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Cottage in a day

Anne Stanton

More and more people are thinking about living more simply and going "green."

The problem has always been that it's just so darn expensive and complicated to do the right thing.

As a Traverse City area builder for 20 years, Drew Craven is ready to deliver on an out-of-the-box, planet-friendly house and he believes the market is ready.

"I think people are realizing that with traditional stick-built homes, they are paying more and more and getting less and less," Craven said.

The typical homeowner is guaranteed to have future maintenance problems, pay more each year to heat the home, paint the exterior and interior on a regular basis, and deal with woodpeckers or other wood-loving animals. And Michigan's weather always makes construction schedules a challenge.

"People are building a house essentially the same way they did 150 years ago, and I just felt it was time to move forward," Craven said.

BREAKING THE MOLD

So five years ago, he started sketching out a new kind of construction that would break the mold and solve these inherent problems. The result: a modular home called "Cottage in a Day," which is literally what it says it is. You can order a cottage and 60 to 90 days later, get it delivered and "installed" in one day.

"You can get it delivered and sleep in it the same night, it's that easy to hook up. I think when people look at it, they'll think it's a great idea," Craven said.

In the spirit of simpler, economical living, the cottage designs are small, starting at 345 square feet. They can go as big as the owner wants, however, thanks to the modular design based on 14-feet by 14-feet squares.

Craven says he has thought through every conceivable way to make the cottage ultra-energy efficient and environmentally sensitive.

The walls, floor and roof are made with structural insulated panels—essentially a thick foam core sandwiched between plywood. That makes it impossible for cold or hot air to permeate the building (air exchanges are built into the cottage for air flow).

The modularity allows the cottage to be built on hilly ground. The home's foundation rests on piers, so that makes a minimal impact on fragile terrain.

And it also eliminates the big dirt piles.

"These cottages sit on piers, so all we're doing is boring holes in the ground," Craven explained.

ENERGY STAR

Craven approached the interior design with an eye toward sustainability. Appliances and windows in the house are all energy-star rated, meaning big savings on electricity and water flow. The hardwood floors are made of fast-growing bamboo grass, which releases 35 percent more oxygen into the air than its tree stand equivalents. To maximize space, there's a beehive of squares under the floors to contain the furnace and water heater, as well as to provide storage. The cement board exterior siding is extremely durable, requires very little maintenance, and carries a 50-year warranty.

The modularity also gives great flexibility in design, so the cottage can serve as a guest house, an office, a school classroom, a migrant home, a warming hut, or an artist's studio. "The main thing was getting the design down so it could be adaptable to all these uses," Craven said.

Except for the bamboo, most everything in the cottage is purchased locally or within the state of Michigan. In fact, Brown Lumber has been a fantastic supporter and source of materials, said Kim Bazemore, an associate who has worked side-by-side with Craven to create the new business.

Bazemore is a jewelry designer and an interior designer. She became involved in renovating and renting out homes in Traverse City about five years ago, when she met Craven. Bazemore and architect Michael Fitzhugh helped design the homes, which have an open feel, earth-friendly textures, and are

outfitted with lofts—another space saver.

INSIDE JOB

Bazemore, Craven and a small crew of workers are building the company's first cottage inside of a large pole barn on Keystone Road. A crane stands nearby for moving the walls. It's cold inside the pole barn, but Craven said it beats working in a blizzard. Once the cottage is finished, a mammoth door will open up, and a semi-truck will pull up and deliver the cottage to a plot of land on the Manistee River.

Even though the company is in its infancy, there's been a lot of interest already, Bazemore said. A Northport woman, for example, plans to order a small guest house for each of her adult children who come to visit.

The cost of a cottage ranges from \$254 to \$270 per square foot. Although that sounds very expensive at first blush, Craven said that it's competitive because a cottage comes complete with site work, plumbing, electrical work, and requires very little maintenance. The cost to heat a 570-square-foot cottage is about \$25 a month. And the energy star utilities mean dramatically lower electric bills.

"With a traditional home, people see their bills go up and up and up. I call this cottage an inflation killer," Craven said.

For more information, call 946-7741 or go to www.cottageinaday.com in early March, when the site goes up.

[back to features](#)

