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Philippe Starck appears to be on a one-man mission to save the planet by designing us into a greener future. Well, it's almost a one-man mission, because over the past couple of years he has been working with a lengthening list of collaborators to develop products intended to help us use less of the world's finite resources, from bicycles to super-efficient thermostats to low-usage water taps and furniture made out of industrial waste. His most recent creation is an energy-producing home. With high levels of eco-technology built into it, this prefabricated house is the result of a joint venture between the French designer and Slovenian prefabricated wooden buildings manufacturer Riko.

Formally branded Prefabricated Accessible Technological Homes – or P.A.T.H. for short – this house is known as a positive energy home, because it has a combined solar, thermal, photovoltaic and wind power generation system on its roof that enables an occupant to produce

more energy than they consume. Excess production could be sold onto the grid.

Two models of house are available: Formentera, a single-storey, concentric, residential home, and Montfort, a single-storey or double-storey house opened to the outside. Each house ranges in size from 140 to 350 square metres,

and can have up to eight rooms. Supplementary units for guest accommodation, garages or garden studios are also available.

The houses went on sale in October 2014 at prices ranging from Dhs11,400 to 23,000 per square metre, depending on a customer's specifications. They take six months to manufacture in the factory and three months to assemble and finish on site. Starck believes the house makes living in a technological and ecological way affordable, and provides a low-stress alternative to the uncertainties of self-building.

"Building one's own house can be a source of extreme danger," says the



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designer. "In fact, we all know when it starts, but we never know when it is going to end or how much it will cost. Thanks to P.A.T.H. and its industrial process using prefabricated elements, everyone can have access to property ownership in six months' time and within a defined budget, without any surprises."

Each house is available in three types of structure: fully glazed; built from sustainable timber; or from a combination of wood and glass. Several kinds of roofs are available. Customers can mix-and-match interior finishes, fixtures and furnishings picked by Starck, and

choose from nearly three-dozen floor plans devised by the designer.

"In 34 floor plans, I wanted to provide all families with the possibility of building their dream house, while remaining loyal to their initial expectations," says Starck.

To help buyers personalise their new abodes, the designer has created a number of flexible architectural design elements. "We wanted to reach out to the largest possible public [audience]," he says, "I didn't want to impose anything on anyone. For instance, the Montfort features a cornice roof, but other kinds of roofs are also available, single or double-pitched. The cornice roof achieves a large number of benefits for customers. In fact, over and above the architectural tour de force, the cornice is intended to hide the whole energy producing system, which is a real factory."

In addition to providing green power generation, each house has energy-saving elements like high levels of insulation and a rainwater recovery system. This means the

Interior of the innovative Starck designed eco villa; eco-faucet by Starck for Axor Hansgrohe.

Montfort model can produce 50 per cent more power than it consumes, the manufacturers say.

Both designer and manufacturer are convinced this type of fabricated home represents the future of residential construction in the world. In France, for instance, thermal regulations coming into force in 2020 will require all new buildings to produce more energy than they consume.

Starck's other recent eco-friendly solutions include a smartphone-controlled thermostat he designed for weather apps maker, [Netatmo](#),

which helps reduce energy consumption. It syncs with the app to provide the user with real-time temperature readings, and memorises usage patterns to regulate the temperature automatically unless instructed otherwise.

And there is Pibal, the scooter-bicycle the designer presented to a free cycle scheme in Bordeaux in 2014. Responding to what he calls modern "urban ergonomics", Starck took on board residents' answers to questions about what they wanted, by designing a bicycle that users can push along as a scooter when stuck in heavy traffic. Its wheels are yellow for high visibility, and there is space for baskets at both ends.

The designer has also produced the Organic tap for bathroom brand Axor, which uses half the amount of water an ordinary tap does. By mixing the water with air to make a shower-like spray, his creation uses only 3½ litres of water per minute compared to the seven litres used by

conventional taps, but with no loss of effectiveness, he assures. What's more, the water temperature can be pre-set, so users don't have to waste valuable H2O while they wait for it to reach a desired level of warmth.

Starck's counter stool is made from waste materials found discarded at lumber yards and industrial plastic factories. This was presented at the Salone Internazionale del Mobile in 2014 by furniture manufacturer, Emeco.

Explaining his ethos, the designer says. "My basic mission in life is to create open technical solutions in order to face the most important question of the future: how is it possible to provide people with the possibility to choose, to make consistent choices, taking into account various constraints, expectations and ways of life, and making it possible for people to be proud of the difference they have?"

But, of course, Starck is not the only person attempting to help alleviate our environmental problems. In the world of property, a growing number of house-builders are taking this issue seriously. In Dubai, an entire community is being constructed which is intended to reduce consumption of precious resources. The Al Barari residential estate uses recycled water to irrigate its landscaped gardens. Developed by the Zaal family, 80% of the 131-hectare estate is green spaces, lakes, streams and other water features. ■



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