money than a modern home will cost.” — *Jon Vara*