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Soon We May All Live In Prefab High-Rises

By [Ariel Schwartz](#)



The recession has highlighted the need for affordable, efficient, quick-to-build structures in urban areas. Because while many of us want to live in pricey cities like Seattle and San Francisco, few people can afford the steel and concrete structures that are nice to live in (and hold up in earthquakes). You probably think of prefab houses sitting alone, out in the desert, or something like the post-apocalyptic [Habitat 67](#) [1]. But Sustainable Living Innovations is going to soon unveil the beginnings of the new urban built environment: the prefab skyscraper.

Next week, Sustainable Living Innovations, a group made up of architectural design, construction, and engineering consultants, will unveil its first model unit in Seattle--a one-story prefab structure that shows off the design SLI hopes to use for sky-high buildings. Arlan Collins, principal at CollinsWoerman (the architecture firm behind the group) explains that in Seattle, a wood-frame apartment building with parking is \$130,000 a unit. It also takes an interminable 36 to 40 months

for design and construction. SLI's building costs the same--but it can be designed in less than 20 months. So for the same price as a building featuring a wood frame, vinyl windows, a popcorn ceiling, and an ugly beige carpet, SLI can build a steel-framed building with concrete floor slabs and ample natural lighting, right out of an IKEA catalog.

"From the time we're ready to lift the building, it will only take us 90 days to finish. If you're an observer, this building will go from not being there at all to being done and having someone living in it in four months," says Collins. That's because the SLI design consists of ready-made parts that are put together like an Erector Set on site (see the video below). For people who have seen construction projects languish for years with little progress, this could be something of a miracle.

One thing you'll have to forgo in your modern, quickly built apartment: rooms. An SLI-designed building contains 20% less gross building area than a comparable building because the apartments lacks interior partitions or hallways. In the future, everyone will live in open spaces (though the bedrooms and bathroom have walls). That saves significantly on building materials. Each building is also, but of course, LEED Silver certified. This is the kind of thing that could revolutionize the building market--one day. First, SLI has to work out the tiny detail of getting its high-rise steel prefabs adapted to existing building codes; no small feat considering that no one really anticipate this kind of thing happening.

SLI is confident it can make its designs compliant. Until then, the group can use its design to build structures up to six stories tall, and it is already in talks to build a dozen projects in the U.S. Soon, our skylines will be dotted with quickly erected buildings. Just wait until the construction worker unions get wind of this.

Photo Credit: Doug Scott

Reach Ariel Schwartz via Twitter [2] or email [3].

Links:

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habitat_67

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