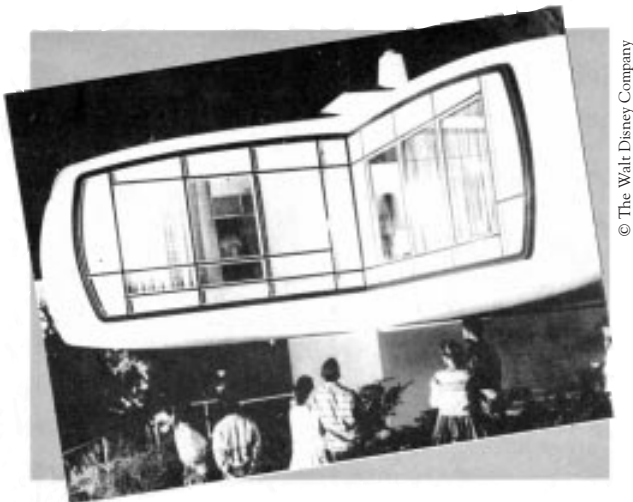


Yesterday's House of the Future

by Marylee MacDonald



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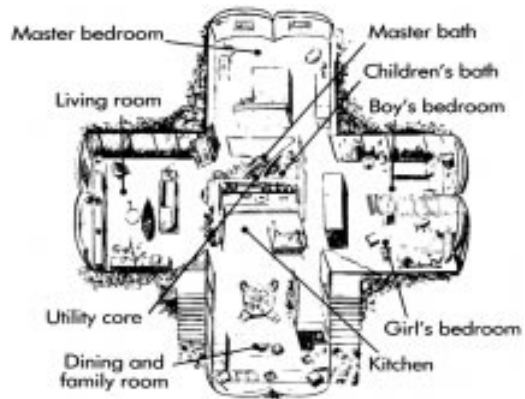
The House of the Future had ten times as much glass as many homes of the day -- as much glazing as floor area -- making the interior unusually open and bright.

Disneyland's House of the Future first opened in June 1957, and visitors stood in long lines for a look into housing's crystal ball. They were curious about the space-age home and its high-tech parts. Who designed the House of the Future, and what did they hope to accomplish?

The chemical manufacturer Monsanto, with an eye on new markets for its products, wanted to prove plastics had a place in housing. With the intensity of rocket scientists racing to the moon, it took just four short years for a Monsanto-MIT research team to come up with this bold new design for a molded plastic modular house. These were some of the house's special features:

- Lightweight movable partitions and curtain walls with sandwich-panel construction.
- Durable laminates for countertops, tables, and walls.
- Shatterproof, lightweight, fiberglass panels to control light in new ways.
- Conduits, ducts, and piping, much of it molded into the floor and wall sections.
- Plastic gaskets to seal openings and join panel sections.
- Foamed plastic for insulation and textured surfaces.
- Appliances and furniture to match the futuristic theme.

The principle unique design concept was an 8x16 molded plastic module.



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The molded plastic formed the ceiling, wall, and floor panels. In the simplest plan, eight molded modules were cantilevered in pairs from a 16-foot-square central utility core that also acted as a pedestal for the house to sit on. The house had two bedrooms, two baths, living and dining rooms, and a kitchen/laundry area -- all packed into five 16-foot-square rooms.

The house could expand or contract with changing family size -- just add more modules. Empty nesters could bring their used models back for trade-ins.

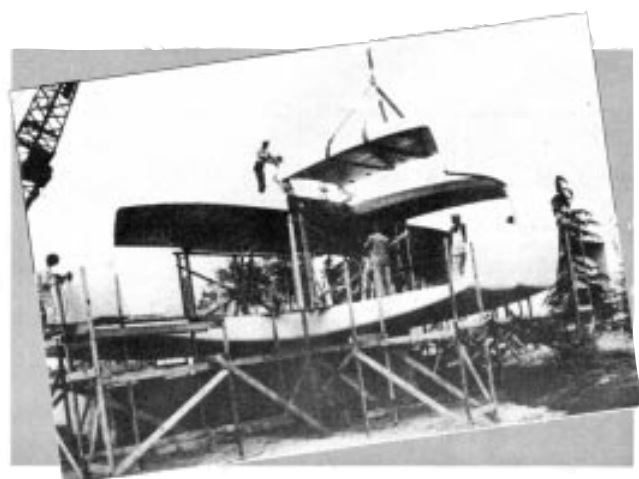
Disneyland's House of the Future relied on the pedestal to give the house a futuristic spin. Yet, the original designs show it sitting on the ground, where it looks a lot like any other modular housing unit.

What is the legacy of the House of the Future? Well, it was here that sandwich panels, modular components, fiberglass, foam insulation, push-button phones, and microwave ovens made their debut. But the long-term payoff was that Monsanto pulled off an incredible public relations coup. The thousands of visitors touring the house associated plastics with avant-garde design, convenience, and "progress." This paved the way for their use in construction today.

Marylee MacDonald is editor of the midwestern edition of *The Journal of Light Construction*.



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Visitors to the demonstration house saw the debut of fiberglass ceiling panels that transmitted light. A built-in wall cabinet, at left in this photo, contained a TV, phone center, and oven.

When the L-shaped plastic sections that made up the modules arrived, the chief project engineer at Disneyland "kept the wires hot one afternoon trying to find out 'who ordered those damned boats!'" They were lifted into place by crane.