

Philippe Starck Dreams Up Super Green Prefab System

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The famed designer on how his modular living system offers a new, greener take on housing.



The new, ecologically minded P.A.T.H. prefab prototype—designed by French designer Philippe Starck in tandem with the Slovenian prefab homebuilder Riko—was recently built for the first time at a test site in Montfort l'Amaury near Paris. Image courtesy of Riko.

“Building one’s own house can be a source of extreme danger,” says French designer [Philippe Starck](#). “We all know when it starts, but we never know when it is going to end or how much it will cost in the end.”

Considering his background, and the fact that this industrial designer’s work has touched nearly every facet of the built environment, it’s no surprise that his solution to home buying was to industrialize the process. But his new P.A.T.H. prototype—designed in tandem with the Slovenian prefab homebuilder Riko, and recently built for the first time at a test site in Montfort l’Amaury near Paris—is as ecologically sound as it is precisely engineered.

“P.A.T.H. is a positive energy house, which produces 50% more energy than it consumes” says Starck. “The positive energy that isn’t consumed can return to the local electric grid.”

The eco-engineering begins with the exterior, made from sustainably harvested wood and wrapped in a triple-glazed glass envelope with options for wind turbines and DualSun solar panels to provide energy, heat, and water. Modular, high-efficiency SPEETA wood stoves provide additional low-cost heating. According to Starck, it takes six months from order to open house.

“P.A.T.H. houses are built like how we assemble Legos,” he says. “All the elements of the houses are prefabricated in Riko’s factories and then assembled on the building site.”

Customization technology at the Riko factory allows potential homeowners to choose from 34 variations on a theme, with alternating sizes (roughly 1,500 to 3,800 square feet), sides (wooden walls to an all-glass shell) and shapes (cornice, flat, or pitched roof). The price per square meter (upwards of \$530 per square foot) certainly isn’t inconsequential, but as Starck says, “It’s not [just] about better design; it’s all about better quality.”

“With P.A.T.H., I wanted to provide the community with the best product, in terms of quality, technology and durability,” he says. “Durability and the notion of heritage, which were almost taboos in the 70s and 80s, are essential today. In order to guarantee longevity, we must build at the right price, which forces us to arbitrate between various items without being a low-bidder or falling into the opposite, excess. When we pay for what’s visible, we inevitably cut out what is invisible but yet fundamental: quality. I did not want to impose anything to our customers: the architectural possibilities are very flexible.”



Starck says that Riko’s experience in prefabrication played an important role in the design and layout of the home system. “The prefabrication process, based on laser-cut technology, allows a surgical precision,” he says. “Riko’s expertise enables us to minimize the risks and bad surprises.” In the design, the electrical system is hidden behind wooden panels. Image courtesy of Riko.