



QUICK FIX: A completed pod and, top, as it comes out of the factory

STREET WISE: A graphic of the homes made in a factory by Mid Wales company Eco Mods. They are designed to minimise waste

and use less fuel to heat because of their thermal properties. The company says it's impossible to tell the difference with the finished unit from a house built by any other method

Prefabs are ready to homes that could be

rise again – as eco-friendly the next big property trend

THEY were once viewed as undesirable short-term accommodation fit only to fill the void caused by the destruction of vast swathes of housing stock during the Second World War.

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'Pods' made in Wales can be put together in days for £20,000

But thanks to a Welsh housing firm, the prefab is ready to rise again – in a new eco-friendly guise.

Originally conceived in 1944 as a hasty solution to the shortage of accommodation caused by damage from German bombs – on top of a record marriage rate – prefabricated housing quickly became a feature of many Welsh towns and cities.

But while most of the original buildings have now been knocked down – albeit in many cases long after their intended shelf life – pre-assembled houses could become the next big trend for the property market.

Eco Mods, a manufacturing company based in Mid Wales, has developed the "House Pod" – a pre-built home that can be put together in five days for as little as £20,000.

The company claims the finished product is both affordable and environmentally friendly.

An Eco Mod spokesman said the House Pods have already been shipped across to Belfast, Northern Ireland, where there is a huge requirement for social housing.

"The basic concept is very similar to a timber-frame house commonly seen on any building site, but instead of being built on site with a timber frame which

is then infilled, it is built in a factory environment using structurally-insulated panels," he said.

"These panels give the strength to the building plus the outstanding thermal properties."

"The benefit of this has been obvious with the weather we have experienced recently – most construction sites have ground to a halt for weeks whereas production can continue unaffected in a factory."

"In terms of delivery to Ireland – there were no problems."

"The biggest obstacle has been how to deliver housing within budget and the developers identified the pod as a perfect way to achieve this, with guaranteed quality and a fixed price at the outset."

"The pod was transported by road on day one, travelled overnight by ferry and delivered and installed to the site on day two."

"The weather was atrocious but as it's a sealed unit, it made no difference and there were absolutely no problems on arrival."

He said that the price includes all the internal fixtures and fittings and internal decoration – the only addition is the land cost, external skin and roof.

iversity, said the House Pod sounds a good idea.

"I've always been interested in the building of homes, off-site," he said. "Anyone who has had a house extension or a house built will know what a mess it can create."

"So if you can build a house in a factory and just deliver it, it has got to be a good idea."

"Many of the big hotels buy in bathroom suites, complete with tiles these days in a similar way."

"And it could be very useful to build House Pods in disaster zones like Haiti."

The term prefabs entered the popular vocabulary in 1944, when Winston Churchill announced the "Temporary Housing Programme" to design houses that could be mass-produced and prefabricated in the factories that had once manufactured aircraft.

A prototype of a steel-framed prefab was displayed at the Tate Gallery in London in May 1944. Another was put on show in Cardiff's Wood Street that December.

The prefab design was lauded as a triumph of space planning. Each house had two bedrooms; a living room; hallway; fitted kitchen, with hot and cold running water, cooker (gas or electric) and built-in refrigerator; and a fitted bathroom with a heated towel rail. Production started in 1946 and by 1949 more than 156,600 had been built.

"The beauty of this product is the costs and the quality can be controlled and because of its thermal qualities, the running costs are exceptionally low."

Professor Malcolm Parry, former head of the School of Architecture at Cardiff Uni-

porary solution, some prefabs are still being lived in.

"Prefabs like the one at St Fagan's Museum and the ones at Newport were survived well past their sell-by date and we have now fallen in love with them, for fear of losing them altogether," said Prof Parry.

Michael Davies, director of

Davies Sutton Architects in Cardiff, believes that factory building helps to eliminate errors and poor workmanship in houses that can happen on a cold and wet building site.

"The Germans produce a lot of factory made buildings, such as the Huf Haus, which are very successful and popular at the high-

er end of the market," he said.

"The success and the problem with the House Pod is perhaps it's simplicity."

"It reminds me of a ship container – a big tin box which is then fitted out in a very impersonal way. This is the problem with standardisation, they lack individuality."

"Nowadays you can see the

same mass-produced housing in Wales, Scotland and England, with no local distinction.

"There are parallels with the prefabs that were thrown up after the war. The problem with temporary buildings is that they seem to hang on well past their use-by date."

"We have seen in recent years many of these prefabs being re-

stored rather than demolished – such as at Newport.

"While I'm sure the House Pod will be built to a very good eco-standard, do the benefits of prefabrication outweigh the loss of local character and distinctiveness? Do we really want more brick boxes blighting our towns and countryside?"

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