

WikiHouse pioneers do-it-yourself home building

February 28 2013, by Glenn Chapman



John Holzauer renovates a home on October 19, 2011 in Denver, Colorado. WikiHouse is putting a new spin on old-time barn-raising with a free online resource that lets people put homes together the same way they might a giant jigsaw puzzle.

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WikiHouse.cc was designed as an open-source construction kit that lets people create and share home designs and then "print" pieces using machines available for as little as a few thousand dollars.

It is part of the effort by the WikiHouse collective of professionals who volunteer to give consumers information and tools about home design and construction.

"Two or three people working together can build a small house in about a day," said Alastair Parvin, a British architect sharing his work at WikiHouse at a TED gathering on Thursday in California.

"People continually get confused between construction work and having fun."

He explained that while the shell of a home would be done it would lack plumbing, electric and other inner components.

Aspiring builders have to get their own [building materials](#), which can be cut into pieces by computer-controlled tools called CNC machines with without any other tools, using data downloaded from WikiHouse, according to Parvin.

"It is kind of like making a big jigsaw puzzle," Parvin told AFP. "It is basically magic as far as I'm concerned."

Parvin told of graduating university in 2008 only to encounter a bleak job market for [architects](#). He veered from the traditional career path, and took part in launching WikiHouse about 18 months ago.

A growing "makers movement" coupled with increasingly affordable technology such as 3D printers and CNC machines is letting consumers become creators of goods they desire, according to Parvin.

"How awesome would it be if we had a kind of [Wikipedia](#) for stuff?" he asked rhetorically. "How much would that change the rules? I think technology is on our side."

He sees the great design project of this century as the "democratization of production."

WikiHouse is putting itself to the test in the favelas, or shanty towns, of Brazil, hoping that a CNC machine made available for creating furniture will eventually be put to use building homes with the potential to transform slums.

"Slums are being built anyway," Parvin said. "If people are going to build things for themselves, wouldn't it be cool if what they make is not rubbish?"

WikiHouse is working on a way to attach files showing people how to make foundations for homes.

"We could do it," Parvin said. "We are at a point where it is not innovative; it is just that architecture is behind the game."

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Citation: WikiHouse pioneers do-it-yourself home building (2013, February 28) retrieved 23 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-wikihouse-do-it-yourself-home.html>

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