

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Pink Flamingos Not Included *Pre-fabricated homes again all the rage*

By Chris Lavin



Jared Levy, below, and Gordon Stott, above, of Connect-Homes in front of a modular home in Orinda that was built customized for the family then constructed on site. Photo Chris Lavin

Long gone are the old days of plopping down a double-wide trailer and sticking a couple of plastic pink flamingos in the ground out front. Today's built-to-suit homes have clean lines and customizable features.

While prefabricated home trends have come and gone over the years, today's building materials, improved energy efficiency, and new manufacturing

techniques all coincide with the newest addition to the pre-fab homes: the Internet.

"People can get what they want," said Ben Munday of Orinda, the proud owner of a prefabricated home purchased from Connect-Homes. Two homes, actually – Munday put the smallest model out back to use as an office, although it still has a bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. After Munday and



Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian ...read on page D12

his wife, Sara, decided which company they wanted to go with, they began selecting colors, fixtures and appliances by cruising through the website and clicking away.

"From my point of view, we loved Orinda," he said. But in many cases if you don't have \$1.5 million to spend, middle-class families are often priced out of the market. The Munday's two-story modern home cost about \$600,000, with the smaller home, the company's cheapest model, running another \$230,000.

Perhaps the most mind-bending aspect of the new pre-fab homes is how quickly they go together. In the old days, a double-wide size home took up major highway space, often requiring a police escort, lead and follow-up cars, tons of flags and "wide load" signs. "It would cost thousands of dollars just for transportation, and then you couldn't just put it anywhere. A winding road or remote location was out of the question," Munday said.

The Munday's homes arrived in – get this – eight shipping containers, "at a cost of hundreds of dollars, not thousands," Munday said. All the kitchen and bathroom fixtures had been connected at the factory. Connect-Homes builds its homes out of its own factory in San Bernardino, so the trucks packed up and left early in the morning, arriving in Orinda just off Moraga Way at 9 a.m. the day before school started in August for 6-year-old Max and 4-year-old Zoe, who started pre-kindergarten. The amazing thing: The homes were built by 2 p.m. – the same day.

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