

Our Airstream Dream Come True

Bob & Sam Krumwiede



My wife and I have been dreaming of traveling in a vintage Airstream for some time now. Recently, we realized that dream and plan to live full time in our newly remodeled 1964 Overlander. This is our story. Before we begin, if you believe that an Airstream should never be changed, only refurbished, then please read no further. We changed ours a lot. But we think that the original spirit and elegance has been preserved, perhaps enhanced by our efforts. In any case, we love her.

Since our trailer was not designed for the full-time lifestyle, we knew we had to make some changes. We spent almost a year researching the issues, resources and companies that could do the work. The Internet definitely helped and we used the Vintage Airstream Club website (www.airstream.net) extensively to find information and gain confidence in our endeavor. We hope to personally thank those at the VAC who developed such a great resource when we do finally hit the road.

Our design goals were simple: make it livable for two people and two dogs; allow us to continue to earn a living while on the road; make it possible to boondock for at least a week; make it to last our lifetime; and finally make it cool and fun to live in. Our vision for the interior reflected our love of Art

Deco/Streamline Modern design from the 30's & 40's. One of our favorite examples is the Queen Mary ship, which is also where we got married.

Since we had just finished remodeling a San Francisco Victorian, we thought that we had what it took to undertake such a project. Boy, did we have a lot to learn! We planned to design and manage the remodel ourselves, but leave the actual construction to professionals. Without getting into too many details, we hired *Airstream Classics* to do the work. Unfortunately, the owner died just as we were to begin the project, leaving us with a gutted trailer and no one to do the work. Fortunately, his craftsmen have a passion for building trailers and agreed to work on our project.



As with most remodeling projects, our simple vision became more sophisticated and expensive as it progressed. Matching current technology with a Queen Mary look was a challenge, to say the least. We also needed to be able to fix anything while we traveled, so we chose modern RV technology for critical components like the oven, fridge and water heater. We wrapped the fridge and oven with stainless steel though, for durability and so it didn't look like we got it at "Camping World". On some things we refused to compromise: a California King sized air mattress, a real workspace and beer on tap. Some things are not negotiable.

One of the first projects was to evaluate and upgrade the chassis. We learned from our house remodel that a good foundation is crucial and money spent here is repaid many times over. Although it was in good shape, several factors caused us to redesign and replace the chassis with a new one. Aside from the fact that it was already 35 years old, we knew that we would be adding a substantial amount of weight to the trailer (about 2500 pounds when it was all finished!) Also, we knew that recent Airstreams had all of the holding tanks inside of the chassis frame members, which seemed a great idea for gaining additional space for all of our stuff. Last but not least, we wanted a side bath, instead of the original rear bath layout.



Fortunately, we were able to hire someone who had previously worked for Airstream (as well as Silverstreak) to design us a chassis. Moving the body was nerve wracking, but was surprisingly straightforward for the people we had working for us. Now we felt comfortable that our remodeled Airstream would be road-worthy for many years to come.



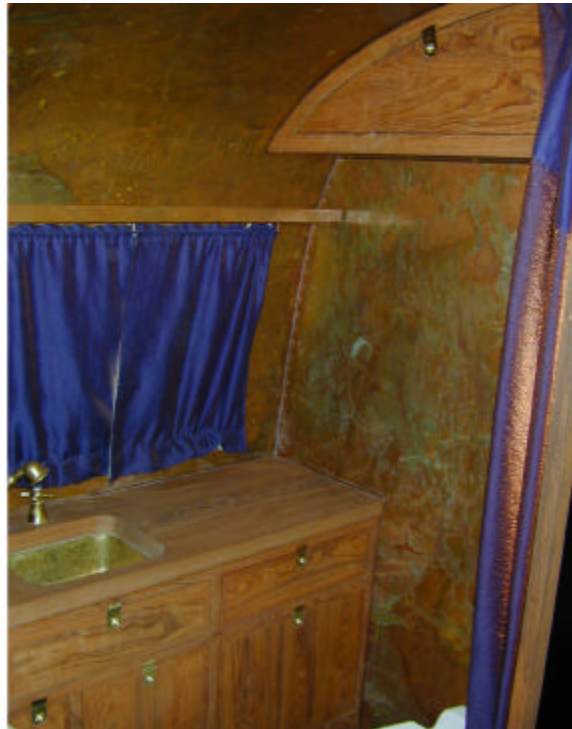
Next, we re-wired everything for the new layout. Since we wanted to live “off the grid” as much as possible, we chose 12V or LPG fixtures and appliances wherever possible. We got an inverter for the microwave and air mattress compressors, which are only available in 110V. Fearing that we might change our minds or have forgotten something, we ran empty conduit throughout so that we could easily re-wire. This turned out to be very wise, as we’ve already used it twice!



To get the Queen Mary look, we wanted to cover the walls with Lacewood veneer, so the next project was to apply 1/8" bending board throughout the coach as a base. Doing this also not only covered up the many holes in the interior, but also allowed us to create a 5-panel look to match the exterior. We used "half oval" aluminum rub rail as battens to cover the panel seams; using different sized rub rail for the window and vent trim gave it a cohesive look. While on the subject of trim work, we found a novel solution for the cabinet trim. Normally, a plastic welt or gimp is used to cover the places where the cabinets meet the walls. Since we were using aluminum for the other trim, why not use aluminum rod for the welting? Some of the details got a bit tricky, but it has an advantage over plastic – once you bend it, it stays put.



Building cabinetry for Airstreams is a special form of torture known only to a few crazed souls. Let's just say that it takes a long time. I was comfortable with our Victorian being "out-of-square", but this is completely different – there is no "square" to begin with! We'd build a template, cut the pieces too big and then repeatedly sand it down until it fit. Every piece. It still hurts to think about it. Let's go on.



The bathroom was a great challenge, because we only wanted to give up 40" x 40", including a shower. The faucet is a hand shower, so it does double duty. We covered the walls with copper and plan to let it age to a natural patina, although we gave it a head start with some vinegar. The trashcan and T.P. holder are built into the cabinets, which are Teak and can also handle getting wet.

Designing a small kitchen takes courage and patience. There is an amazing amount of food to be stored, equipment to prepare it with and a way to clean it all up. We are pleased to report that we found room for all of the amenities (other than a dishwasher) and that two people can actually co-exist in this prime real estate.



We also got lucky with some design decisions. For example, when we decided to put the fridge over the wheel well, it meant that it had to be smaller. A significant benefit became clear, though – being above floor level meant that we could open the door without hitting a dog!



Our front room has to be many things – living room, dining room, guest bedroom and office. The only caveat was that the office needed to be hidden when not in use. As you can see from the pictures, our solution was to slide the office down into the cabinet. We hid a file cabinet and printer underneath the seats.



A living room is accomplished by sliding the tabletop underneath the front cabinet to create a sofa space.



The dinette and guest bed were easy, since the typical trailer solution is still the best.

There are still a million more details that we'd love to discuss, given a chance. Designing and building our rolling dream house has been the experience of a lifetime. In fact, it has been so rewarding that we would like to do it again.



We have gone into business with the craftsmen who created our work of art and we are already hard at work to realize someone else's dream. We hope to also be a resource for other remodellers, whether we do the work or not. Please email us at bobnsam@yahoo.com to get a link to color pictures to our project or ask us any questions.

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