

# Upwardly mobile home has architect's touch

## Winning prefab design headed to Triangle

By Richard Stradling, Staff Writer

Nathan Wieler and Ingrid Tung hope to help launch a new housing trend in their patch of woods near Pittsboro. Early next year, the couple will move into a factory-built house that will have little in common with the single-wides and double-wides that roll out of factories now. Its designers hope the couple's new home, with its modern architecture, will serve as a model for a type of manufactured housing that appeals to a wide audience.

Wieler and Tung are reaping the benefit of an international design competition sponsored by Dwell, a modern home magazine based in San Francisco. The magazine asked 16 architectural firms from as far away as Sweden and Australia each to design a prototype home that could be mass-produced.

Allison Arieff, Dwell's editor-in-chief, said she thinks the home will find a market among middle-class people who want something other than a typical tract house but can't afford to hire an architect to create a custom home.

Wieler and Tung, who were married Saturday, helped choose the winner, which came from the New York firm Resolution: 4 Architecture. The two-story home, which will cost Wieler and Tung about \$200,000, will be L-shaped, with terraces, an outdoor fireplace and lots of windows.

"We like it aesthetically," Wieler said. "And we thought it would be one of the more fun houses to live in."

Manufactured housing has earned its reputation for being "cheap and ugly," said Arieff, who wrote a book about modern "prefab" homes. But she says she sees no reason why assembly-line production can't be married with good design. She hopes the Dwell contest will inspire manufacturers to aim higher.

"Many of them will readily admit that their designs are not very advanced or innovative, and they're not sure how to get there," she said.

Joseph Tanney, one of the architects of the winning design, said his firm has formed a company called Modern Modular that will make the homes. The price would likely come down through mass production, Arieff said.

"The goal would be to become the one-stop shop, where we design and we build it as well," Tanney said. "Right now we're taking baby steps. We want to do one, and do it well."

Wieler and Tung, both 30, got involved in the Dwell contest partly out of frustration. They spent weeks looking for a home in the Chapel Hill area and didn't even like the ones they couldn't afford.

"It's like trying to find the person you're going to marry," said Tung, a former corporate lawyer who plans to open a preschool. "Nothing really grabbed us."

Then the couple picked up Dwell and saw an ad for Arieff's book. Wieler called Arieff to get an advance copy, and they soon began talking about the design competition and the need for a client.

"She said, 'You guys would be the guinea pigs,'" Wieler said.

Dwell told competitors to design a 2,000-square-foot home for less than \$200,000. Wieler and Tung provided other specs: three bedrooms, office space for him, a place to teach violin for her, room for a future addition.

"We didn't want something that looked like it was about to take off," Wieler said.

The couple put a video of their 12-acre lot online so architects could see the hilltop building site; four architects from New York and California came to Pittsboro to see for themselves.

The designs varied considerably. One home came in a variety of colors and featured power windows. Another had glass walls with white Kevlar curtains on the outside. A third looked like a warehouse.

"There were some things we said right away, 'That's cool, but I wouldn't want to live in it,'" Wieler said.

Wieler founded Zoom Culture, an Internet start-up that evolved into a television production company before closing this year. He now has a small business helping people build art collections but says he may pursue a prefab venture of some sort.

"I think there's a great opportunity to bring a great designed, affordable, prefab home to the market that people can order from anywhere in the country," he said.

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