

# M O U J E H

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An  
Adventure  
In Style

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Image: Robyn Robson



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# THE POD THAT MAN BUILT

Deserted for over half a century, the Futuro Pod has been given a new lease of life as developers look to repurpose one of the world's lost architectural treasures.

Around some of the world's most desolate terrains, hide deserted elliptical shaped houses made out of fiberglass, measuring 12ft high by 32ft wide and stilted atop metal frames. In the wake of its downfall, a new wave of collectors have emerged looking to repurpose the Futuro Pod for a whole new 21st Century clientele. Originally designed in 1968 as a ski lodge for explorers to brave the sub-zero chill in Finland, architect Matti Suuronen looked to the terrestrial skies in a bid to bring outer space crash landing onto earth. Before the return of architectural probity, engineering

mavens labeled any building that didn't resemble a brick box as an 'alien spaceship.' Suuronen gave the media just that, with what he believed was the prefabricated building of the future.

The Swinging Sixties, so synonymous with embracing counterculture, saw the Futuro as an emblematic image of its time. Finnish filmmaker Mika Taanila documented the emphatic change the Futuro brought to a world obsessed with optimism in his short, *Futuro - A New Stance for Tomorrow*. 'It was a time of the man going to the Moon and it was widely believed that science and technology would have all the answers for better living. It was a very optimistic age without cynical boundaries for imagination,' expresses Taanila. 'Suuronen had donated his materials from the project to the Museum of Finnish Architecture, but very little information was known or at least collected together on the saga of this unique housing project. It was not so much the success of the house that I found fascinating, but rather the failure, the ill-fated short span of international attention the Futuro house received and its collapse. It felt like one of those great dramas of impossible quests with mythic qualities.'

The lingering utopian undertone to the documentary was something Taanila found increasingly important

to convey. 'By looking at the utopias of the future, we can talk about the values of our own age. There's a fascinating distance.'

Only around 60 Futuros are said to have been produced, many in locations unknown to the public. Cabin number 001, the original, is the most tangible reminder that the Futuro was in fact an architectural phenomenon. It is showcased annually at the WeeGee Exhibition Centre in Espoo, a 20-minute drive from Helsinki, towering above its replicas in a War of the Worlds take on modernist architecture. Simon Robson, founder of *futurohouse.com* and practitioner of all things Futuro, has seen four units in his lifetime. 'Each is different, Roysse City is derelict, Rockwall is still used but on private land, Espoo is fully restored to its original condition and Pöytyä is simply unique in its location, raised 15 metres in the Finnish forest,' says Robson. 'I am hoping to visit the Futuro in Corfu next year and sometime in the next few years will try to take a couple of road trips around the other US located Futuros. If I can ever manage it, I might also visit the other European ones and those in Australia and New Zealand.'

Robson has been an avid fan of the Futuro since the creation of his blog. 'When I first saw the Futuro it piqued my interest, not only because of the blog I had started but also because of its simplicity, its 'UFO' like appearance and its uniqueness,' Robson continues. 'As I delved more I became intrigued with what had happened to those that were manufactured. I felt that the Futuro was worthy of preservation but there are many derelict units and some that have been demolished. My website has continued to grow and I feel it now provides a serious, detailed and accurate history and status of what I consider to be an architectural icon.'

Detrimental to the Futuro's success as a solution for the world's housing crisis was the Arab oil embargo at the start of the Seventies. With oil tripled in price, the production of fiberglass, the material that shaped the pod, became all the more costly. In turn, production halted and the spaceship-mongers who had reaped the benefits of the Futuro were out of business.

Half a century on and interest in the Futuro has peaked again. The man behind the Futuro no.22, Craig Barnes, has been instrumental in the redevelopment of the pod. In April of 2013, Barnes found himself negotiating a deal on top of Table Mountain whilst on holiday, to buy his dream property. The reality of purchasing such a large scale collectable involved a 12,000-mile journey by sea, perched above a container ship to relocate his beloved possession back home. 'The Futuro ticked all those boxes and many more,' explains Barnes. 'My first instinct was to save it from destruction. I consulted with experts in the field of fiberglass restoration, and Futuros themselves, before embarking on a very long journey of removing the damaged gelcoat layer of the exterior so a new surface finish could be applied. I've had to source new windows and even make a new front door, copied from one in New Zealand.'



Futuro House in the Dombai Mountains, Soviet Union, mid-1970s

Restoring the Futuro has proved costly, so it is little wonder many aren't willing to commit to such a heavy financial burden. Those who do and those who have studied the Futuro intently, have discovered a whole new outlook on its purpose. 'I think the Futuro house serves as an example of what can be achieved,' says Barnes. 'So many things can be added to the 21st Century Futuro experience. I think the important thing is to keep the balance with the spirit of the 1960s it embodies.' For Taanila, the draw of the Futuro's exterior was its biggest appeal. 'The oval shape is like a magnet. Once you've seen it, it feels very familiar and cozy, and it's difficult to forget. The Futuro House can be seen as some kind of tabula rasa for our projected daydreams.' Yet it was the timelessness of the Futuro that enticed Robson. 'Despite it being nearly 50 years old it actually still looks futuristic and innovative. I think there is a market but clearly it is a niche market.' Whether the Futuro itself will be as popular as it was in the Sixties is yet to be seen. 'My guess is it will retain its almost cult-like following,' continues Robson. 'While I hear talk now and again from someone out there wondering about manufacturing, I personally do not think it will happen; for me it would just be a reproduction and that never holds the same significance or interest as an original.'