

pieceHomes Commits To Modern Green And Modular

By Robert Mendel, *AB* Alumnus

LOS ANGELES, CA—Sustainability is a social issue that is here to stay. The building industry took the early lead in addressing the various challenges it presented and if it wasn't a revolution it was a movement that produced the Energy Star® and LEED certifications and made the word 'green' a household term.

Now that sustainability is a key element in the building industry architects have embraced the movement. Jonathan Davis, the principal of Davis Studio Architecture + Design (DSAD), founder and designer of pieceHomes here is one architect who began incorporating sustainable features in his work long before it was a buzzword. At the time he was designing custom site-built homes in Louisiana, Colorado and the Cascades where the emphasis was on interaction with the site and the surrounding landscape.

Davis explains, "I built my first home over 20 years ago and even then I used geothermal heat pumps, solar panels and a buried insulated tank as a heat sink tank and thermal exchange. I've been doing sustainable features for a long time. When my wife and I joined our business and our lives six years ago we decided to bring the green factor to the forefront. So we make our basic finish package for pieceHomes® as sustainable as we can without busting out of the budget."

Davis' studio includes a full service print and web design wing, generally the responsibility of his wife, Mary Jo. When the Davises added modular homes to their architectural business they called it pieceHomes with the tag line 'pH for a



Davis Studio Architecture + Design home and office in Los Angeles typifies 'modern' architecture with its simplicity of design based on boxes and use of industrial sheathing material. Interior is designed to maximize light and provide for cross ventilation a feature of pieceHomes' models.

balanced home.' They describe their pieceHomes product as 'a line of green, modern modular homes.'

"We aren't saying every home is certified. Our homes can be certified to various sustainable standards such as LEED or Build It Green but even when they are not certified we're building to those standards," Davis says. "Building in the factory in itself is sustainable and it has a smaller carbon footprint than conventional construction due to the processes and efficient use of materials," he adds.

The pieceHomes line consists of the Single, the Double, the Container (in name only, not a shipping container), the Wrap House, the Wrap Tower, the Solar Passage and the Venice2, along with extraPieces, a series of modular sections used for additions to existing homes. The models can be selected in their standard format or customized.

Davis notes that one aspect to his approach to sustainable also means building smaller and more efficiently.

"You don't need a 4,000 sq. ft. home.

You can live in 1,500 sq. ft. home if it's designed well and includes a strong connection to the outdoors. Or instead of building



The Solar Passage fits on a 50' lot and it looks inward on the lot. It's also designed to provide as much light in as possible. It has a solar orientation with cross-ventilation. The model runs 1,540 sq. ft. in a three-bedroom plan with decks, green roof and a solar panel covered entry.



Jonathan and Mary Jo Davis joined their business careers by launching a full service design studio called Davis Studio Architecture + Design with services ranging from commercial and residential architecture and interior design to graphic design for print, web and other digital media. They also brought green building to the forefront with their pieceHomes model line.

one home on a large lot you can build a number of homes and create community or build a neighborhood,” he adds.

Some pieceHomes models are based on something DSAD has done before. The company studio/home structure on Venice Boulevard is 17' wide. Davis based the Single model on it and narrowed it to 12' wide.

The Double doubles that size to create a 24' wide duplex. The Solar Passage fits on a 50' lot, looks inward on the lot and is designed to let in as much light as possible. It has a solar orientation as well as cross-ventilation, another factor Davis considers important in all pieceHomes designs.

All the pieceHomes models offer solar panels, green roof and deck or roof deck as options. The ‘smaller is beautiful’ approach also affects affordability. Davis is trying to reach a larger client base with an attractive price for an architect-designed green home.

“While many people still think ‘prefab’ means that you can get a house for \$100 per sq. ft., pieceHomes are built to UBC state codes,” Davis says. “Our models can be built at \$200 – \$225 per sq. ft. on a foundation, finished and ready for move-in.”

There’s just one issue facing Davis and his pieceHomes venture at the moment: the dearth of modular manufacturers in California.

Davis says: “We’re working with Silvercrest/Western here in Southern California because they’re willing to build something close to what we’re designing. In Mar Vista

we’re building a two modular section addition to a home and a one-section 628 sq. ft. guest house. We also have a 2,000 sq. ft. house project in Mountain View, CA and we’re talking to a number of factories about that.”

Without undertaking a marketing push Davis’ work has attracted considerable attention. He has been getting calls and e-mails from around the country on an average of one a day, just from his online presence. To date pieceHomes marketing consists of its web site, the architectural studio web site, a presence on several other prefab web sites (www.prefabs.com, www.prefabcosm.com), Low Impact Living, (www.lowimpactliving.com) and by participating in the *Dwell* magazine annual design shows.

“We’re very interested in finding modular builders who will build to our specifications and we’ll consider metal or wood sections and even SIPs. Our approach, however, is to build as much as possible in the factory which is why we focus on modular construction, not panelized.”

Davis is finding that more and more people are enjoying modern home design and the fact that it’s linked to the sustainable movement.

“I think over time you will see more people who are looking into modular homes say ‘Lets go with a modern design,’” he says.

Davis is currently involved in another intriguing project working with a client in the Northeast who runs an events managing company. They want to take a modular home on the road to 10 cities across the country. The tour will serve to showcase what ‘green’ means. They are planning to use the Solar Passage model. Davis is looking for someone who wants to build it and then benefit someone like Habitat for Humanity or auction it off to help a worthy cause.

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The Davis architectural rendering of a recreational room addition done with a single modular section in Mar Vista, CA. Extensive use of glass opens the interior to daylight and creates a sense of space beyond the square footage. Davis is finding that more people are enjoying modern designs and its link to the sustainable connection.