



The New York Times | <http://nyti.ms/1CUemJb>

REAL ESTATE

A Tiny House Fit for the Hamptons

JULY 24, 2015

Big Deal

By **JULIE SATOW**

With his venture Cocoon9, Christopher Burch — the man behind the now-shuttered clothing brand C. Wonder and the former husband of the fashion designer Tory Burch — hopes to prove that small, prefabricated spaces can be luxurious and perfect for the Hamptons.

Such a space is the company's Cocoon Studio, a 480-square-foot prototype of a prefabricated house that is now on view at the Southampton location of Mecox Gardens, the home furnishings store.

The rectangular building, which ranges in price from \$225,000 to \$275,000, features a wall of sliding floor-to-ceiling windows and white lacquered cabinetry that conceals shelving, kitchen appliances and a Murphy bed.

"About four or five years ago, I started looking into this concept of really cool houses that you could manufacture quickly," said Mr. Burch, via phone from Niihwa, a resort on Sumba Island east of Bali that he bought in 2013. "The goal was to create a thoughtfully designed product that is simple and elegant and can be used for many different functionalities."

Lindsay Burn, of New Canaan, Conn., recently became Cocoon9's first client,

after spending the last two and a half years researching a design for a pool house and home office to complement her midcentury modern home. She said the Cocoon Studio “far surpassed my expectations — quality of materials and modern details.”

Mr. Burch founded Cocoon9 with a childhood friend, Edwin Mahoney, several years ago, with the aim of tackling the increasingly crowded field of luxury prefab homebuilding.

Prefabricated houses, typically manufactured piecemeal as modules on an assembly line and put together like Legos on the building site, are a growing industry. And as their popularity has risen, they are shaking off the dowdy, uniform styles they were once known for, and increasingly becoming a less expensive way to execute stylish designs. Recent examples include those by the designer Philippe Starck, who is building prefab houses near Paris, and that of Tim Wright, who is a grandson of Frank Lloyd Wright and who lives in a prefab house in Wisconsin. And Dwell, the home design magazine, offers its own branded prefab houses.

Cocoon9 began when Mr. Burch asked a team of designers in Shanghai, where he has an office, to come up with building concepts. He soon recruited Mr. Mahoney, a third-generation homebuilder and the owner of E. B. Mahoney Builders of Bryn Mawr, Pa.

“Chris said, ‘Look, I have this concept to create a plug-and-play home, what do you think?’ ” said Mr. Mahoney, who grew up in Bryn Mawr, near Mr. Burch’s childhood home in Wayne. “It was so out of the norm for me, since I build sticks and bricks, but he sent me over to China, and when I saw what he was doing, I just had to put my toe in the water.”

The company, which has a factory in China and another in New Jersey, has so far manufactured two prototypes: the one on display at Mecox Gardens, which will be delivered to Ms. Burn and her husband, Spencer Grimes, a financier, after the summer-long open house ends; and the Cocoon Cabin, the same size but with a different floor plan, at Mr. Burch’s Southampton home, where it serves as his pool house and guest cottage.

Cocoon9 is selling three models, all built as single modules and designed so as to

be easily transportable by flatbed truck. Both the Cocoon Cabin and the Cocoon Studio measure 12 by 40 feet and are similarly priced. The Cocoon Lite 20, at 8 by 20 feet, costs between \$75,000 and \$95,000. Made of steel that can withstand winds of up to 150 miles an hour, they are insulated so as to require minimal air-conditioning or heating. The houses also have several environmental features, such as LED lighting and nontoxic materials.

Despite their contemporary, geometric shape, these buildings suit even the traditional architecture of the Hamptons, “where pitched roofs and cedar siding are the norm,” as a blog post on the Mecox Gardens website noted. The exterior of the Cocoon Studio is a wood-plastic composite, while other models have exteriors of carbon stranded bamboo siding. Cabinetry can come in several finishes, including bamboo or a matte or glossy white lacquer, while flooring is either cerused oak or vinyl with an oak grain. The fixtures can also be tailored to taste, from Venetian bronze to brushed stainless steel, with bathrooms that feature marble mosaic or glass tiles.

The houses, which take four months to manufacture, also feature distinctive touches like 360-degree TVs that can swivel from one room to the next and showers made of “smart glass” that changes from clear to opaque when in use. Buyers must build their own foundations on which to attach the buildings, secure the proper permits and connect the utilities themselves, the costs for which can vary, but may add up to around \$30,000, according to the company. A crane is also needed, which can run an additional \$10,000, while shipping costs can range from \$5,000 to as much as \$40,000, depending on the state. Once the home arrives, it can be hooked up in a matter of days.

For Ms. Burn, the style of the Cocoon Studio at Mecox Gardens matched her house, designed by the architect John Black Lee, seamlessly. “Our house has such a clean look and we wanted to honor that architectural aesthetic,” she said.

So far, Ms. Burn is Cocoon’s first and only client, but after the soft launch at Mecox Gardens, interest is growing, according to the company. The hope is that these buildings will not just adorn the backyards of expensive homes, but that hotel developers will buy several buildings and install them along a beach in the

Caribbean, for example, to create a near-instant eco-resort.

“The idea is that it can be used a variety of ways, from a house on a quiet beach for one person, or a combination of houses for a hotel or offices,” Mr. Burch said.

Greg McKenzie, the interior designer who outfitted the Mecox Gardens house, added: “It could even be for someone who is building a house, who can plop it down on the property while they are building, and then turn around and use it as a pool house. Quite frankly, even builders could use it as a construction trailer and bring it with them from site to site. It is extremely flexible and stylistically would work in any topography.”

Steven Chen, the company’s lead architect, recently went to New Canaan to conduct a site visit at Ms. Burn’s home. “I wanted to look at road access for getting in the flatbed truck, and to discuss utilities and the foundation, and how to coordinate before the unit arrives,” Mr. Chen said.

Cocoon9 hopes to stand out from the pack with its reach and its speed. “We surveyed our competition, and they are very regional, usually selling within a 300- to 500-mile radius of their plants,” Mr. Mahoney said. “They are building their homes in sections that they then have to assemble. By the time you walk into the company, order it and get it built, it is a 12- to 16-month cycle.”

Cocoon9 is offering smaller houses that can be built quickly and delivered worldwide. “We are ‘plug and play’ — if you order it tomorrow you will see it in less than 16 weeks,” Mr. Mahoney said. “It’s hard to beat that.”

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A version of this article appears in print on July 26, 2015, on page RE1 of the New York edition with the headline: When Style, Not Size, Counts.