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\$80,000 home is no pipe dream

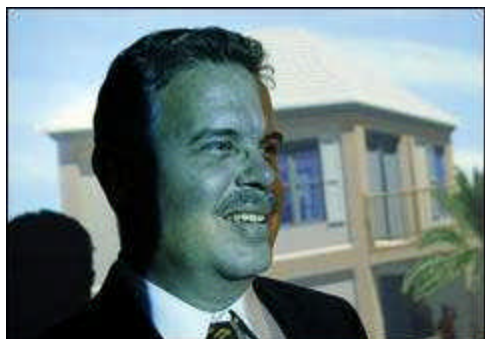


Photo by Glenn Tucker. Ask not what your country can do for you: Design Source president and CEO Paul James believes it is time for the private sector to do its part to help alleviate the housing crisis. Modular homes starting at around \$80,000, available through Design Source, can help provide the answer, he said.

In a Country where the average price of a home has soared to more than \$1 million, the thought of purchasing one for just around \$80,000 sounds completely unreal

According to Paul James, president and CEO of Design Source International, the fantasy has become reality.

“This is not a pipe dream,” he said, adding that modular building is the key to affordable housing in Bermuda.

Currently costs on the Island are around \$300 per square foot of residential construction. Modular building – the technique of building large sections of a building off-site – can cut that in half. With some additional site costs when the pieces are finally assembled on-site, Mr.

James estimated savings will be around 20-25 percent “at the very least”.

Design Source is a design firm with expertise in architectural design. Shortages of both affordable housing and local contractors prompted the company to examine cost-effective development on the Island.

Modular building, it seemed, was the solution. Large sections of the studio, two-bedroom or three-bedroom structures are first constructed in Pennsylvania, then shipped on chartered ships to Bermuda, probably into St. George’s.

The pieces are then taken to the site, and assembled into a house. The Pennsylvania manufacturers, Deluxe Building Systems, have built hotels such as the Sandals Royal Bahamian Resort and Spa in the Bahamas, and housing complexes all over the US East Coast.

Mr. James likened the structures to the new RenaissanceRe building on East Broadway – structural steel with light-gauge infill.

The main structure is heavy structural steel, he said – and it is sized to resist windloads of more than 145 mph.

The buildings have a Bermuda profile roof, with every other aspect of the house looking like traditional construction. They are engineered to add a storey without additional structural work.

The whole system is integrated, including the septic tanks and fibreglass water tanks. If the houses are not on sea-level, they can also have a basement, which can easily be turned into a further apartment.

Customisation is also available – owners can move windows, even walls, to suit their own desires.

With the smallest unit at around 470 square feet, Mr. James estimated the unit’s construction costs will start at about \$80,000.

Response to the prospect has been “guarded”, he said. “People have had a lot of promises made and broken.”

However, “We have three going already,” he said, “and a fourth just came in today so we’re

getting busy”.

“We’re afraid of the control and loss of it – part of that is planning. We have had extensive meetings with Building Control about these issues. We have people to file inspection reports to Bermuda for all the construction process – if anything, it would be more stringent.”

Design Source is hoping to work with Bermuda Homes for People and the Bermuda Land Development Company.

Government, Mr. James added, is also exploring manufactured housing and “we have been in contact with them”.

“We would like to work in unison with them, but haven’t as of yet met on the subject.”

The private sector has a role to play in the affordable housing crisis, he said.

“We really believe the private industry can rise to this challenge. We can’t answer to why they haven’t, but we’d like to prove that they can ... I think we could do this for this country, and that it’s long overdue.”
