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Finding a Factory

At press time, Resolution: 4 Architecture was on the verge of choosing one of two housing companies to manufacture the Dwell Home. Just before he left for North Carolina for meetings at both factories, we asked architect Joseph Tanney to tell us about the arduous process of finding just the right manufacturer for the job.

Convincing manufacturers to expand the parameters of what is possible in housing has been a big obstacle for many architects interested in taking prefabrication to the next level. Will this factory accept the challenge?

Since winning the Dwell Home Design Invitational, our priority has been to identify a manufacturer that is licensed and approved to build in the area and that's willing and able to work with us to make the Dwell Home a reality. We want to find the best one, so we can get the best product at the best price. Every week we learn a little more from each company about what they can and cannot do, what they're able to do and what they're willing to do. Each manufacturer we've spoken with has different abilities in terms of the materials and finishes they can actually provide in the factory. This is crucial, because the more that gets manufactured in the factory, the lower the cost per square foot, and the better we'll be able to hit our price point of \$200,000.

It's an interview process, with a lot of back-and-forth dialogue. There's a lot on our end to learn. We issue design drawings and then we get info and pricing back from them—it's a tennis match. What we've been learning is that this is an entrenched industry and no one thinks it needs to grow or evolve. Many manufacturers are suspicious of who we are and what we're trying to accomplish. The industry is fine, they say, why are you trying to change it? So we're trying to identify the companies that get it and are willing to work with us.

In the future, this will all be easier, as we learn from this project and carry that experience into the next ones. Now we know which questions to ask.

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