

HOME AND GARDEN

HOUSE PROUD

Just Like a French Chateau, Only Plastic



Stanley Mazor

Stanley and Maurine Mazor are building a chateau in Oregon inspired by a 17th-century Norman structure.

By JOHN MARKOFF`

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STANLEY MAZOR is one of the architects of the information age, one of three Intel Corporation engineers who invented the original microprocessor, the nerve center for personal computers as well as refrigerators. So it was not surprising that when Mr. Mazor turned his hand to building a vacation house, his approach would be inventive.

The results of his experiment can be seen in the rolling countryside on the outskirts of Ashland, Ore., where he has finished building the first two-thirds of a French chateau, modeled on a 17th-century structure in Normandy. Not being a purist, Mr. Mazor, 63, gave the project, which will ultimately cost about \$2 million, all the pragmatic earmarks of a Silicon Valley engineer.

For example, the house is built not of stone and plaster but largely of polystyrene blocks reinforced with concrete. Much of its decorative trim has been fashioned from extruded plastic

foam, and six of the ornate window surrounds on the third floor are made of Corian, a material widely used in kitchen countertops.

The materials fit with Mr. Mazor's belief that houses should be affordable and modular. Although building with plastic foam is more expensive than building with wood and similar in cost to cinder block or brick, the blocks are larger, do not need to be insulated and present certain advantages. Plaster, for instance, adheres well to them without any preparation. And modular construction, Mr. Mazor said, allows a dwelling to be built over time, a pay-as-you-go approach. His chateau is being built in three phases, but could have been built in as many as six.

He chronicled the project in 2003 in a book, "Design an Expandable House: For Present Needs and Future Dreams" (Unlimited Publishing).

Mr. Mazor, who is retired, sketched his chateau for three years, recording details of buildings he admired from business and pleasure trips to France. He hit upon the idea of building with foam in Japan when he noticed fast-food containers in a Tokyo alley and began to think about its uses. Later he discovered insulated concrete forms.

Mr. Mazor's architect, Elvin Spurling, translated his sketches into architectural renderings. They collaborated, sending sketches and specifications back and forth via e-mail between Mr. Mazor's primary home in Los Altos, Calif., and Mr. Spurling's office in Prineville, Ore. They did not actually meet until after the first phase of the building was finished. "I would do a sketch and hit send, and then we could talk about it immediately," Mr. Spurling said.

The construction of the chateau began in 2000. The building, a jumping-off spot for Mr. Mazor's rambles around the Northwest, has advanced from the original three-story 1,800-square-foot "cottage" through Phase 2, a 3,000-square-foot wing, to Phase 3, a final 4,000-square-foot section, now under construction.

When completed, it will be 152 feet wide and 16 feet deep, and its 7,800 square feet will allow for six bedrooms, a music room and a gym. There will be a tower at each end, one designed to house two cars, the other to house the kitchen and dining room.

"Since chateaus are rooms in a line, you just start at one end," Mr. Mazor said. "However, the garage probably wants to be at one end. Then you have to decide where to put the kitchen and dining room. In my case I ended up with the kitchen and garage at opposite ends. This is not ideal, but it follows the general format of a symmetric building."



Stanley and Maurine Mazor

He drew his idea of designing the complete building first and then constructing it in stages from what is called "top down" design in the computer world. The chateau is being built with "interfaces." The floor plan locates doors and windows so as to make it relatively easy to add on.

Mr. Mazor's romance with all things French began in French class in high school in San Francisco in the 1950's. The chateau as an architectural form began as a fortified building that

could be used to defend an entire village. It was not unusual for chateaus to be surrounded by moats, so Mr. Mazor added a bridge across a small stream on his 25-acre estate, which sits on the edge of Ashland, a city of 24,000 known for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. His land, however, feels remote, and his house is increasingly surrounded by the red oaks, birches, poplars and pines that he planted.

"I like chateaus, but when you think of Oregon, you don't think chateaus," he said on a sunny afternoon on the deck behind his California home, a classic California contemporary, where he lives with his wife, Maurine. "So I found an isolated area where we aren't in people's faces and we have privacy."

A devotee of French cooking, Mr. Mazor once had a bed and breakfast in the wine country north of San Francisco. "For a long time I had wanted a French chateau in a resort area that could potentially become a B&B," he said. Although his flirtation with the inn business was brief, his desire for a chateau endured.

He puzzled for a number of years over the narrow footprints for chateaus, which present a thorny challenge in laying out rooms. But after many experiments with pencil and graph paper he decided to adhere to the classic proportions.

In 1997 an article in Architectural Digest about a Normandy chateau caught his eye. He wrote to the owner, a marquis, to ask if he could visit. On receiving no for an answer, he and his wife flew to Normandy and called again when they were about half an hour from the chateau. The marquis answered the phone and in perfect English told them they were welcome to come by and take photographs.

As Mr. Mazor wandered the grounds, he observed that the building had been created in stages. "They originally built it sequentially," he thought to himself. "Why don't I build it sequentially, too?"

Back home he discovered there were several possible polystyrene products on the market. He decided on Rastra, made by a company in Scottsdale, Ariz. Rastra combines recycled foam plastic with a concrete slurry to make a block that is strong, lightweight and highly fire-resistant. The blocks, which fit like Legos, are first glued together. The concrete is then poured into the resulting channels.

The link between architecture and computer design seemed obvious to Mr. Mazor. Computer design has increasingly moved to a higher level of abstraction, and computer architects now work by assembling components like Legos. And so it was fitting that when the Mazor chateau was under construction, the work crew displayed a Lego banner high above the ground.

Correction: February 24, 2005, Thursday A picture last Thursday with an article about a home made of polystyrene blocks carried an erroneous credit. The completed home was photographed by Joi Shannon. (Stanley Mazor is the house's owner.)

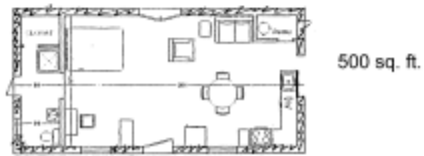
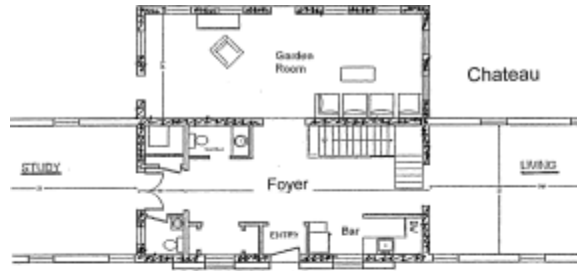
Photos: FOAM PALACE -- Stanley and Maurine Mazor are building a chateau in Oregon inspired by a 17th-century Norman structure, inset. But instead of stone they are using cut-and-glue building blocks made of recycled foam and concrete slurry, left. (Photos by Above, Stanley Mazor; below, photographs by Greg Wahl-Stephens for The New York Times)



1,800 sq. ft. 2 bedroom, 3 story expandable house



front elevations, of expanding house



expanding house floor plans from cottage to chateau



closeup view of ICF Styrofoam building blocks



expanding the phase 1 home, with more ICF blocks

