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Atlanta-based Designer Offers Housing Alternative for Katrina Refugees

Architecture

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Roswell, GA: Trailers are being hauled in daily for Katrina refugees by the thousands. Is there a better alternative?

Lew Oliver, founder and CEO of Whole Town Solutions, thinks so. The Atlanta-based designer recently designed a Creole Revival cottage that costs less to build than many of the trailers currently being used as temporary housing.

Not only does the “Rainbow Row” cottage costs less to build, it is also durable, super-efficient, indigenous in both style and form, and easily transportable. The designer hopes it will help with the revival and reconstruction of communities affected by Hurricane Katrina both along the Gulf and in those cities that have opened their doors to the storm’s victims. The house is currently being diagrammed for panelized construction by Duany Plater-Zyberk, the nation's most influential New Urbanist firm.

At 598 feet, the cottage is also ideal for a wide range of homeowners across the U.S., from retired persons, artists, schoolteachers, and first-time homebuyers. The vernacular prototype is a Creole Revival shotgun, but with different elevations, can easily be adapted for almost any location. The cottage is effectively rendered in rainbow pastels and placed in rows or clusters to form friendly cottage enclaves and neighborhoods almost anywhere—old towns, new towns, commercial zones, urban infill. It features a dramatically cantilevered roof with massive curved brackets, elegant vertical windows, and a French door whose transom is meant to be customized—hand-cut and painted—to fit the owner’s personality. The floor plan is open, and includes a living room, eat-in kitchen, and two bedrooms with shared bath.

Oliver is a leading advocate of the movement known as “New Urbanism,” which is based

on the ideals of quality design, authentic materials, environmental sensitivity, and fine craftsmanship. The focus, according to Oliver, is not only on individual houses but entire communities, which are walkable, livable, and pedestrian-friendly. Rainbow Row, for instance, is most effectively placed in clusters, thereby providing the infrastructure for a real community and an authentic social vision.

Oliver's homes are among the most sought-after in the business. His work has aptly been described as a fusion of classicism and vernacularism with great attention paid to form, detail, and proportion. "Lew Oliver is the fastest person of great talent that I know," says Andres Duany, founding co-principal of DPZ and widely recognized as the leader of New Urbanism. "His eye is among the most incisive I've ever seen," concurs Steve Mouzon, President of the New Urban Guild.

The designer has had a hand in many of the major New Urbanist towns and neighborhoods across the U.S., including Rosemary Beach, Lost Rabbit, and I'on, amongst others. His long list of awards includes Designer of the New American Home for the National Association of Homebuilders and Westin's Best in Brand worldwide.