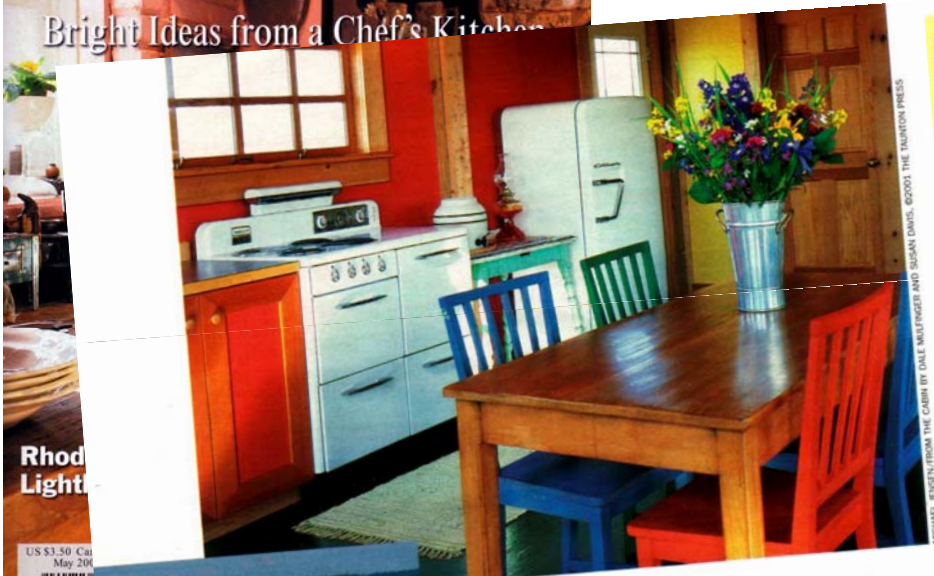


Shelter-Kit Incorporated

22 Mill Street, Tilton NH 03276 ■ (603)286-7611; fax (603)286-2839



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Shelter-Kit Incorporated, 603-286-7611. View a variety of houses and layouts, including floor plans in 3-D, on their Web site, www.shelter-kit.com. Prices, which vary according to plan, range from \$7,900 for a Unit One to \$39,000 for a 24-by-64-foot Barn-House. Price includes personal customization of floor plans. Note that there can be a wait—typically six weeks during the winter and up to four or five months in the summer. 22 Mill St., Tilton, NH 03276.

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Featured in the book *The Cabin: Inspiration for the Classic American Getaway* (Taunton Press, \$34.95), this Shelter-Kit Barn found its way to Whidbey Island off the coast of Seattle.

Mail-Order American Dream

For 32 years, Shelter-Kit has been delivering do-it-yourself homes by mail: affordable, adaptable houses that amateurs can build.

THE TABLE SAWS ARE SILENT TODAY in an old mill beside the Winnepesaukee River in Tilton, New Hampshire. That's not usually the case. The brick building is home to Shelter-Kit Incorporated, a mail-order company that sends kit homes and barns to customers all over the world. Two carpenters turn out an average of two homes a month, and the shop is almost always abuzz with the sounds of woodworking.

The sawdust has had a chance to settle today because precise stacks of boards, plywood, and hardware are being packed in a shipping container and sent to Hawaii. The

two-bedroom 24-by-32-foot barn-house kit will be the primary home for an island family. With a little help, they should have the house's shell up in three weeks. Every two-by-four, each piece of siding, and every bracket of the post-and-beam structure is stamped and numbered for easy assembly. All materials are packed in manageable bundles, small enough for just two people to handle.

More than 30 years ago, Shelter-Kit's president, Andy Prokosch, set out to produce simple, versatile modular house kits that amateur builders could construct in just a few days. Using a small cabin he'd helped

build as a family project in Sanbornton as a model, Prokosch and his father, an airport architect, designed and refined the "Unit One," a low-slung box with a deck facing a wall of glass sliders. Their aim was to develop a form that could easily be enlarged and modified to suit changing needs. They also sought to keep the price low. Since then, they've added several other kits: the Loft House, the Barn, and the Barn-House. "Our goal hasn't changed," says Prokosch. "A lot of customers come to us because of our prices, but it's also about the experience. Something meaningful happens to people when they are involved in building their own house."

Shelter-Kit homes are designed so that they can be put together without a single power tool. This makes them ideal for remote locations. The homes are only the shell of a living space, including the support structure, walls, roofing, siding, and windows. Many customers prefer to purchase their own windows and buy only the basic structure. Once the home is up, owners need to insulate, wire, and plumb the building and install any other amenities. Still, the cost of a Shelter-Kit home versus conventional construction is usually just half to three-quarters the price. The cost of knowing every inch of your home intimately? Priceless.

—CAROL CONNARE

WWW.NEWENGLAND.COM