



WestPoint  
Pepperell

**news**

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#### LIVING IN FOAM CURVES

Living in a curvilinear house is not new, the Indians and Eskimos did it, and after all our ancestors lived in caves for centuries. But, now there is a new type of round house, the plastic foam house, appropriate for the new leisure life style. And aware that living in domes has gotten very popular, mainly because the circular environment is friendly and comfortable, WestPoint Pepperell has built a foam house featuring the latest in home furnishings technology, and design.

Getting away from the standard rectilinear forms we've been living with is a refreshing change. Right angles demand a certain way of live, and represent a confining boxlike situation which requires often contrived decorating schemes. Also, the standard architectural approaches almost demand a more formal mode of living. Whereas in the cluster of domes, all foamed together to represent a liveable unit, life is more or less a lark.

Because of the new shapes and dimensions, furniture in a foam house is kept at a minimum, most of it is built right into the walls. This is true of seating, beds, storage space, bathroom and table or shelf units. Here and there, there is an occasional loose chair, often in a very unconventional shape, a chest, a standing clock and lamp.

These free standing items were chosen for design contribution, and as color accents. All make a statement and complement the rest of the decor which is texture and color oriented.

Light, natural light that is, links the bright colors of the carpeting and other fabrics to the actual structure of the house by changing the moods with the passing time. Because of the many domes used as skylights, and the unusually shaped windows placed strategically at many offbeat locations, there is an exciting blending of the natural decor of the outdoors with that of the rooms. Sitting in the dining room is really sitting on the edge of the lake. Lying in bed you can see the stars, or light blue sky depending on the time of day. And while in the bath a tiny window at ground level, allows you to be in touch with nature.

While living in a dome is great relaxing fun, there are times when you need to find a vertical and horizontal reference point. With curvilinear spaces you tend to lose the key to normal orientation, so that your gravity functioning mechanisms need to readjust. That's why Felix Drury, the Yale architect who designed the West Point Pepperell Foam House, built a straight wall which runs right through and is very important

feature in this house. It also serves as a link between the bedrooms and bath and other spaces. And functions as an art gallery, closet area, and even seating lounging space.

Very important to the architect, and ultimately to those who will use the Foam House, is that the construction processes allow for great individuality. It's a process in which the personal attention of the people making the building, plays directly in the configuration of the building itself. This is unlike other construction processes which are completely impersonal, being so mechanized as to being beyond the control of the builder, and the user. The foaming technique allows the builder to make many modifications on the site of the structure itself. Some are pure accident, almost on esthetic whim, others in response to things that just didn't work as originally planned. Also important, is that any change in the construction itself is very speedy, so it's very easy to make changes without using a lot of manpower, and overtime.

There is an enormous amount of freedom in using foam. Using the curvilinear situation, either in one or two directional curves, it works very well, only limited by the spanning factor which still requires more research. Designs in foam have been executed up to sixty feet in span, which is perfectly adequate for residential use. And, in the relationship of the rooms, there are no limitations on the size of the rooms, so that all this flexibility can lead to exciting new design discoveries. With foam, the wall can become a ceiling, or a wall can disappear, or a wall can join a ceiling, simply because the foam adheres to everything, it adheres to itself, can be cut, welded back, and so on.

Finally, in building a foam house you cannot completely ignore the rigors of ordinary architectural situations as applied to rectilinear construction. All the needs of human occupancy are still there. There are problems of scale, general space control, to allow people to feel comfortable, and to utilize the building from a practical and tangible point of view. It becomes apparent that designing in foam becomes harder than using the more conventional techniques.

As Felix Drury says: " I guess I had several purposes in designing this house, I've built a number of foam building and with each one I uncover a new pile of information or a new pile of stimuli that I want to respond to, and these have to do with finding an ability to control curvilinear space. I think it's very important to investigate curvilinear space today not simply from a product point of view, of producing, let's say a vacation house, or ultimately lower cost housing, that's very important too. For me, the most important factor today is an understanding of what's happening to us environmentally."

" Plastics and bent metal are slowly but surely doing away with hard edged differences between horizontal and vertical planes. The car is the biggest single example of this, it's curvilinear environment, it's one in which we are becoming increasingly at home, it is in itself a reflection of our pace, and our tendency, not to be static. The strange thing is that we drive it out to a very static rectilinear environment, and it sits uneasily in front of that rectilinear environment.