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The L41 home: Seduced by a tiny modern cub



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Christina Symons spends a swell night in the L41, a prototype dwelling.

By Christina Symons

It's a bit risqué, agreeing to a sleepover on a second date. But after I was introduced to the charming and invited to return to spend the night, I didn't hesitate to pack a suitcase.

Truth is, they had me at the rendering. It's something you'd expect to find in *Dwell*, *Domus* or *Wall*

be the first person to catch some winks in a module dwelling that addresses the need for modern, at arrangement.

The L41 home — a play on “all for one” — is the brainchild of Vancouver architect Michael Katz and partners in life as well as design. It’s their first prototype dwelling together: a tiny, modern cube dressed in glass and charcoal grey.

“The parameters evolved around asking the question: ‘How small can we design a house and make it habitable?’”
“There’s a big difference between that and ‘How small can you make a house?’”

At first glance, you can imagine it as a laneway house or stacked à la Moshe Safdie’s Habitat 67 project.

And so, purely on looks alone, I want one. But they’re not kidding: This abode is ultra micro — 220 sq. ft. Can it really be habitable, let alone delightful? Beyond the allure of a minimalist footprint, there was a lot of intelligence.

Mr. Katz, who has an extensive background in architecture, urban planning, compact and subsidized housing, and Ms. Corne, an artist and designer, explain the L41’s inventory of innovations.

Key features include an integrated building mechanical system, “the beating heart” with solar thermal panels and sustainable construction techniques, including non-toxic materials, LED lighting, zinc cladding, large windows and cross-ventilation.

As important, the L41 is intended to be mass produced, with the price declining as production goes to scale. (Delivery, foundation or services) range from \$90,000 for the 250-sq.-ft. studio to \$120,000 for the two-bedroom unit.

Framing is cross-laminated timber (CLT) fabricated with beetle-killed wood. The strength of CLT is typically used in mid-rise buildings (or stacked L41s, as the case may be) which Mr. Katz and Ms. Corne feel is a more sustainable alternative to emissions-producing concrete. At this time, they are exploring the feasibility of a 12-story building.

Inside, the L41 layout is deceptively simple. The interiors are nuanced, layered and elegant, with kitchen and living areas. Mr. Katz and Ms. Corne decided to build this singular unit for the 2010 Olympics to prove how small they could make it. But it can be configured as one- or two-bedroom, module by module.

“When we told people we were going to design a 220-square-foot studio unit,” Mr. Katz says, “they thought it was a tiny space, a jail cell.”

But the two weren’t obsessing on size as much as focusing on quality of experience and living space. “It’s a great kitchen,” says Ms. Corne, who notes that most small homes compromise this area.

Here, sleek Eggersmann cabinetry is recessed below the ceiling, adding loft and height to the full-size living area. Large, rather clear horizontal windows to flood the area with light. The appliance package is streamlined and includes compact European brands.

storage system is stepped back to visually broaden the space. A retractable glass wall provides the o to outdoors, where there is bicycle and solar battery storage on the deck. The bathroom is modelled

“It’s a teaching device, this little house,” Mr. Katz says. “It’s a conversation about the future and tha produce a little house like this, then we can do what Ikea did and bring high design and high quality

When I arrive for my sleepover, and after tucking my bag in the closet and stashing my snacks, I ch sofa bed and take it all in. Could I live here? Yes indeed!

There’s room for a yoga mat or to skip rope, for sure. I can watch a movie via projector on the scree studio. And the Control 4 smart electronics system allows me to adjust all the lights, sync my iPod f one remote. After a sweet welcome party drops off some wine, a cosy gathering for eight to 10 peopl

I drift off to sleep thinking about the last thing Michael Katz said to me, before he wished me a good

“I hope this little house speaks to you in a way that shows you the L41 is all you really need. Everyth just desire.”

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