



Words by **Kevin McCloud**

THE PERFECT HOUSE No 10: THE M-HOUSE



Above, two seamlessly-joined caravans combine to make the M-House, which incorporates mod-cons such as water, electricity, and underfloor heating



DESPITE APPEARANCES, THIS MONTH'S PERFECT HOUSE IS NOT ACTUALLY A HOUSE. IT'S A CARAVAN. ALBEIT AN INCREDIBLY WELL-DESIGNED, FULLY FUNCTIONAL, HIGHLY FINISHED, IMMENSELY COVETABLE CARAVAN



IT MIMICS A BUILD PROCESS USED IN THE UNITED STATES, WHERE HOUSES ARE PREFABRICATED AND FINISHED IN SECTIONS, THEN TRUCKED TO THE SITE



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ow's your space management? Do you need more? Have your children metamorphosed into smelly, hairy teenagers who want their own 'personal space, dad'? Or have your local authority refused you permission for the extension? I have the answer: the M-House.

This 1,000sqft piece of Californian cool is the brainchild of architect Tim Pyne. And the most extraordinary thing about it, is that it's not a house you need to move to. It's not even a house. It's a caravan.

To be precise, it's two caravans, which are seamlessly joined. So, if you have access 3m wide to your back garden, you can slip in the two sections of prefabricated building (each comes on wheels) and slip your 'home extension' through a rather large, silver-box-shaped loophole in the planning system. Providing you're going to use your M-House 'incidental to the enjoyment of the main dwellinghouse' and it fits within the curtilage of your home, it can become part of your home. And it won't feel like a caravan at all.

This is partly because the M-House has a huge projecting apron, a deck, under which its chassis and wheels are invisible, so it doesn't look as though it's going anywhere. It also won't feel like a caravan because it can have mains water, electricity and drainage, underfloor heating, plus some cool domestic appliances. Also, unlike my parents' Sprite Musketeer, the M-House has walls which will take a nail to hang your pictures – they even conform to Part L of the building regulations. All this means, of course, much improved lavatory facilities: no condensation on the loo walls, no having to wait for everyone to leave the vicinity before attempting a poo behind a foldaway plastic screen, and no chemical toilet to empty.

It seems inappropriate to heap praise on anyone who has raised the

standards of caravan design, because they are so dire. But Tim Pyne is worthy of much more, because he has created so much more, along with a team of collaborators, who between them, bring as much to the M-House party as Fat Boy Slim and Eminem might bring to any other kind of house party. It was partly inspired by Cedric Price, the father of Archigram; the planning issues surrounding the design were resolved and clarified by consultant barrister, James Hines; architect Michael Howe worked on the detailing of the building and Neil Thomas, a visiting professor of product design at the Royal College of Art, supervised the engineering and manufacturing.

Of course, the real reason it doesn't look or feel like a caravan is because it isn't one. This home more closely resembles a Portakabin construction. More accurately, it mimics a build process used everywhere in the United States, where houses are prefabricated and finished in sections, then trucked to the site and assembled in a day or two.

The perfect brilliance of the M-House lies in the level of thought that has gone into designing it – the quality of its factory manufacture and how Tim Pyne has used the product of this mix of new standards to address the crises facing Britain's housing. We live in one of the most overcrowded countries in the world; we have a serious skills shortage in the housing industry, and our planning structure is creaking under the weight of applications.

The M-House deals with these problems one by one. Admittedly it costs more than a caravan, at £150,000, but that's inexpensive for a piece of couture architecture in a place where planning permission for a permanent residence might be unthinkable. I'm now wondering whether to leave my home in its entirety to the teenage children and move into one in a neighbouring field. ■

tell us about it...

Who are you?

British architect, Tim Pyne, designer of the M-House.

What is the M-House?

Pronounced 'mouse' it is an easy-to-assemble, modernist kit house. It needs no foundations, can be delivered within 12 weeks of ordering, and comes in two pieces, which slot together on site. It has a variety of uses, including holiday home and granny annexe and, as the internal walls can be omitted, it can also be used as an office, studio or party venue. Classed as a caravan, the M-House can live anywhere: in the countryside, on urban brown sites, roofs, beaches, and even on rivers.

How did the idea for the house materialise?

I saw a beautiful house for sale by the River Crouch in Essex, but you weren't allowed to build on the site, only to park a caravan or mobile home. But when I looked to see what was on the market, there weren't any mobile homes good enough. So I decided to build my own - something that I'd like to live in. It is designed to very high specifications, there's no stamp duty or VAT to pay, no problems with planning permission, no builders and, best of all, if you move, you can take it with you.

How much does it cost?

The price of a two-bedroom M-House ready to move into is around £150,000. It will be absolutely suitable as a permanent residence and should be maintenance-free for around 100 years.

Does it feel poky?

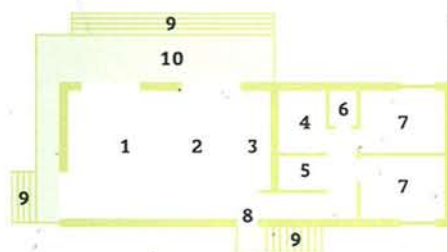
Not at all. The M-House provides over 1,000sqft of space, with 8ft ceiling height. It comes with a fitted kitchen with loads of work surfaces and storage, a bathroom with shower and bath and even has kingsize bed decks with storage below.

Can I have a look around?

A finished and furnished 'double-wide' M-house is available for viewing in a meadow just outside Canterbury. Contact us and we'll let you know where the key is and you can let yourselves in. Tim Pyne, m-house (0207 739 3367; m-house.org)



Opposite, wheels of the caravan are concealed beneath a huge projecting deck apron; the kitchen has 8ft high ceilings and feels surprisingly lofty. This page from top, the bathroom - a far cry from foldaway plastic screens and chemical toilets; the living/dining area; the M-House can be clad in a variety of finishes



FLOOR PLAN

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|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 Sitting area | 6 WC |
| 2 Dining area | 7 Bedroom |
| 3 Kitchen | 8 Main entrance |
| 4 Bathroom | 9 Steps |
| 5 Utility | 10 Deck |

