

**Off-Grid Living on the Earthship with Amanda Speer  
and Dain Daller**

**LESS  
HOUSE  
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MOOLA**

We help the tiny house community  
use their lower housing costs to  
build financial independence.

With Laura Lynch



Full Episode Transcript

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Laura Lynch

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## Off-Grid Living on the Earthship with Amanda Speer and Dain Daller

It takes a brave and independent mindset to go tiny. If you are trying to figure out your tiny pivot, this podcast is here to inspire and connect you with the other unconventional, gritty, inspirational people within this community.

I'm Laura Lynch, your tiny house friend and host. On this show, we are always going to come back to money because, as a financial planner, this is the question I hear the most: How do I make this work for me financially?

Well, that's my jam. So jump in, let's go. New episodes drop every Thursday.

**Laura Lynch:** Well, welcome to Less House More Moola podcast, Amanda and Dain. So thrilled to be here in your home. You and I connected originally because one of my earliest podcast guests, my neighbor, Kate, posted about your work on Facebook.

And so that's kind of how I tracked you down through the website and said, "Hey, I'm going to be in town. Let's get together." So thanks so much for sharing a little bit about your home with my audience today. Would you please introduce yourself, where we are and a little bit about your story for listeners?

**Amanda Speer:** I am Amanda Speer. I moved here with Dain almost 15 years ago, 14 years ago. And we are sitting in our finished now earthship, which we built from the ground up. And I mean, we just finished it yesterday.

**Dain Daller:** Yeah, I'm Dain Daller and we are in the back of the kitchen of the sizable project that we're now pretty much done with.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah. So awesome. So tell us a little bit about your journey to building your own home. I mean, you've lived other places and had other

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homes in the past. So how did you come to this place where you wanted to build your own space?

**Dain Daller:** We moved here from Chicago and we were renting and we kind of got sick of that.

Like just having these rundown apartments and then not wanting to fix them ourselves. And then we didn't really have the money or careers or anything to get a mortgage to buy anything and we kind of had it with the big city, I guess. So we ended up here and we're able to buy some land and we kind of just delve in and step by step.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah. All those stars aligned. We found the land and learned about our ships the same, I think the same day. And we didn't have any money and we realized that if you're building a house and you have time and energy, the Earthship is a good way to go. And then, yeah, so—

**Dain Daller:** It was also a good way that we thought we could go in without really any experience and be able to have it not fall down or something like that. There's a lot of leeway. You can be pretty, it's pretty forgiving.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah. When your walls are two and a half feet thick and weigh like 3,000 tons, you can easily build on top of it without it having problems.

**Dain Daller:** You don't really have to be an engineer or anything, just as long as you don't make some really insane errors, but it was good.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah, I love the sweat equity piece of things and talk about this a lot because not only does building your own home allow you to get a little ahead from a financial perspective, but it also allows you just to build so much confidence within yourself. If you can build your own home, you can build pretty much anything.

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**Amanda Speer:** Right. It's a great way to, I don't know, it's after I did it or while I was doing it, I thought, "Hey, everybody should do this." And it really is how you should live instead of complaining about this house you bought, go build one. Yeah, it's rewarding in every way, the confidence, the skills, and then the outcome.

**Laura Lynch:** But also terrifying, right, when you first started. So how did you build up the confidence and enough knowledge just to even get started? Because getting started of anything is the hardest part. So how did you kind of build up enough knowledge and confidence to say, "Yes, we're just gonna, we're going to take a stab at this."

**Amanda Speer:** Dain learned at the Earthship community. He did the internship and learned how to do some of the basic stuff. And then we were living in the back of our truck at the top of our driveway. So we had to do it. It wasn't that much confidence, it was necessity. I was like, "Okay, do this," or, you know, not have a house for even longer.

**Dain Daller:** Yeah. There was a few moments where we maybe thought, "What are we doing? Is this going to work? Are we going to enjoy it long term?" Like all this stuff, but the satisfying aspect of accomplishing all the steps as they went definitely outweighed that and luckily we never really got tired of being out here in the middle of nowhere. Initially moving out here from a big city, we thought, "Well, we might miss some of that stuff. Who knows, but let's try it and it worked out."

**Laura Lynch:** So if there are listeners out there who are curious about some sort of alternative building method or kind of tackling building your own, what would you say to them?

**Amanda Speer:** Start as soon as possible 'cause no one's getting younger and go for it. I would say go for it. And if you can't physically do it, hire somebody or find friends, but really building your own house is, I mean, we

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don't have a mortgage. It's pretty, it's a pretty magical thing. It's like people in this country live their whole lives paying for the house that they're inside of, and ours is done and we paid for it as we went.

So slow and steady. We referred to all the materials and all the costs of building, which isn't free. We referred to it as rent the whole time, but at the end of it, we have a house.

**Laura Lynch:** And what do you think about, you have chosen to live in a place where you can build your own home. This is not something that everybody has the option to because people are tied to their jobs and that sort of thing. What do you think about that trade-off? And how do you think about that for folks as far as kind of isolate, you know, kind of going out to a place where there aren't building codes versus staying in town. How has that debate played out in your mind, do you think?

**Dain Daller:** I mean, I guess, to each their own. I mean, if you want to move out to a rural area and have an alternative kind of house, then that's what you want. And you should do that. Not everybody wants to do that.

**Amanda Speer:** Our best friends built their house not only in Santa Fe, but in the historic district. So they had so many rules and regulations, but they did it. And it was just a different hurdle they had to jump over and to each their own. Now they have a beautiful house that's in Santa Fe.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah, awesome. So let's talk a little bit about how building your own home played into your freedom to follow your artistic path. You're both artists, so I love this for creative folks because oftentimes the income isn't the same as a corporate folks'. So how do you see this building your own home and creating this lifestyle for yourself as enabling or contributing to your ability to follow your artistic path?

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**Amanda Speer:** Rent is such a big drain on our peers who do the same things as us that they can't go a hundred percent. So I think it's the rent aspect. We, what is rent nowadays?

It's 30% of your income if you have, if you're middle class, I think. So it's pretty daunting. So we have 30% more for savings and 30% more to travel and 30% more to not worry about that bill.

**Dain Daller:** That bill and other bills, like we don't have an electric bill. We do buy propane, but it's not significant. I don't know, all those things kind of add up. We're also, we live pretty cheap. We are maybe not super diligent and ahead of the game on saving for retirement, but we're doing what we love. So I guess it's a trade-off

**Amanda Speer:** and saving some,

**Dain Daller:** Yeah. Having the time or just even temporarily to get out of having significant bills and scraping by to kind of develop what you're wanting to do, that's important. And now that we've gotten established, we're doing okay. If we had to pay a lot of bills and all that in the years leading up to that, I don't think we would have been able to do it.

**Amanda Speer:** Yep. And we live apart from the city, so we don't have the many distractions of the city beyond the cost of living in a city. We work at home and we don't–

**Dain Daller:** We don't go out that much sometimes, but–

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah, I mean, it helps that we love what we do. And we got lucky 'cause we found, we are weavers and we found weaving in New Mexico and everything just lined up for us where I feel very lucky.

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**Laura Lynch:** Yeah. Yeah, it seems a very strong weaving community. A lot of folks focused on that particular fiber arts here due to the millennium of history. And that's a beautiful thing to be able to live in a place where there's—

**Dain Daller:** Yeah, and the area is very receptive to fiber arts. Even if they're not fiber artists, they're like, “Oh, I know about this,” or “I appreciate it and I would love to buy some of it.” We've gone to other parts of the country and done shows. And there are people that are interested but it's not quite as high a percentage, it seems, as around here. So that helps to be well received by your community, I guess.

**Laura Lynch:** It seems to me and my creative pursuit of this podcast and building a business as well that having the freedom by reduced cost of living to focus your entire attention and not have to do, you know, have a side gig or a night job or whatever, just allows so much more progress on your craft or in your artistic pursuit. Because when you have to divide yourself, it seems like you wouldn't get as far. Would you say that's been true for you to be able to just be solely focused and not have to go do a restaurant job or?

**Amanda Speer:** Oh, 100%. I do have a separate job, and it does feel daunting, but it's 16 hours a month. So it's like hardly countable as an extra job. And even that's like a distraction to me. So, yeah.

**Dain Daller:** It's not something that you had to take on by necessity, it's because—

**Amanda Speer:** Passion.

**Dain Daller:** Yeah, it's working for the local fiber at center.

**Amanda Speer:** Where we learned to weave. So, yeah, a hundred being a hundred percent and like for example, we were, it's just weaving is, we're constantly talking about it.



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We were talking about a particular loom and I was like, "I'd really like to weave on one of those." The day after somebody emailed me about that loom in the community. And so we're going to go meet with that person. And it's just weaving is so alive here. It's a part of our world and a part of the greater community's world too. So it's wonderful.

**Laura Lynch:** Sounds like you're running into this, into a lot of serendipity here. Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

**Dain Daller:** Yeah. Everything usually lines up. There's been bumps in the road over the years, but nothing significant enough to steer us away from the direction we've been going.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah. So let's stay on passion for a minute and talk about how this particular housing type aligns with personal values that you hold.

**Amanda Speer:** Well, a lot of aspects of it. We use the water in our house five times before it goes back to the earth. Water comes from the rain, then it goes to our planters and it waters our plants. Or no, it comes from the rain, goes to our fixtures and like the sink gray water waters the plants. Then it goes to a storage well and becomes our flush water for the toilet. Then goes outside and it's put into a blackwater planter before it goes to the standard leach field. So the water element of an earthship is for sure my favorite aspect and the one I'm most passionate about.

**Dain Daller:** And I don't think that much water even makes it past the planter, the plants just eat it up and grow, and then we have solar power so we're not dependent on the grid or however they're making electricity, which may or may not be sustainable and—

**Amanda Speer:** The reused materials.



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**Dain Daller:** The Earthship design, a key element is that it heats itself and stays cool in the, heats itself in the winter and stays relatively cool in the summer. And so we don't have to burn wood or use gas or anything to heat the house or air conditioning or anything like that.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah, the house is buried on three sides, which keeps it under, even in these hotter summers, keeps it under 80 degrees and it feels air-conditioned almost all summer. And we just control the temperature by opening and closing the doors in the house. And then finally the, or not finally, but another thing is we've used a ton of recycled materials to build the house and tires are one of the least sustainable things on the planet that are the least recyclable things.

And so instead of just throwing them in a pile for the rest of the earth's existence, we are filling them with dirt and making walls out of them in the house. The two-and-a-half-foot wide walls is a reason that the temperature stays.

**Dain Daller:** Yeah. They're like thermal batteries. So if you think of a thin frying pan, if you heat it up, it'll heat it up. You can heat it up really quickly and then it'll cool down really quickly. But a thick cast iron takes a long time to heat up and a long time to cool down. So it's like months or a year-long temperature cycle, takes forever for the walls to absorb all that warmth and then they hold on to it for months and months and months.

So it's not so much like a day-by-day temperature thing. It's all year slowly going and one aspect that's really nice is beyond that you don't have to have a wood stove, which is kind of messy and a hassle, when we get home from being gone all day or being gone on a trip, it can be snowy and freezing cold outside, it's still warm inside.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah, walking into the house at 4 AM–

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**Dain Daller:** And wait hours and kind of, it's just very comfortable. That's very nice. Yeah.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah. I love that.

**Dain Daller:** The little things that you start to appreciate were just kind of incidental, I think.

**Laura Lynch:** Well, let's talk a little bit about your story to the work that you do. Were you weaving in Chicago or has that been something—

**Amanda Speer:** No, we learned here in Espanola at the Espanola Valley Fiber Arts Center where Dain is now on the board. And I am the education coordinator and we're very involved in every aspect of the center. And we loved it since we learned about it and only grown more and more active in the community.

**Dain Daller:** We learned to, our friend of ours had taken a class there and we saw what they had made and thought that looked like fun and we'd try it. And then we both took to it and just kept experimenting and learning and challenging ourselves, and went for it.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah, we started selling our work, started selling work right away. I think the second work I made, people wanted to buy it. And then we were like, "Wow, we could just do this." And then we ran with it and we're still weaving.

**Laura Lynch:** That's so awesome. And so was there, had you always been interested in it or were you searching for something to—

**Dain Daller:** We'd always been interested in fabric and fiber and stuff like that. Not some, specifically weaving, but it always seemed interesting and magical and all the fiber crafts from around the world and things that had

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always been interested in, but kind of from an outsider's perspective. It didn't really seem, I don't know, it just never came up that it was like, "Here's a weaving class. Learn to do it." We just thought, "Oh, that's something they do." But the fiber at center was there and that was our first step in just doing it ourselves.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah. That's so cool. Because we never know kind of when our calling comes to us, right? And so you're in a community, as you mentioned earlier, that is very welcoming to this.

So how has weaving within this lifestyle that you've created for yourself allowed you to, as you mentioned, you're able to save and you're kind of taking care of yourself. You want to share a little bit more about kind of how it is to be a working artist?

**Amanda Speer:** It can be stressful having to make money off of your art. It can be really stressful. Stressful to come up with new ideas. Stressful, wondering, is this going to keep working? What are we doing? But that is outweighed by the benefits of just when we do a sale, just here, if we don't sell a lot, we still hear people appreciating it. So I think as long as we stay excited about it, it'll be reflected in our work.

Yeah, I encourage everyone to figure out how to make, how to go to work every day and enjoy what you're doing because then you won't be as stressed, I'm assuming.

**Dain Daller:** Yeah, I mean, it's tiring weaving all day, but we don't feel as drained, I think, as like when we had jobs working for somebody else doing something that was like maybe not what we would choose to spend our days doing.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah, we feel satisfied at the end of a hard weaving day more than any other day, I think

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**Dain Daller:** Yeah, and we're both creative people and quite often jobs don't really let you tap into your own personal creativity that much. But that creativity is so driving that even working hard all day, if you've got that inspiration, you got your personal goal in mind, it just seems so much easier to, I don't know, keep at it, not want to take a break all the time or something.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah. Follow your own, the beat of your own drummer and your own personal self-competition rather than, yeah, competing in a world where everybody is kind of out to get to the next rung of the corporate ladder.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah, the art, we're not good at promoting our stuff. We're not, we are just artists. It's funny. I'll see like people who are, they aren't making very good art, but boy, are they good at selling it. So we're on the other spectrum. I think we're quite good at making the art. And then, we sell it like we're artists. We're true to the art.

**Dain Daller:** We're not so good at networking, promotion.

**Amanda Speer:** In fact, the art world is a thing that we both are like, we are definitely detached from it. We don't have gallery representation and big shows because we aren't, we're intentionally not a part of that world. It's not for us. It's not the path we're taking.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah, not after the prestige, more after the work.

**Amanda Speer:** The personal accomplishment. Yeah.

**Dain Daller:** I mean, if it came and fell into our lap, maybe. It's not, it's just that people I think have to really get out there and really—

**Amanda Speer:** It's a hustle.

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**Dain Daller:** Yeah, but for example, we were at the fiber art center. We used to weave these blankets in the back and somebody from the folk art market came and we had some of our personal scarves and things that we had woven on hand, and he saw those and got the folk art market, some people to sponsor us to go to India to participate in a textile symposium there. And then we went to another one in Thailand and it wasn't like we got famous, but it felt cool.

**Amanda Speer:** We got recognized. It was wonderful

**Dain Daller:** In a scene of weavers that appreciated what we were doing and we made some contacts and we're still getting yarn, silk yarn from somebody we met there in India and—

**Laura Lynch:** That's awesome. Well, speaking of the work, do you have a couple of pieces you want to show?

**Dain Daller:** Yeah.

**Amanda Speer:** You can start.

**Dain Daller:** This is one that I just finished. It's a hand wove, these scarves. They were just the gray and that maroon color and then I folded it and clamped it between two circles of wood to resist the disc dye, then dyed that. And then at the end, with a needle and thread, I went around the edge, scrunching it up, and then dipped that in some dye. So this is primarily what we call Shibori techniques, which is like a fancy word for tie-dye.

**Amanda Speer:** Japanese word for tie-dye. And then this is a new one that I made, which is silicon cotton and it's Ecot dyed.

So this, all the dyeing was done beforehand and then it was put on the loom and then we draft our own patterns. So the pattern in here I made—and

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another one I did is recently I did these double weave pieces and I made them into, I sewed them and made them into collars, which was just a fun, new design because making scarves gets a little boring so now I have a new collar design.

**Dain Daller:** This is my previous project that I finished recently. And they're sort of a scarf-shawl mix. Big enough to be a shawl, but they're thin enough that it could be a, yeah, a scarf and it's got a pattern that's all loom-controlled.

And then there's a little bit of this Ecot dyeing. So that's resist dyeing the warp before you put it on the loom, and this is made of cotton and silk.

**Laura Lynch:** This seems, as an outsider to the weaving community, this seems astounding to me that you just picked up weaving what was it, in 2010?

**Amanda Speer:** 2013.

**Laura Lynch:** 2013.

**Amanda Speer:** Moved here in 2010, started weaving three years later.

**Laura Lynch:** Yeah. So you've been doing this for 11 years and you have such amazing variety of technique and it just, it looks so, I don't know, it looks like it couldn't possibly be handmade.

**Amanda Speer:** That's a review of weavers as well. The weaving in our community is mostly large yarn made to, people make rugs, like traditionally the Chimayo weavers and the Rio Grande weavers are rug weavers. So people are pretty surprised by the small size of the yarn we use. And we are just always looking for smaller and smaller yarn because it's what we like to make fine textiles.

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**Dain Daller:** It's funny. In America, we'll show our stuff and people say, "Wow, you use such fine yarn." When we went to India and Thailand, they're like, "Wow, you guys use such big yarn."

**Amanda Speer:** You can't even, we have to get our yarn from India because we need the small stuff. We can't, it's really hard to find it here in this country.

**Laura Lynch:** I see why you mentioned that earlier. Yeah. That you can't find it.

**Amanda Speer:** The wool

**Laura Lynch:** Yes.

**Laura Lynch:** Interesting. Well, good. As we're wrapping up, share with the audience where they could follow you or ping you or what have you.

**Amanda Speer:** We have a website. It's our, we call ourselves the warp zone. Our website is [warpzoneweaving.com](http://warpzoneweaving.com) and our Instagram account is @warpzone with two e's at the end, warpzonee.

**Dain Daller:** Yeah.

**Amanda Speer:** Yeah. That's about how you find us.

**Dain Daller:** There's a whole blog about the house that has pictures—

**Amanda Speer:** I don't even know if any of those pictures are linked anymore. Let's not, let's not talk about that.

**Dain Daller:** I believe there is a link on the website. If you're really dedicated, you—



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**Amanda Speer:** There might be.

**Dain Daller:** You can follow that one.

**Amanda Speer:** We should do a final entry.

**Laura Lynch:** Well, Dain and Amanda, thank you so much for sharing your beautiful home and your beautiful work. Super excited to share this particular concept with the audience so that they too can consider what alternative housing options there are outside of conventional buildings. So I love to bring you as an example.

**Amanda Speer:** Thank you for interviewing us. We love sharing our ship techniques to everybody. We're very pro-earthship there, a really sustainable way to live.

Hey, I'm honored that you listened to this episode of *Less House More Moolah*. I hope something in it will help you continue to move toward a life aligned with your values.

Every algorithm out there is trying to tell us what to prioritize, but we get to choose. If you haven't ever identified your key values, I have a free resource on my website to help you.

You just have to go to [thetinyhouseadviser.com](https://thetinyhouseadviser.com). It's the tiny house A-D-V-I-S-E-R dot com.

At the bottom of the page, you can grab the tiny life values worksheet. When we design a life around "what is our core truth?", we shortcut to deep fulfillment.

See you next Thursday.

Please see the show notes for an important disclosure regarding The Tiny House Adviser, LLC and this episode.

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