

‘WOULD YOU WANT YOUR CAR BUILT IN YOUR DRIVEWAY?’

Off-site-built house gives owner a home just in time for Christmas.

The good news: It took one third the time to build, it looks like a half-million bucks and the trees and creeks around it won't suffer from its construction.

The bad news: the word “modular.” It's a perception thing — modular equals mobile. Problem is, that's a woeful misperception of how nice off-site-built homes really are, say the architects and builders responsible for Bruce Hayden's new home, the first “built” —erected might be a better word — in the prestigious Palmetto Bluff community.

Work began on the home seven weeks ago at Ridgeland's Haven Custom Homes factory. It took a week or two to engineer the house's outline, ship it via a flatbed truck and stick it on a permanent, solid foundation in Palmetto Bluff's infant East Wilson community.



Once the basics were in place —and the basics, with an off-site-built house, are almost everything — the work on the fun stuff began. Hayden's home contains antique heart-of-pine floors, quartz countertops, plantation shutters, “dual fuel” (gas and electric) appliances and other features you wish your house had. Officials from Architectural Building Systems, the Bluffton based company that designed the house and oversaw its “construction” in the Ridgeland factory, didn't want to reveal just how much the 1,448-squarefoot house cost, but admitted it was in the “mid-500s.”



The final county inspection of the building's interior is set for this week. After that, Hayden will be welcome to move in. Debra Hull, ABS's marketing director, said Hayden planned to move in on Dec. 1. That's eight weeks after work began on his house.

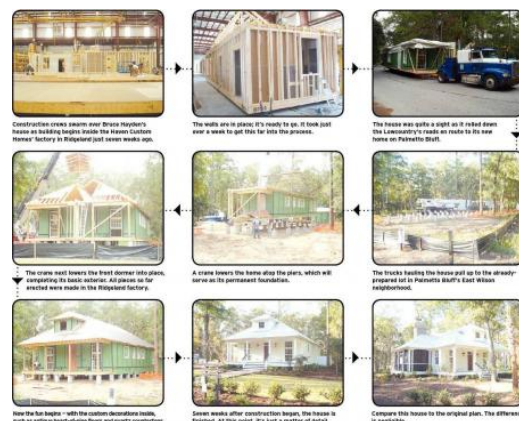
“It takes at least a third of the time less than (traditional, onsite) stick-built construction takes,” said Kent Knapp, ABS's construction director. “That's the real reason the manufacturing process is so efficient.”

It's “green,” too, to use a modern buzzword. Erecting homes in less than two months requires far fewer trips by construction equipment — meaning trees' roots suffer less damage, meaning erosion isn't so bad, meaning less waste is produced for local landfills, said Rob Hull, one of ABS's founders.

“ABS off-site-built is inherently green,” he said. That's why Hayden, a California hotelier, was so interested: “Palmetto Bluff encourages its residents to be stewards of the land and I wanted to do everything I could to assure the environment was disrupted as little as possible.”

Bill Peacher, the president of the Palmetto Bluff Real Estate Co., said the development had no qualms about allowing a “modular” home, mainly because it's impossible to tell the difference once the finished product is in place.

“It's a positive more to the purchaser,” he said. “Many times when people build even a small cottage here, the length of time it takes from start to finish, (building off-site) is a time-saver and therefore a money-saver.



"For our part, we feel like diversity is a big part of what we're all about," he said. "It's part of an evolving process of building a village, to have small houses of this type next to larger homes, aesthetically they all blend. It doesn't diminish the value at all. There's no question these guys (ABS) do a great job." ABS has overseen similar off-site homes on lots in the Old Town, in Oldfield, in Windmill Harbor and on Tybee and Daufuskie islands. The Historic Savannah Foundation recently recognized ABS for bringing another off-site home to the city's Victorian district.

"It's a better way to build a building," Rob Hull said. "Would you want your car built in your driveway?"