

# A house from another world

The house looks like a ship, or a shell, or a superhero's secret fortress.

It soars up three stories, seemingly anchored to Earth by four huge wooden beams arcing toward the Little Manatee River in Ruskin. The top floor juts into empty air, hanging from the long curve of the wooden roof.

Architect Mike Calvino's first major project seems to belong to an altogether different planet from its single-story-bungalow neighbors on Canal Road.

The only thing more remarkable than the building's design is its construction.

**Hands-on:** In the five years since the house was commissioned, Calvino, 34, has built most of it with his own hands. He dug the foundation, poured the concrete, even stretched cypress planks on a mold to create the unique wooden beams.

**Big gamble:** In 2000, a friend introduced Calvino to Stanley Woodruff, then 66, who had just bought a piece of land in Ruskin and was looking for an architect.

Even now, Woodruff can't explain why he and his wife, Sharon, took a chance on the ambitious young architect who had never built a house.

"All of my friends at first told me I was nuts," he said. "Then as time went by, and they saw what Mike was doing, they were flabbergasted. It was a gamble, but it was worth it, because the kid is so talented it's unbelievable."

**Soaring cost:** After general contractors turned Woodruff down, Calvino offered to build the house himself. But he realized it would cost more than the \$200,000 Woodruff wanted to pay. They agreed on \$400,000.

Calvino has spent more than that, but he doesn't mind, he said. He views it as equivalent to paying the interest on a small-business loan.

By now, he said, if he and Woodruff had used hired labor, the house, with 2,050 square feet of air-conditioned living space, would have cost close to \$1-million to build. It could be valued at twice that amount, Calvino said.

**Floating walls:** The house is as unique in its details as it is in its general design. The kitchen walls aren't built up from the floor but instead hang from the ceiling, so that the counters and walls seem to float just above the floor.

The floor is dyed concrete, except for large



The house being built on the Little Manatee River in Ruskin for Stanley and Sharon Woodruff features hanging walls, dyed concrete floors and a soaring price tag.

wood and glass inlays — the latter letting in light from below. Stone shelves are set asymmetrically into the concrete walls in the living area, bedrooms and bathrooms, and look as if they had grown there.

**Will Calvino's work be important?** "I think it will be," said Santiago Perez, an assistant professor of architecture at USF. "Here's the question: What will he do next? If this is just a one-off and he quietly slips away ... there are a lot of architects who have built one brilliant project and then disappeared off the map. For this to be important, something has to come after. Then it will be seen as his seminal work, his point of departure."

**What's next:** The house should be ready for the Woodruffs by December.

Then, Calvino, who teaches architecture at Hillsborough Community College, will get to work on his next project.

He's not sure what that will be. But he has some ideas.

"I'm going to try to build the smallest home possible," he said.

— S.I. Rosenbaum srosenbaum@tampabay.com

Photos by Skip O'Rourke/tbt\*



Architect Michael Calvino works on cutting pipes to size. This is the first home the young architect has built.

## Road trip detour: the drive-through

Ah, the great family summer road trip. We began ours — a trip to Myrtle Beach, S.C. — an hour and a half late, naturally. The minivan was loaded to within an inch of its axles. I had planned meticulously, packed for every possible contingency. Determined to save time and keep costs down, and having just seen myself in a new bathing suit, I'd brought a cooler full of healthy food and drinks to prevent any errant drive-through excursions. We were going to eat up the miles, baby, and ward off any additional weight gain.

### On tampabay.com

Tampa Bay Dot-Moms is a blog written by various mothers. You can find more entries and post comments at [tampabay.com/living](http://tampabay.com/living).

That resolution lasted about five minutes, until I realized I'd have to hit the drive-through for coffee, that wonderful elixir of life for mothers and road warriors alike. As we pulled back onto the road, laden with a heavenly smelling bag of grease disguised as breakfast, I warned my family in the strictest terms that we absolutely would not be doing another drive-through on this trip.

That resolution lasted a full three hours, I'm proud to say, until we discovered that someone (okay, it was me) had forgotten to add ice to the cooler, and all my carefully prepared health foods had assumed a tepid room temperature. As we pulled back onto the road, laden with a heavenly smelling bag of grease disguised now as lunch, I again warned my crew, in a slightly abashed but still firm tone, that we absolutely would not be doing this again.

That resolution lasted an inspiring two hours, I'd like to point out, until, in a desperate attempt to pacify the brawling brats in the back, I resorted to bribery. As we pulled back onto the road, laden with a heavenly smelling bag of grease cleverly camouflaged as a snack, I assured my brood that we would probably not be doing this again.

That resolution lasted an amazing three hours, until, snarling from stress, I commanded my husband to pull into the nearest drive-through and order everything on the menu. As we pulled back onto the road, laden with bag after bag of openly acknowledged grease, I said nothing, just stuffed every last calorie-loaded morsel into my mouth.

We finally reached our destination, bought bathing suits in larger sizes and ditched the cooler. We're having a grand old time.

— Jackie lives in Largo with her husband and two children.

## your home (A BUYER'S GUIDE)

### Get a copy of your condo documents



Joni Herndon

**Please tell me how I can see the most recent copy of my condo documents. We have had many changes since I bought my unit in 1994, but I have never heard anything about amendments.**

Every homeowner in a condominium development is entitled to a copy of the condominium documents, covenants and restrictions. The changes you mention may not be to the documents but to the day-to-day operations of the development.

Here is how I would get a copy of the documents. First, call the president of your homeowners' association and ask for a copy. If your community does not have an active association, try calling the management company. There may be a charge (I have seen as high as \$50 for a 50-page document). However, I see no reason why you would not be allowed to visit the office and read them.

Any amendments to the original condominium documents would have been put before the board of directors of your association. Notice of proposed amendments would then be posted in your meeting room, an information kiosk or any place where unit owners gather. The proposed amendments could also be mailed to individual owners. A specific amount of time is set for owners to voice their opinions.

If there have been a lot of changes that you believe are not good for your development, call everyone on your board of directors and make your voice heard.

— Joni Herndon is a state certified property appraiser/realtor and owner of Real Property Analysts/Gulf Coast. She is the 2005 President of the West Coast Florida Chapter of the Appraisal Institute. You can reach her at [askappraiserjoni@tampabay.com](mailto:askappraiserjoni@tampabay.com).