

THE STYLE & DESIGN ISSUE

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HOME



360°
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THE PREFAB LUXURY HOME

LIVINGHOMES HOUSE

➤ The day began as ex-tech entrepreneur Steve Glenn watched a crane gently lower a stairwell onto a cement slab in Santa Monica, California. Eight hours later his three-bedroom, 2,500-square-foot bachelor pad stood shining. Walls of floor-to-ceiling glass and sun-drenched interiors mark it as California modernist, but the house represents more than Left Coast status quo. It's the beta test of Glenn's newest start-up: LivingHomes, maker of high-style, low-impact, luxury prefab housing. No doubt that the last bit sounds like an oxymoron, with "prefab" conjuring images of pastel vinyl siding and lawn gnomes. That's why Glenn hired Ray Kappe, an architect at the forefront of making modular look jet-set, incorporating multiple levels (think groovy sunken living rooms) mixed with lush interior gardens and expansive decks that tweak conventional conceptions of "indoors" and "outdoors."

The structure's numbers are impressive: 11 modules, each weighing an average of five tons, manufactured in a nearby California factory in four months and assembled in a single day. No weather delays. No shyster general contractors. No do-it-yourself dilemmas. "It's a way to build better, faster, and cheaper, and with a smaller ecological footprint," says Glenn.

Turns out building green was relatively easy, a matter of sourcing eco-friendly systems and materials — and paying up. Green features added an estimated 20 percent over a comparable prefab place but resulted in a house that makes its own power, automatically irrigates plants using gray water (wastewater from the showers and sinks), and leaves almost no carbon footprint. That list of eco-superlatives earned it a platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating — the U.S. Green Building Council's equivalent of Michelin awarding three stars to a restaurant — making it the first residence ever and one of only five buildings in the nation with such bragging rights.

One more benefit to building a home Lego-style? Renovations are a drag-and-drop affair. Kappe's design, with rooms that blend to form large open spaces, perfectly matches Glenn's lifestyle as a single SoCal 40-something. And if he gets hitched, the house will adapt, with movable walls and a structure that allows rooms or an entire floor to be added. LivingHomes is no pipe dream, either — since April 2006 the company has sold 13 houses. The price is \$280 per square foot, excluding foundation, transportation, and lawn gnomes (livinghomes.net). —JESSIE SCANLON



[ORIGINS]

■ Kappe's sense of shape and Glenn's personal style come through in this initial rendering of the house, though Kappe originally had different plans. "I wanted to do it more as a steel house, with less wood," he says. "Steve wanted as much glass as possible because he thought that it had universal appeal. Same with the wood siding and ceilings. I think that proved correct."

PHOTO: C.J. BENO; PHOTOGRAPHY: JONAS BUCHHEITZ; PHOTOGRAPHY: (4)

[DETAILS]

1. The expansive roof deck has a garden with deer grass that helps insulate the house.
2. A rooftop photovoltaic system provides 75 percent of the house's power. The solar panels double as a canopy.
3. The retaining walls are made from pieces of a sidewalk that

had occupied the site, the house frame's steel is recycled, usually from automobiles, and the kitchen countertops are almost entirely made of recycled newspaper.
4. An oversize fireplace burns denatured ethanol, meaning no smoke at all.

