

AMERICAN HomeStyle & Gardening

Nov/Dec 1996
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**traditional
is hot!
colonial cottage
makeover
3 family kitchens**

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winter
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home
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special delivery

It's created in a factory and shipped to you. Your contractor puts it together, fast.
It's called a kit house. And it's never been more popular



This 3,500-square-foot house was built from a kit; its cedar-shingled exterior and painted mahogany-framed windows suit its location on Martha's Vineyard.

If you're ready for a house built from scratch but are daunted by the details of assembling architects and contractors and (go ahead, admit it) conjuring up a design you really can live with, there's a practical and

affordable alternative that takes much of the angst out of the process. It's the so-called kit, or factory-engineered, house. With a kit house, the major components—walls, stairs, doors, floors, roof and even such

finish work as cabinets and molding—are created in a factory and shipped to the building site, where they're assembled. The floor plan is chosen from a catalog of standard homes that can be customized, or the manufacturer

BY MICHAEL WALKER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW GARN

The homeowners modified the plan of the house several times, even during construction. The plan of the 19 x 9½-foot kitchen was changed midstream: A dropped ceiling was removed and a "bridge" that holds track lighting above the island was added.



want to customize? no problem

can create an original design. You can opt for a simple structural shell or have the manufacturer include nearly everything, right down to installed cabinetry and appliances. The advantage? A kit house goes up faster, with less labor and wasted materials. The cost? In some cases, about 20 percent less than an architect-designed custom-built house.

It was the savings, convenience and high quality afforded by a kit house that allowed two families to build a dream vacation home they share each summer. Elizabeth and Stephen Power and Irving and Margo Cohen had been vacationing together on Martha's Vineyard since 1975 and had tired of paying the high rental prices on the island. Pooling their resources, they purchased a parcel of land near the house they had been renting. The couples investi-

gated several options before deciding to build a 3,500-square-foot house manufactured by Deck House, Inc., a Massachusetts-based company that has been designing and building kit houses for 30 years.

Like many kit-house buyers, the couples elected to customize one of Deck House's 50 stock house plans. Working with the company's designers and drawing on their own expertise (Elizabeth Power had renovated several homes, and Margo Cohen is an interior designer), they borrowed from several of Deck House's basic house plans and added many touches of their own to personalize the home.

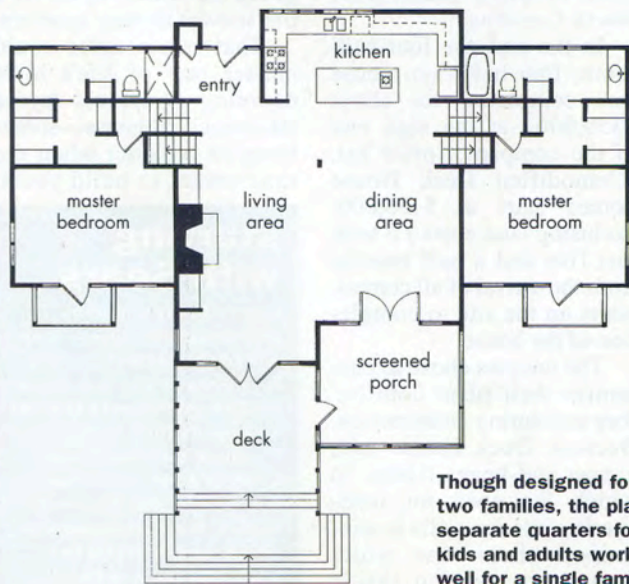
From the start, the Powers and Cohens had been attracted by the savings and aesthetics offered by the Deck House system. They wanted a durable, no-nonsense design that would still satisfy their

From factory to your backyard



Top: Components fabricated at Deck House's Acton, Massachusetts, facility are shipped within four weeks. **Middle:** Typically, three shipments are scheduled; components arrive on site as needed. **Bottom:** Materials are arranged in order of use at the site.

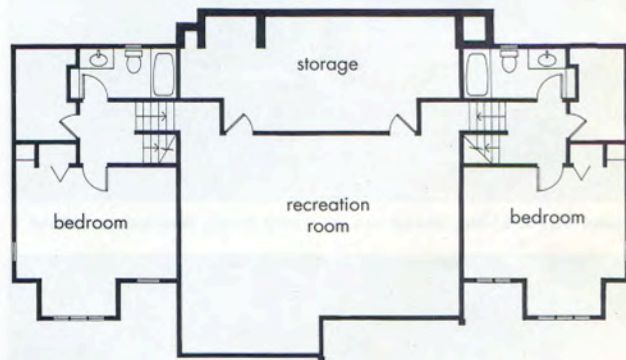
Some assembly required



Main level

0 5 10ft

Though designed for two families, the plan's separate quarters for kids and adults work well for a single family. The Powers and Cohens (right), close friends, pooled their money and built this vacation home on Martha's Vineyard



Lower level

using a Deck House prefabricated building system. The plan puts master bedrooms and baths on the main level and children's rooms below, with ground-floor kitchen, dining and living areas shared by all.



PLANS: MARINA KIESER

Shopping for a kit house

"Building systems" is the building trade term used to describe any modular, panelized or log home component that is factory-produced or pre-assembled and shipped to the home site. The components must meet, and often exceed, local and area building codes. At present, more than 40 percent of homes built each year in America are constructed in whole or in part using building systems—and that figure is

rising. This year, more than 250,000 system-built homes will be constructed. Most of the systems manufacturers use computers to customize standard home plans or to create an original design to meet aesthetic and budget criteria. Below are three examples of kit houses from Deck House, whose package price typically includes plans, floor and roof decking, windows and skylights, doors, siding and trim.



"Signature" plans are custom-designed for clients.



Model 7875: Living areas are on entry level, bedrooms below.



Model 7455: rear elevation offers wide views, passive solar gain.

order a structural shell, or everything *and* the kitchen sink



Porches and decks on the rear facade capitalize the view.

ideas about style and comfort. By not having to pay an architect's design fee and by utilizing the company's standardized components wherever possible, they were able to afford some judiciously chosen luxuries, such as a granite island and imported ceramic tile flooring in the kitchen and a custom-made fireplace mantel from North Carolina.

In the end, the four-bedroom, four-bathroom house was completed for about \$350,000—at the high end of the company's price list. (Unmodified Deck House homes start at \$150,000, excluding land costs.) It took just five and a half months from the arrival of all components on the site to completion of the house.

The couples chose to customize their plan, both before and during construction. Because Deck House uses a post-and-beam frame, in which the need for load-bearing interior walls is minimized, there was wider leeway to position inside walls and create the desired

spaces. For example, the couples decided, on the recommendation of an architect friend, not to install a lowered ceiling over the kitchen; the results married the room more successfully to the adjacent living area and its soaring cathedral ceiling. Too, when Margo Cohen wanted a whirlpool bath in her side of the house, she got it; the Powers opted for a tile shower in their quarters.

That two couples could master one of life's most daunting of dreams says a lot about a kit house—something to consider when the time comes to build yours.

starting with Sears

Before today's modern prefabricated houses—now one of the fastest-growing segments of the new house market—thousands ordered kit houses from the Sears Roebuck catalog. From 1908 to 1940, Sears sold 100,000 of their Honor-Bilt homes, the components of which were shipped to buyers by rail and then assembled. Many are still in use, especially in the Midwest and East. Some, built for \$2,000, are now worth more than \$200,000.

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The 14 x 20-foot living room, part of the jointly owned vacation home's shared spaces, opens onto an inviting deck with great views. Idiosyncratic window placement shows the flexibility of the kit-house system.