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- Game Changer

## Different to Its Core

Proto Homes' concept house raises the bar for technology and design.

By [John Caulfield](#)



[Los Angeles](#)-based prefab supplier [Proto Homes](#) recently relocated to a new factory that can handle the increase in orders it has been receiving for a concept home that the company's president, Frank Vafae, believes could establish a new paradigm for a home's design, construction, and affordability.

Vafae, who since 1986 has run general contractor [Group F Builders](#), co-founded Proto Homes in 2007. His idea is to "productize" the house by simplifying its design and production. "It's fairly similar to a Model T," he explains.

That analogy is apt, as Vafae says he envisions rolling out new generations of houses every year. But the comparison doesn't do justice to the technology and design innovations that Proto Homes' concept house brings to the forefront.

The "engine" of this house, says Vafae, is its ProtoCore, an 8-foot-by-8-foot-by-22-foot component that includes all of the mechanicals, which are easily accessible for repair and replacement. Extra features a homeowner might install later, such as a water filtration system, can be plugged easily into the ProtoCore, the builder says.

Proto Homes ships the shell materials—made from steel, polyvinyl chloride, aluminum, and a water-resistant composite called [Ecoclad](#)—and the ProtoCore to the jobsite, where the house can be completed within three months.

All fixtures are wall mounted, and the interior walls, cabinets, and shelving are designed for flexibility and mobility.

“We wanted to create a feeling of modularity,” says Melissa Salamoff, whose [Salamoff Design Studio](#) was retained by Proto Homes to, in Vafae’s words, “give a ‘face’ to our concept’s interior space.”

Salamoff points specifically to the kitchen, where the island is mounted on rollers, the cabinets hide the range hood, and the fixtures have the same look.

The designer also notes that the dwelling’s wiring and cables run through magnetized baseboards that easily can be popped on and off for maintenance or renovation. Likewise, a homeowner is able to manage all of the house’s security, lighting, and electrical appliances from anywhere with a smartphone or iPad.

Proto Homes currently is on track to sell 16 to 20 houses this year, priced at around \$200 per square foot excluding land, although that price is expected to come down as demand increases, says Vafae. [Dwell magazine](#) is Proto Homes’ marketing partner, and the builder licenses sales to a realtor, [PartnersTrust](#).

Vafae is developing manuals and training to license construction to general contractors, and eventually he plans to license its manufacturing process to expedite expansion.