



A Better Way to Build

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Open Prototype Initiate (OPI)

In 2006, Bensonwood collaborated with *House_n*, a Department of Architecture research group at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other industry partners to launch the Open Prototype Initiative (OPI). The goal was “to improve homebuilding across the country and to make homes more affordable, adaptable, and environmentally friendly.”

The Open Prototype Initiative planned to test its ideas through a series of four prototypes homes, each to be built in 20 days. A new house would be built every 18 months. Bensonwood led the design, prefabrication and on-site construction of the home, utilizing their Open-Built software to design the structures. The first house built by OPI, named OPEN_1, emphasized the environmentally friendly aspects of the building. As a Net-Zero home, it would produce as much energy as it consumed, ultimately reducing its environmental footprint to zero.

Kent Larson, the director of the MIT *House_n* Research Consortium, commented:

There are countless examples of green homes, but the industry has not developed a process to affordably mass produce these homes. The Open Prototype Initiative has developed scalable processes, such as prefabrication and the separation of core services that, when followed, enable builders to create thousands of customizable Net-Zero homes that are being made more affordable right now.

“UNITY HOUSE”

The second prototype built in 2008. Dubbed “Unity House,” the 1,930 square foot house became the on-campus home for the president of Unity College, a small school in Unity, Maine with an environmentally focused curriculum. It was to serve as a single family residence for Mitch Thomashow, the president of Unity College, and includes a classroom, as well as space for on-campus meetings and events.

Thomashow commented:

Unity House and the OPEN Prototype Initiative embody the principles of Unity College, including environmental leadership, sustainability, and collaborative and experiential learning. We are America’s environmental college, and with Unity House we are proud to be a part of an effort to reframe America’s building industry, making the mass-production of custom environmentally friendly homes a reality.