

# insideout

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# kitchen confidential

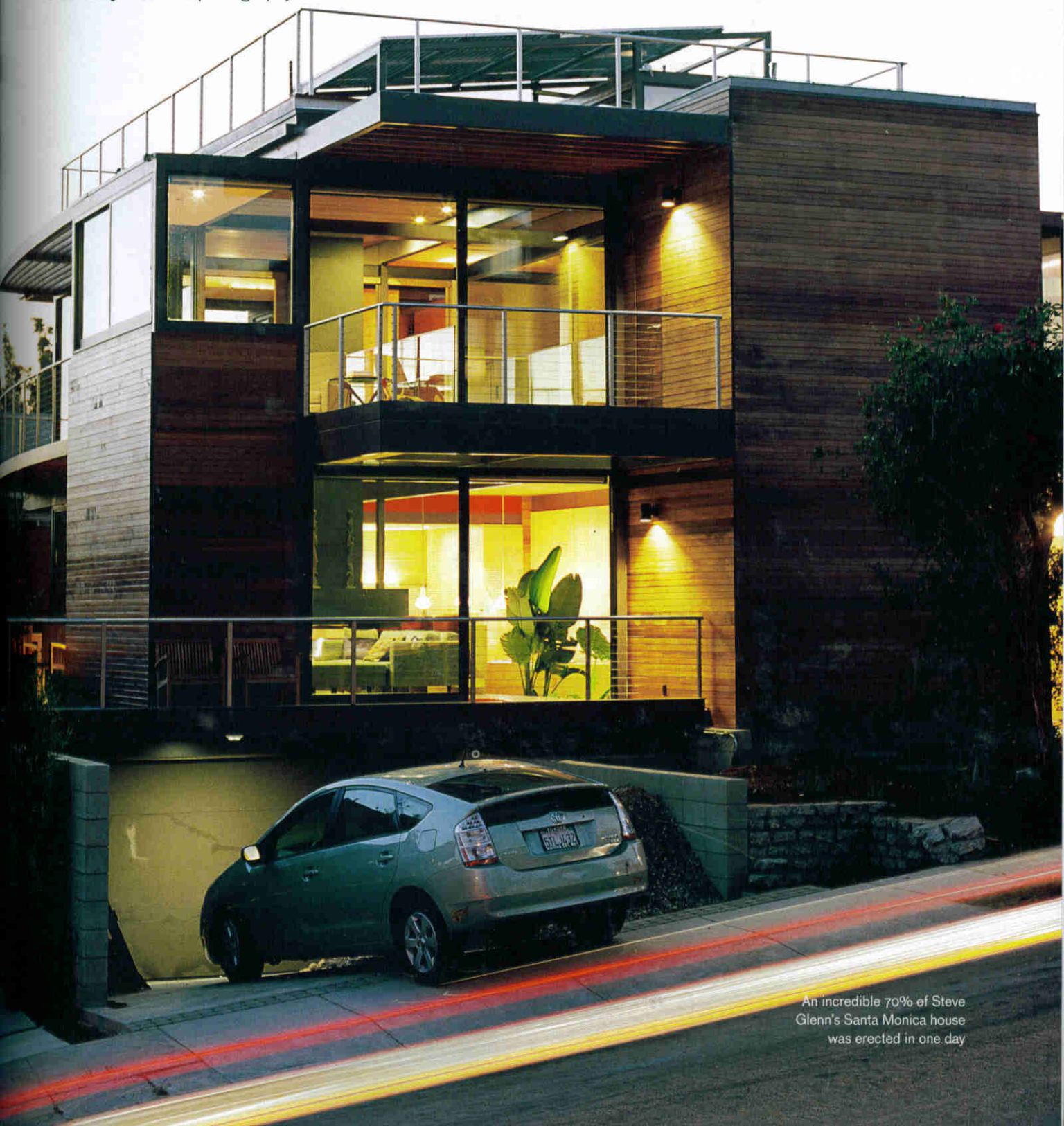
SLEEK, DESIRABLE AND HIGH PERFORMANCE



# module behaviour

AN ECO PRE-FAB HOUSE THAT CAN BE ASSEMBLED IN 48 HOURS  
- WHAT COULD BE MORE EFFICIENT THAN THAT?

words **Tony Horkins** photography **Dave Lauridsen**



An incredible 70% of Steve Glenn's Santa Monica house was erected in one day





For most of us, a fascination with Lego and the ability to fashion the brightly coloured bricks into some semblance of a building faded along with our desire for alphabet-shaped food. But 42-year-old real-estate developer Steve Glenn has turned his love of building blocks into a lifestyle. As the CEO – and first resident – of Living Homes, a southern California-based company, he specialises in prefab housing with strong design and ecological leanings. 'I've always loved Lego and wanted to be an architect, but I didn't have the skill or the temperament,' he says from his stunning 2,500 sq foot, three-storey home just a few blocks from the Santa Monica beach. 'But I soon learned about developers and their importance in setting the agenda.'

Steve's agenda is straightforward: to commission good architects to supply standard designs, integrate a comprehensive environmental programme and supply prefabricated homes to what he refers to as 'cultural creatives'. These are 'the chunk of people who care deeply about design and the health and sustainability of the products they buy,' he says. 'They shop at [organic supermarket] Whole Foods, they drive a Prius, they do yoga... currently you can't find homes that reflect those values, so I started a company to do that.'

Hence Living Homes was born, and the company's first model was assembled on a 6,000 sq foot lot that Steve bought in 2004. His architect of choice was Ray Kappe, whose work is considered by many as the apotheosis of the Californian home. 'He's my favourite living architect,' Steve says. 'He does unique, important, warm Modernism.' Which, in the case of this home means beautiful blocky forms, wide double-height rooms and the use of materials such as western red cedar, tigerwood decking, cork and polished concrete.

First, Steve had to deal with Santa Monica council, a notoriously tough bunch with a reputation for denying building permits. Fortunately, they were impressed with what he was trying to achieve. Getting permission and constructing the base – a subterranean slab of concrete – took nine months. The 11 modules that make the house itself were then erected in a single day. 'Around 70% of the house was completed that one day,' says Steve, 'including the basic plumbing and electrics. The rest – windows, interior finishes – took around three months.'

Entering Steve's house is a breathtaking experience. It's vast, >>



**Opposite:** in the open-plan kitchen/living area, Lego on the coffee table still provides inspiration. **Clockwise from above, left:** Steve on one of the glass-walled balcony areas; the worktop is made from recycled newspaper; the furniture is Modernist classics, such as the Eames lounge and Arco lamp; the atrium is spectacular



## energy monitor

Measuring the efficiency of everything from the lightbulbs to the photovoltaic panels on the roof, at the heart of Steve Glenn's Living Home is an energy monitoring system. Designed by the Lucid Design Group, it's wired to a countertop monitor in the kitchen and allows him to gauge the energy production of his home.

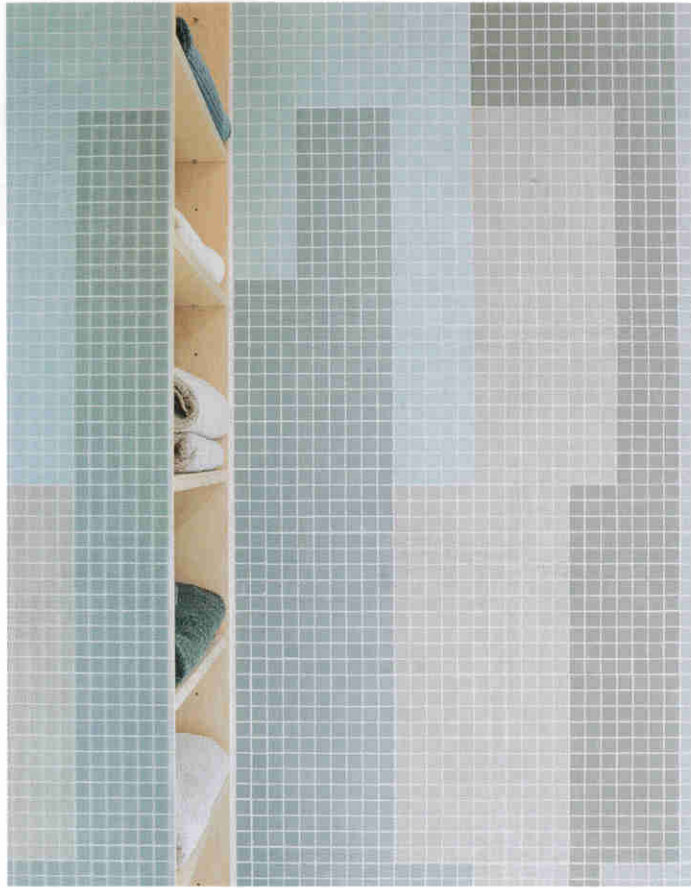
For example, the software produces graphs that reveal if the roof-mounted photovoltaic system that supplies much of the home's electricity is producing more power than he's using, or whether it's working at a deficit.

If the system's working at a deficit, Steve can make a conscious effort to redress the balance by, say, making more of an effort to turn off the lights, or by watching less TV.

>> [luciddesigngroup.com](http://luciddesigngroup.com)



**Metal casing** Perforated metal forms a semi-transparent casing for the stairs. Inside, the stair treads are as simple as possible so that the overall appearance through the metal is clean and unfussy. Try [cadisch.com](http://cadisch.com) for perforated plates.



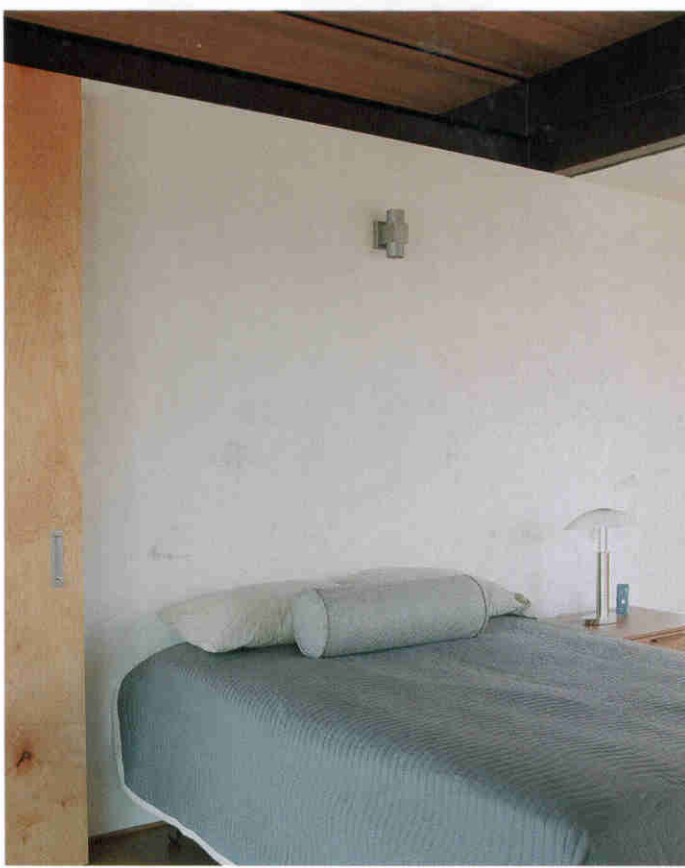
**Mosaic tiles** In the bathroom, different coloured mosaics form graphic patterns. Bibliotheque ([bibliotheque.co.uk](http://bibliotheque.co.uk)) do unglazed mosaic tiles, 25 x 25mm, in 16 colours. Prices start from £32.90 per sq metre.



**Recycled tiles** Surrounding the bath, are distinctive slim, brick-shaped tiles, which are made of recycled porcelain. 'Bark' tiles, £34 per sq metre, from H&R Johnson tiles ([johnson-tiles.com](http://johnson-tiles.com)), are similar.



**Wood panelling** Cedar clads the walls, while the floor decking is made of tigerwood. All of the wood in the house is FSC-certified. Finnforest ([finnforest.co.uk](http://finnforest.co.uk)) supplies various sustainably managed timbers.



**Above, from left:** a textured silk quilt in the bedroom adds a soft touch to the bachelor pad. A sliding door means the space can be closed off or left open to add to the flowing feel of the house; glass walls and panels and lots of balconies are perfect for making the most of the Californian weather



## home delivery

When a customer orders a Living Home, what arrives? According to Amy Simms, Living Homes' project architect, six trucks, 16 crew and chunks of house, weighing around 6,800kg to 9,100kg, turn up.

'What basically arrives is completed modules, ranging from eight to around 12 depending on which model and size you've ordered,' she says. 'The definition of "completed" means that all the electrics, major plumbing, including sinks, toilets and bathtubs, the kitchen units and countertops will be installed.'

Since Steve's home was assembled, the company has found a way to deliver the modules with all the glass intact, significantly shortening the installation time: all that's left to do on delivery is bolt and weld the house to the foundations – a two-day job – grout the tiles and put a final coating on the walls..

open and contemporary, managing to be both show-home impressive and warm and inviting. From the double-sized wood and frosted glass front door, you step down into the first of many living spaces. From there you can see into most of the downstairs area and, through the open central atrium, many of the upstairs rooms, too. The easily accessible outdoor balconies and patios create a seamless indoor/outdoor living experience, perfect for the year-round Californian sunshine. Steve has added to the house his eclectic – if design-conscious – collection of furniture; a Jeffrey Bennett armchair here, an Eames recliner there.

The home, however, goes far beyond the visual in its appeal, taking ecological ideals to new levels. On the energy side, hydronic space heating, a closed combustion, smoke-free fireplace (also an aesthetic focal point) and solar power for hot water keep costs and emissions down. On the water side, the same is achieved with a drought-tolerant native landscape, a grey-water system which uses sink and shower water for irrigation, and a computerised watering system that checks the weather on the internet before switching itself on. All materials are resourced within 500 miles and recycled, reclaimed or sustainably grown: the kitchen counter, for example, is made of recycled and pressed newspaper – it looks like black granite.

Steve's company has contracts to build 11 Living Homes in both southern and northern California. Buyers can choose from one of four flexible Kappe designs, ranging from \$350,000 (£180,000) to \$650,000 (£335,000), plus delivery and assembly. 'We are concerned about how the homes can grow,' Steve says. 'The moveable walls create a more flexible space' and, in this one, for example, you can add a floor plate and two wall plates so it can expand into a fourth bedroom. Houses don't usually elegantly allow for renovation like this.'

For a single man, Steve admits three bedrooms and two bathrooms are more than enough in his own house. 'Hopefully some day there'll be a family here,' he says. A home as appealing as this won't stay empty for long. [Living Homes \(livinghomes.us\)](http://LivingHomes.com)