

Paper houses are not just for the poor

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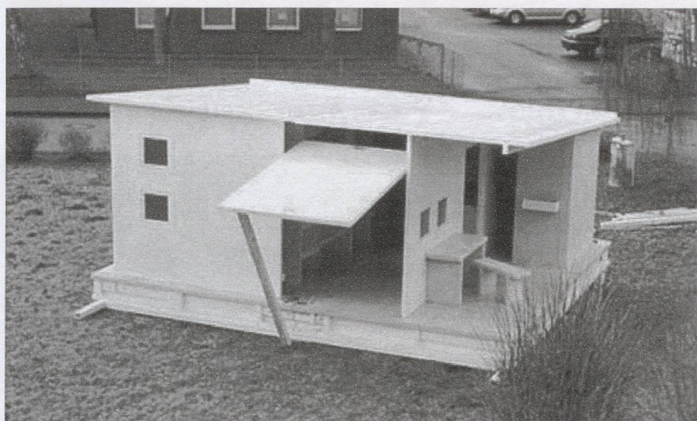
Paper houses are not just for the poor

A Swiss company has come up with the novel idea of producing paper houses to give people in developing countries a roof over their heads.

The SFr6,000 house is the brainchild of Schaffhausen based entrepreneur Gerd Niemöller, who has a vision of providing whole refugee camps with his invention.

"We want to create a building so that poor people in developing countries, who are without homes, can lead independent lives in a healthy living environment with a self-sufficient energy supply," he said.

Niemöller's 34-square-metre model house comprises a kitchen, two bedrooms, a shower and a veranda. It has been designed to provide shelter in Africa and in crisis zones.



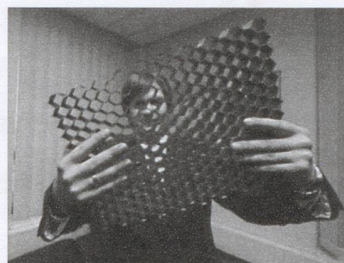
Niemöller's paper house

The walls are made of panels coated with a hexagonal structure reminiscent of beehive honeycombs. Niemöller's company, called 'The Wall', which has its headquarters in Schaffhausen, has patented the "Swiss Cell" construction to provide insulation and strength.

The walls are made of synthetic resin soaked cellulose and are incredibly stable. Strictly speaking, the houses are made more of air than paper. More

than 90 per cent of the house consists of air. It works because the honeycombs are so rigid.

The treatment of the material makes it resistant to fire, wind and water. Such houses can be locally manufactured within hours. Mass production of the honeycomb cells will start late this year once a special machine has been developed. Measuring 1.4 metres wide, 1.6 metres high and 80 centimetres deep, the device is expected to be as small as two refrigerators, but would produce 25,000 honeycombs or 1,000 homes a month.



Honeycomb cell

However, how will a family living in a slum in a poor country manage to afford the SFr6,000 price tag? 'The Wall' is working with the Catholic Church to provide micro-credits, and governments could also supply funds.

In addition, the company is also collaborating with various charities such as World Vision in Switzerland. Together with this welfare organization, Niemöller plans to build a village of paper houses for the 2010 Football World Cup in South Africa.

World Vision is also working with other organisations such as USAID and Habitat for Humanity. They have clubbed together with The Wall to spread the word about the paper houses worldwide.

Niemöller said that he had been overrun with enquiries. "We have more than a million houses in the pipeline. We recently received a Chinese government delegation that wants three million houses," he said.

But Niemöller does not only want to provide houses for the developing world. "The material would also suit housing in Europe at a reasonable cost," Niemöller said. "It would even be possible to build a mansion or a multi-storey building with this material." *from swissinfo*

Novembertag

*Nebel hängt wie Rauch ums Haus,
drängt die Welt nach innen;
ohne Not geht niemand aus;
alles fällt in Sinnen.*

*Leiser wird die Hand, der Mund,
stiller die Gebärde.
Heimlich, wie auf Meeresgrund,
träumen Mensch und Erde.*

Christian Morgenstern

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