

THE WORLD'S BEST HOMES,
INTERIORS & DESIGN

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INTERIORS//DESIGN//ARCHITECTURE

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MATTEO ALESSI

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



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BE BRAZEN
WITH KNOCK-'EM-DEAD
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PLUS//DREAM HOUSES IN THE UK AND AMSTERDAM AND THE WORLD'S BEST DESIGN HOTELS



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MODERN HOMES

A PREFAB PALACE

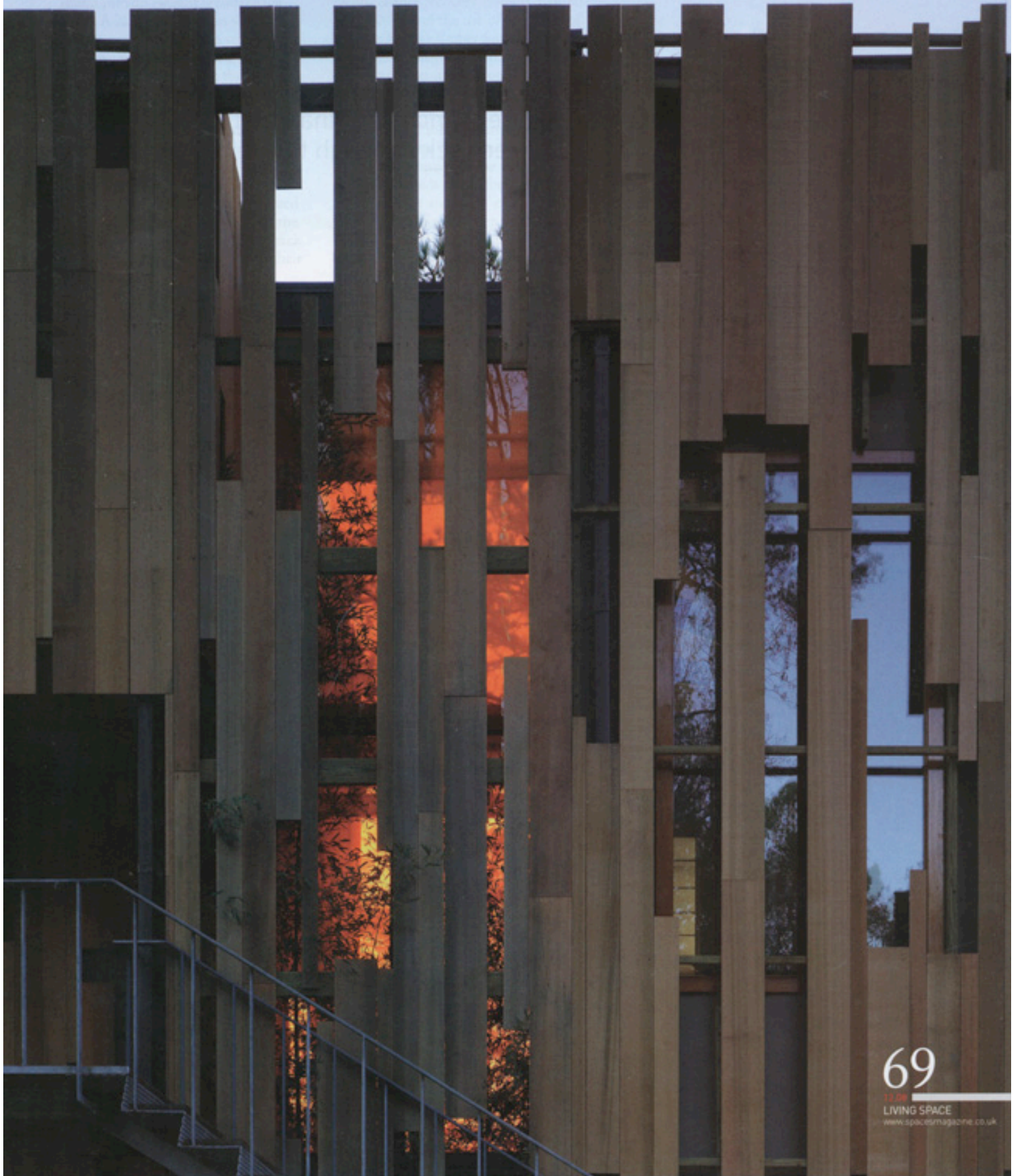
Still can't think of prefab buildings without visions of utilitarian and decidedly un-sexy post-war boxes clouding your vision? This is how Emma Hill felt until she laid eyes on the rather lovely Loblolly House.

PHOTOS: Barry Halkin

For years architects have been championing off-the-shelf housing as a cost and energy efficient solution, but ask the man on the street to describe his dream home and you'll be waiting a long time to hear the word prefab. Perhaps this is about to change, though, with the advent of a new breed of lovable kit homes which show just how far we've come since the early days of prefabs.

Take Loblolly House, for example. Having been constructed miles from its Maryland site and assembled from the platform up in just six weeks it easily holds its own against homes that have been built in a more traditional manner over a far longer time frame.

The house's staggered vertical rain screen evokes the pattern of light and shadow formed by the trees that surround it.



It is to the architects' credit that Loblolly House has been attracting much interest and more than a little praise from those who've been lucky enough to see it 'in the flesh'.

Despite its hasty construction, the house has a cosy, lived-in feel with its sophisticated nature-inspired palette.



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The 2,200 sq ft family home, which takes its rather unusual name from the loblolly pines that surround it, fits seamlessly into its site, fusing the natural elements of this barrier island into an elegant architectural form. A clever aluminium scaffold system provides both the structural framework for the building and the means of connecting the pre-fabricated elements using simple tools.

The architects behind the project, Kieran Timberlake Associates, have been heavily associated with off-site construction for some time. The firm also has a strong reputation for eco-friendly builds, having embraced sustainable design solutions from the moment they were founded way back in 1984, decades before many of their contemporaries caught up.

Loblolly House was built as a second home for Kieran, giving the architect the ideal opportunity to

trial new methods of building. It has been constructed using local materials sourced within a 500 mile radius of its site. Other green features include the house's high-performance exterior walls, energy recovery systems, natural ventilation and the use of a green roof.

The house's timber foundations are at once pragmatic (minimalising the disruption to the ground) and poetic, because the dwelling is literally founded on the trees. Meanwhile the design of the staggered vertical rain screen was composed from a site photograph, evoking the abstraction of solids and voids of the forest wall.

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However, it is not solely the architecture that makes this project shine. Kieran Timberlake Associates >>>





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worked closely with interior designer Marguerite Rodgers to ensure that despite its speedy construction the home would have the kind of comfortable lived-in look that usually takes years to create.

The plan is that in the longer term Loblolly will serve not only as a well-designed one-off, but also as a template for a new kind of prefab.

The designer explained: 'We've done a lot of work with Kieran Timberlake Associates in the past and we were brought in right at the start of this project, so we had an opportunity to look at the plans and make suggestions. Our client wanted

Design classics have been paired with immaculately finished Asian furniture and low-level lighting in the living room.



The house's wooden walls and floors provide a warm backdrop, which is complemented by the furniture and accessories.

a retreat they could use to spend time with their family and friends, so it needed to be easy to care for. Also, as they're an architect, we wanted iconic mid-century modern furniture that they could identify with.' She added: 'I think what we're most proud of is that the house isn't self-consciously "interior designed", which we feel suits the way our client lives.'

As well as the ubiquitous Le Corbusier and Eames chairs, the designers have sourced unusual and beautifully finished pieces of Asian furniture and 1960s vintage pieces for added interest. They were also acutely conscious of the home's eco credentials; the house itself has been designed in such a way that it could be taken to pieces and recycled with ease, so Marguerite Rodgers mirrored this approach, sourcing a mix of design classics with longevity and pieces for disassembly.

To make the most of the fantastic water-side views, the house features large folding glass windows. Other focal points include its distinctive tree

trunk 'legs' and wood panelling, which gives a warm, organic quality to the build both inside and out. Initially the architects had considered extending the exterior aesthetic to the interior, choosing furniture made from wood and metal, but the intervention of an interior designer ultimately resulted in the use of a more rich and varied palette of materials.

Marguerite commented: 'The clients were heavily involved with this project and they were really pleased with how well the design reflects their tastes.' She added: 'Nina Pritzker Cohen was the lead designer on this project and her goal was to make the home liveable, warm and comfortable. I certainly feel that this has been achieved.'

Kieran and his family have been spending time in their home for some months now and it clearly suits their needs perfectly. However, the plan is that in the longer term Loblolly will serve not only as a well-designed one-off, but also as a template for a new kind of prefab. >>>

With concern about the financial and environmental cost of new houses at an all-time high it certainly seems like an opportune moment at which to be championing a different way of building.



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Its layout and dimensions could easily be tweaked to suit the demands of different sites and clients and with concern about the financial and environmental cost of new houses at an all-time high it certainly seems like an opportune moment at which to be championing a different way of building.

It remains to be seen whether Kieran Timberlake Associates' ambitious new template for construction will be adopted by the masses. Either way it is good enough to make us take a second look at the humble pre-fab, casting aside our preconceptions along the way. ●

Kieran Timberlake Associates
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