

A Conversation with Architect

Mark Waghorn



Architect Mark Waghorn relaxing on the deck of one of his small-space builds, The Merwyn.

Mark Waghorn is an award-winning architect based in Wales, who has a passion for sustainable architecture and small, functional spaces. Tiny Living Magazine spoke with him about the cohesiveness of living with nature and where he sees the future of small-space living headed.

TLM- *In what ways, do your homes bring closer interaction between people and the natural environment?*

MW: I am inspired by people who are already living lives that are closely connected to the natural environment...I hope to demonstrate that modern technology can be combined with natural materials and settings to allow people to live comfortably but simply and in harmony with nature.

TLM- *There have been many articles written about modular housing, and its future in the UK housing market. What general trends do you foresee in the ever-growing demand for affordable housing?*

MW: There are plenty of luxury modular house suppliers, but not enough providers of affordable, high quality modular and mobile homes. Living in rural Wales, I can see that many people rely on mobile homes to live in, but these are not fit for purpose. They are generally poorly insulated... I realised that this does not need to be the case, so I set about designing a range of micro and modular homes that are highly insulated and make use of local, natural materials.

TLM- *Do you feel the planning restrictions for small, static dwellings (under 35 msq.) as a primary dwelling are relaxing or becoming tighter nationally?*

MW: I believe that the reason there are not more micro-dwellings in the UK lies in the way that planning policy impacts the economic viability of such development. Planning policy restricts the availability of land to be lived on, and this causes development land to be expensive. Therefore micro-dwellings often don't generate enough value to cover the cost of both the land and build. An exception to this can be found in Wales, where an exciting planning policy called One Planet Development allows you to live on land that is not allocated to housing, and therefore is far more affordable, as long as you can demonstrate that you will live a very low impact lifestyle.

**For more information on this visit www.oneplanetcouncil.org.uk*

TLM- *What do you personally feel are some of the reasons for resistance to embrace small-space living by local councils?*

MW: The size of one's home is understandably associated with the quality of life it can afford its occupant. Local councils are aware that developers are motivated to reduce floor area to increase profit, so often impose minimum space standards for new planning applications. Whilst tiny living is a great way to achieve a home affordably, in my opinion it should be a choice, not imposed. However, local authorities do need the imagination to be able to critically assess innovative projects that combine small-space living with shared amenity space to create a high quality environment for their occupants.

TLM- *Can your designs be adjusted to meet most planning requirements in areas outside of Wales?*

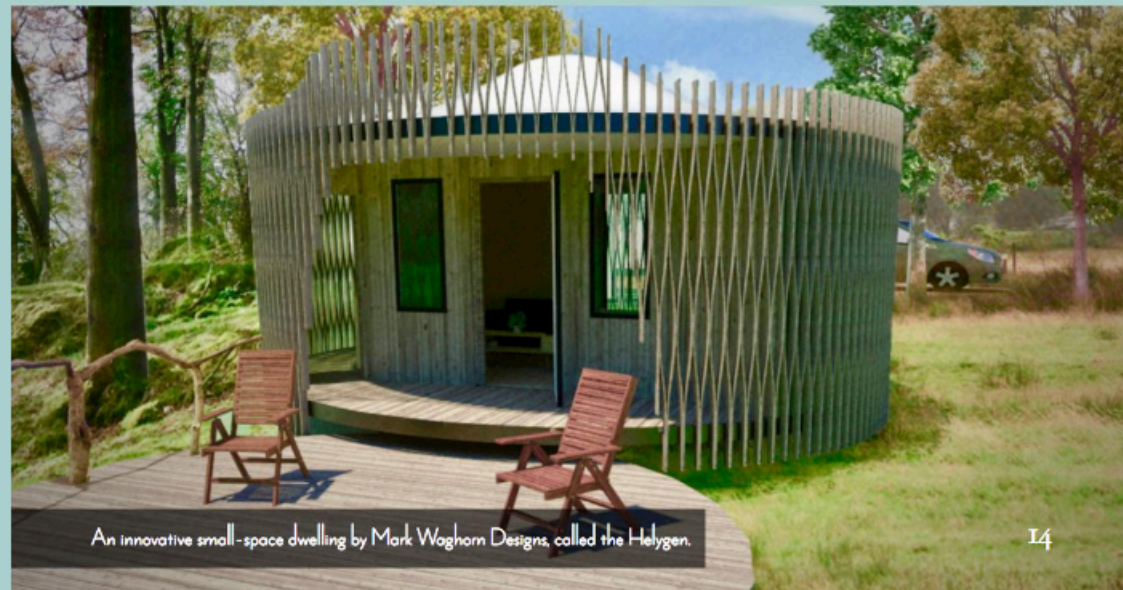
MW: We're able to manage the planning process for sites anywhere in the UK. Our micro and modular homes are designed to be transportable. The main constraint is more likely to be width or height restrictions on the access route from the main highway to the site for the home.

TLM- *I know that sustainable building is very important to you. Do your homes range from completely off-grid to conventional electrical sources?*

MW: Our designs are all conceived to have either electric or biomass heating, or a combination of the two. The house can be off-grid, in which case a battery bank will be required, or grid connected. If there is any site electricity generation, then the house can still be connected to the grid, but it still makes sense to have a battery.

**Biomass systems are wood-fuelled heating systems which burn wood chips, pellets or logs. They're very useful in heating a small area and according to the [Energy Saving Trust.org.uk](http://EnergySavingTrust.org.uk), may save homeowners up to £960 a year when compared with an older electric heating system.*

For more information on Mark Waghorn's designs and his associates, visit www.mwd.wales



An innovative small-space dwelling by Mark Waghorn Designs, called the Helygen.