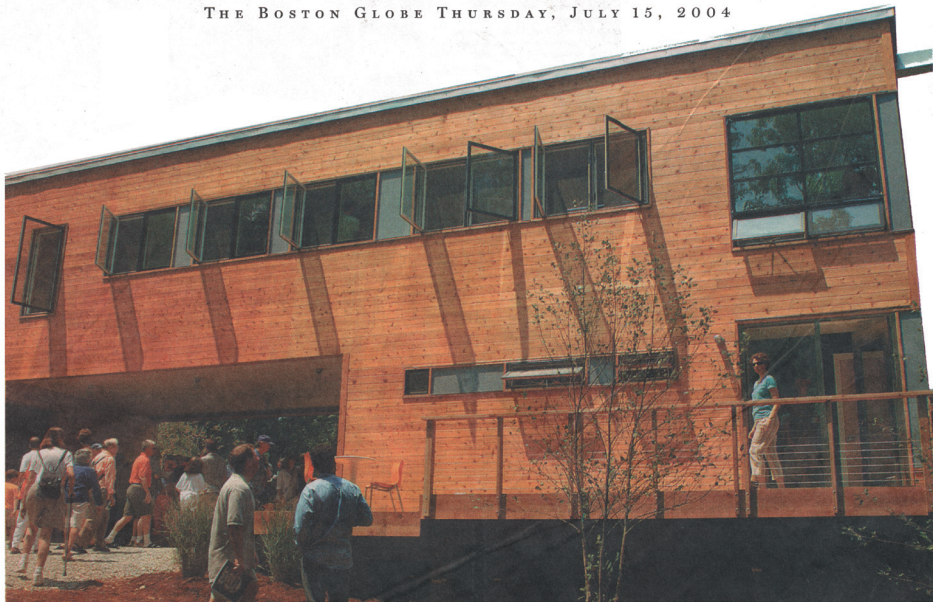


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Fab prefab

Dwell magazine leads the rebirth of a modernist movement in housing



GLORIE PHOTOS/LOGAN MOCK-BUNTING

About 2,500 people converged on Pittsboro, N.C., Saturday for a look at the Dwell Home, a 2,942-square-foot modern prefabricated structure designed by Resolution 4: Architecture in New York for a Dwell magazine contest. At left, homeowner Ingrid Weiler adds a few personal touches to the home (top), while decorators work on the flooring.

By Diane Daniel

GLORIE COURTESY/DWELL

PITTSBORO, N.C. — Hanks Chapel Road, a two-lane blacktop lined with pine trees, meadows, and Carolina red clay, is an unlikely stage for modern prefab, a housing form that's not new but has certainly been revived.

And yet, here among the modest stick or brick homes of central North Carolina is the Dwell Home, which was delivered in seven pieces by a local manufacturer in April and features cedar siding, a bamboo floor, stainless-steel doors, decks with cable rails, indoor and outdoor fireplaces, and much sunlight.

It owes its name, and existence, to Dwell magazine, which publishes eight times a year from San Francisco with the tagline, "at home in the modern world." The magazine doesn't turn 4 until October, but it reaches 200,000 subscribers, many of them unusually enthusiastic and faithful. They have been eagerly following the construction in the magazine and online since January 2003, when editor Allison Arieff announced a contest to design it.

The guidelines: Build a 2,000-square-foot house for no more than \$200,000, excluding land, site work, and fees. The winner, a com-

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GLOBE PHOTOS/LOGAN MOCK-BUNTING

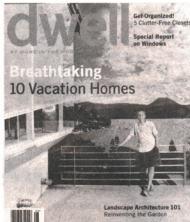
Prefab enthusiasts from across the country have a first look at the Dwell Home in Pittsboro, N.C., last weekend.

Dwell magazine fuels a prefab revival

► DWELL HOME *Continued from Page H1*

pany called Resolution: 4 Architecture of New York City, was chosen in May 2003. The price tag of the Dwell Home could be as much as 50 percent higher if it were being built in New England instead of in this rural town near Raleigh and Chapel Hill, notes Resolution: 4 partner Joseph Tanney.

The house that was built differs from the model on the Dwell Home website, thedwellhome.com. To keep within contest rules and lower the cost, the house was scaled back. "The original plans submitted for the competition totaled 2,260 square feet; the house as built is 2,042 square feet," Tanney says. "We omitted the lower bedroom and walk-out basement."



Allison Grief, editor of Dwell magazine, which publishes eight times a year, says she is excited by the booming interest in modern prefab.

Work at the site went slower than expected, and when the house was unveiled to the public Saturday, the bathrooms were unfinished, only part of it was furnished, and the yard looked more like a construction site. In fact, the 2,500 people who attended in 95-degree heat (Dwell had expected about 500 visitors) had to sign liability waivers because of the state of construction.

"What is surprising," says Arief, "is that the most difficult part has been the un prefab part, like floors and counters."

The house will soon be lived in by owners Nathan Wieler, 31, a former dot-com entrepreneur, and his wife, Ingrid Tung, 32. The couple moved to Chapel Hill from the Buffalo area in the mid-'90s but became discouraged while searching for their first home. Wieler said. During the couple's research, they discovered Arief, who also is coauthor of the 2002 book "Prefab," and contacted her for prefab information.

The bad news, she told them, was there wasn't a lot out there — yet. The good news was "we had really wanted to do some kind of housing competition," Arief says, and a partnership was born. The couple bought 12 wooded acres in Pittsboro, and the magazine invited 16 architects to submit designs for the home, which sits atop a hill surrounded by trees.

Resolution: 4 Architecture started to offer modern prefab choices a couple years ago after becoming discouraged at the proliferation of unremarkable, oversized homes.

"We made an observation about several things," says Tanney. "Americans are building and occupying homes at an alarming rate. But with 95 percent of the homes built, architects are not involved. We also noticed that our stuff is getting cooler — iPods, Target, Philippe Starck toothbrushes. But our domestic space is getting worse and worse."

Still, if not for Dwell, their plans might never have seen the light of day. The magazine's popularity "gave us the impetus," he says. With a dozen projects in the works — including one on Martha's Vineyard — they're still at the start of a learning curve, Tanney says, and the most difficult lessons

have been taught by the players in the standard building community — the local and state code writers, the manufacturers, the general contractors.

"Most of them wish we'd go away," he says.

That seems unlikely to happen; a movement is clearly afoot. Like the inspiration that Resolution: 4 received, several entrepreneurs and architects are riding the wave of Dwell's popularity. One of them is Michael Sylvester, a California-based industry consultant who runs the year-old clearinghouse fabprefab.com.

"Dwell magazine gets full credit for bringing the modern prefab home back onto the radar," he says.

Another newcomer is LiveModern, operated by Marshall Mayer, who recently left San Francisco for Montana. Mayer was among a group of active Dwell online chaters who recognized "this modernist housing swell."

Like sylvesterfab.com, the site livemodern.com connects people interested in modern housing. Unlike Sylvester, Mayer is in sales. He markets two prefab lines — the LV Home by architect Rocio Romero, and the Glidehouse, designed by Michelle Kaufmann. The Glidehouse was unveiled and

exhibited in the spring to much fanfare at Sunset magazine in Menlo Park, Calif.

Also found on the site is the work of Gregory La Vardera, an architect near Philadelphia who has long been interested in modern design. He, too, says the Dwell message board, which he helped to monitor in the early days, inspired him to create stock plans for modern homes.

"In order to infiltrate the marketplace, I felt like we should be able to deliver modern design in a medium that people understand," he says. He's now posted and sells six designs and four complete sets of building plans.

"People who buy my plans are regular middle-class people who have slightly different tastes, not some design elite," he says.

How many regular folks are interested in modern prefab?

"This question of measuring potential market is of enormous interest to everybody," says Carol Burns, a partner in Taylor & Burns Architects of Boston. Burns and Arief have met, but perhaps it's a sign of Arief's personal approach that like those of even lesser acquaintance, Burns refers to the editor by her first name.

"Allison has said it many times

Keep in touch

Modern prefab has grown as fast as a modular house in the past few years. Here are some ways to learn more.

BOOKS

"Prefab," by Dwell editor Allison Arief and Bryan Burkhardt (Gibbs Smith Publishers, \$39.95), is in its fourth printing since it was published in 2002. It covers history, current architects, and building alternatives.

"Modern Prefab," by Jill Herbers (Harper Design, \$39.95), which has a similar overview of the movement, was published in May.

WEBSITES

Details on the Dwell Home are at thedwellhome.com, including background on the contest, links to the 16 contestants and projects, and pictures of the progress along the way. At the general site for Dwell magazine, dwellmag.com, you'll find articles and a discussion board.

re4a.com is the website of Resolution: 4 Architecture. The 12 homes the New York firm is working on, including one on Martha's Vineyard, are shown and updated here.

[LiveModern.com](http://livemodern.com) features industry information and includes sales information on modular darlings The Glidehouse and the LV Home. Also links to Gregory La Vardera's modern stock plans. wielershomes.com is the site for Wieler Homes, the company started by Dwell Home owner Nathan Wieler. It sells Ralph Rapson's Greenbelt designs.

Michael Sylvester's site fabprefab.com has news on projects, architects, education, books, discussion boards, and the like.

DIANE DANIEL

— the people interested in Ikea want something well-designed that doesn't cost a fortune. It's not a question of whether the market exists or not, but how big a sector it is," says Burns.

Burns, like several others, compares the Dwell Home contest to the mid-century Case Study Houses, a famed California program from 1945 to 1966 by avant-garde Arts and Architecture magazine that was created to inspire the construction of affordable modern homes.

Like Dwell's influence on others in the business, the Case Study program "certainly did have a trickle-down effect, especially the influence on [Joseph] Eichler," Burns says, referring to the West Coast designer and builder, the only one to build modernist-style homes on a large scale. "But I don't see that Allison has her Joseph Eichler yet."

Maybe not, but there is a Dwell player who would love nothing more than to follow in Eichler's footsteps — Dwell Home owner Nathan Wieler. Wieler himself has now gone into the modern prefab building business. Earlier this year he partnered with famed modern architect Ralph Rapson of Minneapolis, formerly at MIT, who updated his Case Study Greenbelt home for Wieler Homes. Rapson also was a contestant in the Dwell Home contest.

"Definitely Eichler's a huge inspiration for this company," Wieler says. "A lot has happened since the technology and prefab system then. There's a way to do this now on a national level."

Dwell editor Arief, though "dismayed with the state of housing in this country," is excited by the booming interest in modern prefab, much of which she can take credit for. "What it promises is the potential to bring modernism to a great community, to bring good design to the masses. I think if you build it, they come."

As for the magazine, "we are doing another competition, which we'll announce in our September issue. It's not prefab," Arief says. "We'll probably do an issue on prefab in 2005. It's not something I'm abandoning."

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