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Making a Living

California builder LivingHomes couples eco-conscious construction, value-conscious price tag in fabulous abodes. » by ALISON CROUCH



A rendering of the LivingHomes model home as seen from the street. Rainwater and grey water are recycled for irrigation, and all wood used for millwork, ceilings and exterior siding is FSC-certified.

DURING HIS CHILDHOOD, LIVINGHOMES FOUNDER STEVE GLENN WAS FASCINATED WITH LEGOS, FASHIONING INTRICATE STRUCTURES OUT OF THE MULTICOLORED SNAP-TOGETHER BLOCKS. Intrigued by the building profession from a young age—he had designs on being an architect—it was while he was in college that Glenn constructed the blueprint for his professional aspirations. It wasn't, however, architectural skills that the enterprising entrepreneur ultimately decided to develop.

DREAMS IN DEVELOPMENT » Inspired by well-known craftsmen, most notably the venerable James Rouse, Glenn recognized that his heart and talent belonged in the development world. "In studying Rouse, I concluded that the world could use more developers like him who care about the aesthetic and the environmental and community implications of their work

and who could build projects that are successful, scalable and sustainable," Glenn said. Rouse "helped me to appreciate that one can wed profit and purpose in one's work."

To that end, Glenn decided to devise a company that would merge those two ideals. In 2005, he launched LivingHomes LLC, a Santa Monica, Calif.-based home builder/developer of modern, sustainable prefabricated homes designed by world-class architects. The company's creations feature design and functionality to inspire, delight and support residents. "Hopefully we'll prove that there is a large market for modern homes that feature healthy, sustainable materials for a moderate price point," Glenn said of his company's potential impact on the residential shelter industry.

RESOURCES:

For additional information, visit
LivingHomes at
livinghomes.us
or call 310.581.8500.

WALKING THE LINE » LivingHomes will ultimately feature several design schemes, each crafted by a celebrated architect who will infuse the custom





A rendering of the LivingHomes model home as seen from the backyard. Photovoltaic cells on the roof provide the home's energy, and the rooftop garden lessens the heat island effect while providing an outdoor living space. **Opposite**

bottom: A rendering of the interior living space. Interior sustainable features include a radiant heating system, bathroom and kitchen countertops made of recycled glass and cellulose, and low- or non-volatile organic compound paints.

age space and "Living Roofs" with a garden, fire pit and other amenities.

There are a limited number of standard choices for floors, walls, countertops, tiles, appliances and fixtures. The floor itself is eco-friendly: Tiles

are made of recycled porcelain or glass, and the second story is floored with cork. Paint is either no VOC or low VOC. Kitchen and bath countertops are available in recycled glass and paper cellulose. Energy Star-rated Bosch appliances come standard.

LivingHomes also prides itself on its commitment to Earth-smart applications. "Our environmental and health program pervades everything we're doing and is integral in the type of architecture we're practicing," Glenn said. "We're very focused on form and function."

MODEL CITIZEN » One of two Southern California homes selected to the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Homes pilot program, the LivingHomes model in Santa Monica typifies the company's commitment to innovative, health-conscious, sustainable design.

"We're using steel, which is considered the most recycled building material. It's also an extremely healthy material, because you have no mold or mildew issues, no infestation, no moisture issues," Glenn said. The exposed steel-framed construction is used both internally and externally. Additionally, almost all the interior and exterior millwork is Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood.

The model generates its own power with rooftop photovoltaics, while LED lights minimize power requirements. Instead of relying on city water for landscape needs, the home utilizes a grEy water system, which uses sink and shower water for irrigation. A 15,000-gallon cistern collects storm water run-off for additional irrigation. The rooftop gar-

dwelling-ings with a mix of style and sustainability. (The company has already installed several private residences that dot the California landscape.) Renowned modernist Ray Kappe is the mastermind behind the first batch of homes, including the model, which opened in June. Kappe's creations—there are five motifs from which to choose—embody the very definition of a LivingHome.

"Kappe is a modernist who integrates craftsman-like attention to detail and warmth to his work, which we think is very important," said Glenn, adding that he himself gleans inspiration from architectural genres outside the modern movement, including Craftsman, Victorian and Gothic. "We're not into the cold, edgy Modernism."

The Kappe collection offers standard and limited configurations, including a moderately priced two-story home crafted for infill, move-up and second-home uses, as well as a smaller, more economical one-story that fits the first-home price point. Clean lines and plenty of natural light pervade each of the plans. Options include two to four bedrooms, two or three baths, optional den, playroom, media room and study. Movable walls and floor plates make it easy to adapt the space as lifestyles evolve. Integrated media technologies ensure that Internet, music and video are accessible from any room. The homes also boast integrated built-in furniture and stor-

BY THE NUMBERS

Homing in on the stats of LivingHomes.

PRICE POINT: \$150 to \$250 per square foot, not including the foundation or transport and install of materials.

COMPARATIVE COST: A similarly equipped stick-built dwelling (high-end custom architectural house with an "extremely aggressive environmental program") would likely range between \$300 and \$400 per square foot.

SQUARE FOOTAGE: Variable; ranges from 800 to 6,000, depending on design.

BUILD TIME: Assembled over a 4- to 5-month period in a regional factory (foundation work is performed at the same time).

INSTALLATION TIME: One day, plus a few weeks' cleanup afterward.

MODEL INSTALLATION TIME: Lowered onto a concrete slab in 11 modules by a 350-ton crane over the course of 8 hours.

TARGET CONSUMER: "Cultural Creatives" or "Conscientious Capitalists," including people who shop at Whole Foods and IKEA, drive Priuses and value health, sustainability and design.

den diverts storm water, reduces the heat-island effect and increases insulation. A special subsurface irrigation system uses Internet telemetry to determine when it needs to water.

A solar system utilizes the sun's energy to heat domestic water. Inside the dwelling, a radiant heating system embedded in the floor will keep rooms toasty in winter, while improving indoor air quality by heating without forcing dust, germs and other particulates into the air.

Fabricated via a factory-built process, the home's construction results in almost no waste. "Typically with stick-built [homes], maybe 30 to 40 percent of your materials end up in landfills versus 2 percent in a factory because you do shop drawings for all your materials," Glenn said. "We're reusing what we can from the site to be part of the home, like the furniture."

Base models will be LEED Silver-certified, and buyers will be able to upgrade with additional LEED features.

BUILDING A BRAND » In addition to home design and construction, LivingHomes is also involved in development work, including establishing the first LivingHomes community in Joshua Tree, Calif. "Our focus, ultimately, is on builders," said Glenn of his up-and-coming company's vision. "We want to sell this [LivingHomes concept] to builders and developers. They'll be able to buy these from us."

Besides buying the concept, industry professionals can also be inspired that "one can meld modern and sustainable design, priced nicely, without a lot of compromise," Glenn said.

ADDING MORE STORIES » As it nears its second year, LivingHomes remains steadfast in its quest to construct intelligently crafted structures that mitigate the impact on soil, water and land. "We're building homes that are going to be some of the most environmentally responsible production homes ever built," Glenn said. "I feel good about that, given the impact building has on natural resources, both in terms of raw materials and energy."

Glenn hopes this quest will inspire others to delve into the considered-design market. "We would be wise as a nation to build more responsible buildings," he said. Only time will tell, but LivingHomes may just be a leader in helping to forge this trend. **IH**

