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# ALTO



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..... ISSUE 03 / AUTUMN 2013 .....

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*Prefabricated houses are nothing new, but Italian company Pagano's palatial post-and-beam homes push the envelope in terms of design quality and bespoke detailing. Its first UK house will land in stockbroker-belt Surrey next year – and mock-Georgian it is not / By Michael Willoughby*

## Factory fabulous

“If someone can afford any house they want, why would they choose one built in a factory?” This is almost certainly the question that anyone hearing about Pagano’s multi-million-pound prefabricated homes will ask.

But these breathtaking timber homes are not your average kit house. The prefabricated house-building industry, long associated with precision and high quality, is not creating homes of truly mansion-like proportions, which is the Italian firm’s niche: its system starts at around 372 sq m (a five-bedroom home), but it can easily be scaled up to a palatial 5,000 sq m.

Georges Tohme, partner of LVO Systems, Pagano’s distributor in the UK, says that prefabrication has come a long way since the postwar boom: “Over the past 20 years, there has been an evolution in design and technology. Pagano has taken prefabrication to the next level, and there are no competitors.”

This “next level” is customisation: with other luxury prefabricated homes, customers are usually offered a choice of housing designs that can take a certain amount of tweaking. Pagano’s homes, though, are individually designed by architect Enzo Pagano and his team. >



ABOVE: The components for Pagano’s homes are made in its Italian factory and assembled on site, meaning less time spent on site, and lower costs

LEFT: Although each is individually designed, Pagano homes’ signature contemporary look is rich in timber, using large amounts of glazing



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The process starts with a weekend-long meet-and-greet in Pagano’s Rome offices and a visit to its showhouse and doesn’t end until “the client is sleeping in his bed,” says third-generation Pagano, and Enzo’s brother, Andrea. Customisation extends to the furniture, designed individually by partners such as Fendi.

Good old-fashioned customer service feeds into bleeding-edge technology. Enzo Pagano works with the client and maybe a client architect, to create a super-realistic vision of the house in 3D CAD software program Rhino. Computers and patented machinery will then turn that individual dream into a reality by

working out which of the 17 different types of beams need to be fitted together to make the frame, which is carried out in the company’s 10,000 sq m factory.

It is also the combination of craft and technology that allows for these homes to be so enormously large. The beams are made from a sandwich of quick-growing Douglas fir and glue, veneered with iroko hardwood for a handsome finish and cut into 13m lengths. Although mighty and supporting, they are also hollow, carrying electrical wires and other services.

The factory process takes around four months, and can take place while the concrete

*ABOVE LEFT: Extensive timber decking creates a transitional space between the heavily beamed interior and the lush garden*

*ABOVE RIGHT: Interiors can be customised along with the house itself, with partner brands such as Fendi lending their design skills*

foundations are being dug, a major time-saver and one of the biggest advantages of a prefabricated build. The frame is transported to the site on ships and trucks, and assembled in something around a month. The entire process takes around six months, compared to up to three years with a non-prefabricated home.

Because the homes are made and built under highly predictable factory conditions, much of the element of risk is taken out of the job, both in terms of cost and time. “There’s very little that can go wrong,” says Mike Rhode, Georges Tohme’s business partner at LVO Systems. “The timing will be within a few weeks. Soft costs,

such as those for architects and engineers, are reduced. When trades such as electricians and plumbers come on board a traditional build, who knows? There’s always something.”

Pagano can also offer clients a fixed price – within 10 per cent of the quote, says Rhode. He says that homes cost between £90 and £150 per sq m, starting at £1.2m for a 372 sq m house. The largest and most expensive house was built in Russia for £10m. “In quality, the houses are Bentleys, but they are as beautiful and reliable as a Ferrari,” adds Tohme.

The clever construction mechanism also accounts for the open feel of Pagano properties, >

*The post-and-beam system, with services such as electrics hidden inside the beams, allows architects to design long, uninterrupted spaces*





ABOVE: A pool set in a lush Italian landscape; Pagano says its designs will work anywhere, and is building in Russia, Switzerland and the UK

with their strong connections to the outdoors: without the need for thick, supporting walls with space for wires, residents are treated to palatial spans and long, horizontal views; large amounts of glazing feature throughout.

Andrea Pagano says that the look and feel of the houses was inspired by a trip to Los Angeles in the 1980s. “Afterwards, I wanted to make it our mission that everyone could live in either a Frank Lloyd Wright or a Mies van der Rohe,” he says. The properties certainly sit on a continuum of bucolic, American Arts and Crafts-type spaces (the Frank Lloyd Wright influence) and sparse, horizontal modernism (more Mies van der Rohe)

– the latter usually being fashioned from more bleached-looking timber and better lit.

Pagano is no new proposition overseas. It has built more than a hundred structures in Europe over the past 50 years, with eight currently under construction in Russia, Switzerland, Italy and the UK. Its aesthetic works equally well in a desert environment as it does in green and leafy Surrey, where LVO Systems is building its first project, to be sold on the open market (it considers developing to be a better bet than private clients at the moment). One reason that LVO’s partners are so excited about bringing the product to the UK is that their high-quality >



offering might help overcome the planning system. The nine-bedroom property, which will replace an Arts & Crafts house on the 107-acre Rockwood Estate, took just three months to get through the notoriously tough Waverley Borough Council's planning department (although, hilariously, the council asked for the photorealistic CGI to be redrawn in old-fashioned architectural drafting style before they could make a decision). The house's unspoiled, sheltered setting may have helped too, says Rhode: "The fact that it is a modernist house in the middle of Surrey is not relevant, because there is no architectural context – just trees."

The partners also have high hopes because the style appeals to the increasing numbers of international residents in the UK who value the British countryside but don't want to live in a real or mock Georgian mansion.

The Surrey house is currently having its fine details worked out and will go on site next year, and LVO is looking at buying other sites to develop them. As for Pagano, Andrea speaks like a true craftsman when asked what he has planned for the next five years: "Our main goal is quality, not quantity. We want to keep building beautiful projects and designing great houses. We can always say no if we don't like the project." **A**

*ABOVE: British firm LVO Systems is bringing Pagano's distinctive style to the UK, aiming at wealthy clients who also value contemporary design*