

Modern goes modular

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Scott and Vikki Metheny dreamed of building a home that could fit their busy lifestyle. Vikki is a nurse practitioner, and Scott is a carpenter. When they are not working, their two small boys and two large dogs fill their lives with crayons and muddy feet. They were living in Asheville when they decided to "go for it."

When Vikki's grandfather died and his property in Orange County parceled off to family members, they saw an opportunity: Their new wooded site would provide privacy and a place for the boys and the dogs to romp. In addition, it would mean neighbors who would become an integral part of their lives: Vikki's parents.

The Methenys knew they were making a long-term investment in the quality of their lives. "Our goal is to live comfortably in this one house until someone takes us to the retirement home," Vikki Metheny said.

Scott and Vikki wanted a home with a modern aesthetic, one that was flexible, low maintenance, energy efficient – and affordable. They turned to Studio B, a firm willing to think unconventionally about how to build modern on a tight budget. In partnership with general contractor BuildSense, Studio B is well versed in helping clients of all financial means achieve their design goals.

The Methenys weren't interested in a modern home for the sake of style, and they wanted a "better house" than your average developer-built home. The design team's solution: a modular hybrid, part factory built and part site built.

Perception vs. reality

Modular housing is a type of prefabrication, or prefab, that is rarely seen as elegant. While "modular" may conjure up images of dilapidated mobile-home parks and double-wides being trucked down the interstate, many architects and academics have advocated prefabrication for more than a century because of its advantages over building homes on-site. It's estimated that modular construction costs 5 percent to 25 percent less than traditional homes built on-site, according to [CostHelper.com](#).

Erik Mehlman of Studio B sees parallels between prefabricated vs. site-built homes and car-buying. "Why would you buy a car that was built in a neighbor's driveway versus a factory," he says, "even if it was built by someone that knew what they were doing?"

Prefabricated buildings are produced in a controlled environment, so it's more likely that the insulation is properly installed, drywall is well-taped, and windows fit tightly.

And because this type of construction discourages air infiltration and unwanted heat transfer through the walls, prefabricated buildings are very energy efficient. They also tend to be more affordable, require shorter construction schedules and waste less building material.

Sensible showplace

So how is it that the Metheny residence looks and feels like a custom home? Studio B adapted the prefabricated portions of the house into a simple, striking composition: modules on the ends, a recessed entry space in the middle and a single sloped roof capping it all. Three parts of the house were trucked to the site from a nearby factory and installed in one day. Two of the modules are stacked: the master bedroom suite is in the lower module while the upper module contains the bedrooms and bathroom for the boys. The third module contains the kitchen, laundry room and half-bath.

Spanning the modules is the portion of the project that was built on site, the jewel of the house. This main, two-story living area is open and gracious, comfortable and inviting. It is where the family gathers to play, relax and entertain guests. A flexible space by design, it gives the Methenys multiple options for entertaining and living.

The main living space is flanked by two facades: Polygal, a polycarbonate glazing product, was chosen to define the entry. It has a better thermal rating than glass, provides privacy and filters the ambient northern light. The one clear glass picture window, centered on the translucent wall like a piece of art, gives framed views of the surrounding landscape and approaching vehicles.

Opposite is the south-facing glass facade, behind which lies a screened porch that extends the full length of the central core area. The large overhang of the back porch helps to screen the harsh summer sun while allowing the low winter sun to penetrate and warm the interior of the house.

Cypress was chosen to clad the central core, in part to define the public spaces. It is a warm material and is a perfect choice for areas like the entry, where people come in close contact with the exterior of the house. Other materials were chosen for their sustainable, durable and low maintenance characteristics.

Corrugated Galvalume metal siding covers the majority of the house. It is low maintenance, easily installed, durable and reflects heat. The metal siding is a modern response to an old aesthetic because it hearkens back to vernacular barn typology. A similar Galvalume product is used on the roof. Similar to the metal siding, it is a durable low maintenance material. Other features include windows, sliding "barn" doors and built-in storage.

The Methenys are proud of their new house, the relationships formed and the decisions they have made. They think that they have made a good investment and that they will enjoy it for years to come.

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