

From Cargo to Home On the Range

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The structure is eye-catching in its oddity, a standout in the Ste. Adele mountainside neighborhood of chalets and cottages. I pull into the driveway the same time as the property's listing agent, Danielle Mondou. The owner, Bernard Morin, rushes out to greet us with a hearty welcome. Architect by trade, innovator by nature, Bernard makes thinking outside of the box his calling card. What makes this abode different from other prefabricated modular homes is the actual framework of the house. This modern dream home was once a collection of seven lowly shipping containers that once roamed the high seas, packed with washing machines and refrigerators. By reusing old, abandoned steel containers that litter shipping ports worldwide, Quebec based Idekit (founded by Bernard and partner, Jocelyne Labelle) offers homeowners a greener and cheaper alternative to traditional homebuilding methods. The only residential project in Quebec so far, Bernard has spent many years exploring the strong, weatherproof, steel containers to create inexpensive, environmentally responsible housing. Container-based dwellings have been an option for at least a decade, becoming popular in hurricane-prone places such as Florida. Idekit receives a high volume of demands from France, Spain, Belgium and the U.S.

Beneath its sleek lines, this 3000 square foot, 4-bedroom duplex is virtually indestructible. Made of heavy-gauge steel, these modified containers are earthquake and hurricane-proof, termite and mold proof, fire-resistant, structurally superior to wood framing—they're also kid-friendly. With 6 kids in tow (ages 6-14), Bernard and Jocelyne made sure that functionality didn't cramp their style. In less than 10 months, Bernard and Idekit magically transformed seven 8x40 ft long containers into a comfortable, sumptuous living space, designed with energy and cost-efficiency (and minimal maintenance) in mind while flawlessly integrating with its natural environment. Doorless glass showers with river stones as flooring, industrial-strength wooden container floors used as ceilings, architectural cement flooring, painted corrugated container walls (even with their original dents), a see-through grid-iron gangplank on the upper level give this container-based home an urban, industrial yet cozy feel. And the view--fabulous!

Steel-container homes are as environmentally friendly as the user wants to make them. Fallen maple trees were recuperated by Bernard from the site itself and used for the siding, support beams and stairs. Water pipes circulating beneath the cement floors provide warmth in the winter and keep the house cool all summer long. Compared to traditional timber or concrete constructions, shipping container frames cost the same or less. According to your growing family needs, containers may be added on. Need a new home in hurry? Depending on the plan you choose, Idekit can have the foundation in place within 3 hours! And the rest is, as Bernard puts it, "like putting pieces of Lego together." With an infrastructure already in place, a homeowner is looking at less assembly time, lower labour costs, and less additional material than traditional building methods.

One of the biggest drawbacks to container-based living is negative public perception, that it's just a bunch of containers stacked on top of each other. Unfortunately that devalues the whole concept. This Laurentian sanctuary designed with a whimsical imagination was anything but square—I almost forgot that I was inside containers!

So what does the future hold for shipping container-based housing? When you stack it all up, shipping containers provide an enjoyable living space that does as little harm as possible to the Earth by reusing something that is destined to take much more energy to recycle with a relatively small environmental footprint.

For more information on Shipping Container Home Kits in Quebec visit: www.maisonidekithome.com

For general info and FAQs on Shipping Container Housing visit: www.shipping-container.com