

THE MAD HOUSERS

Foundations of Hope

534 Permalume Place Atlanta, GA 30318

www.madhousers.org

MAD HOUSERS EXHIBITED IN SMITHSONIAN



The Mad Housers have a new hut in a very unusual location: sitting in the formal garden of an uptown Manhattan mansion.

It all started last August, when the Mad Housers received an astonishing email from the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. The Cooper-Hewitt, a branch of the Smithsonian, wondered if the Housers would be interested in putting up a structure for the upcoming "Design for the Other 90%" exhibit. The exhibit's title refers to the fact that most design work is geared towards the needs of the 10% of the planet's population living in the developed "first world." Meanwhile, huge numbers of people live with basic needs unfulfilled. The exhibit highlighted design for the other 90%, focusing on providing for the poor, the disenfranchised, refugees, and the homeless.

As a policy, the Mad Housers weigh exhibiting cautiously. Although having shelters displayed in galleries is fun and flattering, it can also be expensive in terms of time, effort, and transportation. But exhibiting in a Smithsonian museum, even one as far away as New York, was too exciting an opportunity to miss. And since the museum was paying for the materials and the volunteers offered to travel on their own dime, the decision to go was a no-brainer.

The exhibit was scheduled to open in May, which allowed volunteers and materials to trickle up north as opportunities arose. Susan Lee went up first to give an interview with the museum staff. Nick Hess and Tracy Woodard drove up in December with a few of the fussier pieces to manufacture, such as the triangular gable pieces and the stove. Then, in April, Nick returned to lead a two-day hut build in the garden of the grand

old Andrew Carnegie mansion, where the Cooper-Hewitt resides today.

Finally, construction complete, Susan and Nick went back to Manhattan to represent the Housers at the exhibit's multiple openings. The exhibit had three separate openings across three evenings – one for the press, one for museum patrons, and one for the general public, complete with a panel discussion.

The Mad Housers hut wasn't the only exhibit, or even the biggest exhibit. Several different shelter structures were there, some made of cardboard,

others of more conventional materials. Some exhibits were potentially useful for Houser clients, such as the super-low cost water filtration system made of clay, or the drip irrigation system that cost pennies per linear foot, cargo-carrying bicycles, solar cooking ovens, low-cost communication and educational tools, and insecticide-impregnated bed netting. The exhibit runs through late September. Anyone visiting Manhattan in the next few months should take the time to see this fascinating, informative, and ultimately uplifting display of human ingenuity working to help others.

The Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum is located on Museum Mile, at the corner of 91st Street and Fifth Avenue in New York City. For more information, visit www.cooperhewitt.org



A Mad Housers hut, on exhibition at *Design for the Other 90%*, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution. Studio Lindfors, exhibition design. Photo credit: Andrew Garn

THE BAD, THE GOOD, AND THE UGLY

MULTIPLE CLOSINGS MAKE FOR STUNNING MONTH

The Mad Housers lost nine camps – a total of 21 shelters – in two unrelated but closely-spaced incidents in April.

The Bad: The Atlanta Beltline project is planned to go straight through the land that the Bankhead camp occupied. Bankhead, one of the oldest camps Mad Housers helped, and by far the most well run, was home to eight campers. Three other camps – Hawk, a singleton camp, Chemical, a pair of Low Riders, and an as-yet-unnamed camp with a single hut helping three folks – were also directly in the path of the Beltline, meaning that fourteen people all told were about to lose the modest shelters they called home.

The Good: However, in an amazing act of good will, the City of Atlanta didn't simply evict the campers. The hero of this tale is Tony Stone of Traveler's Aid, who was contacted by the Mayor's office about the upcoming evictions. Tony had volunteered with the Mad Housers before, when he worked with the Mercy Mobile clinic. When told of the upcoming destruction of the camp, he convinced the City to give him enough time to find shelter for the residents.

Traveler's Aid came through not just with shelter, but with a real chance to rejoin society through their Stepping Ahead program, which combines long-term shelter with active assistance.

Tony explains the program: "Our

caseworkers create an individualized action plan with each client that responds to their specific situation and needs. Once the immediate crisis has passed, a long-term plan is developed that can include employment training, credit counseling, budget management seminars, and a multitude of other opportunities designed to lead the person out of their poverty-stricken circumstances and break the cycle that leads to homelessness."

Not only were the camps immediately in the path of the Beltline offered enrollment in the program, but also the nearby Law, Law Hill, and Walt camps. The Mad Housers urged everyone involved to accept this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

(Continued on page 2)



Bad, Good and Ugly
(Continued from page 1)

Of course, this led to the question of what to do with the empty shelters. The Mad Housers decided to decommission huts as they were vacated, to keep random newcomers from moving in and causing problems. If the City was going to help Mad Houser clients, the Mad Housers weren't going to create any problems for the City. Decommissioning the shelters and helping clients move into their



From hut...



To home.

served by the Mad Housers. Seven structures were lost altogether, although two Low Riders were reclaimed and redeployed.

What next? In general, the Housers lean towards a strategy of many small-to-medium sized camps instead of fewer large camps, which keeps the loss of any one camp from being too catastrophic. However, the camps tend to cluster together, and so are vulnerable to

new apartments took up three consecutive weekends in May. Three huts were entirely salvaged and taken back to the warehouse to be refurbished. Of the others, most were simply too old and brittle to be usefully recycled, and manpower and transportation shortages prevented the retrieval of the rest.

The Ugly: Sadly, not all camp closings had such happy resolutions. Over the past year, the Mad Housers have increasingly

built out in the Cobb County suburbs, as intown development dried up areas where the homeless camp. However, in April an ugly and pointless tragedy struck: allegedly, two clients from one of the Cobb camps got into a fight with a third homeless man, and beat him so severely that he eventually died in the hospital. Both men are in jail now, but several camps were shut down along the road where the assault occurred, three of them

situations that affect an entire zone. Since the homeless live where they can instead of where they'd like to be, there's not much that can be done about clustering. New clients continue to call, and the Mad Housers have expanded their search for camps both inside and outside of the city limits. The sudden loss of so many camps has been a shock – but there's still good work, as always, to be done. ☹

**VOLUNTEER VIEW:
SAM RUSH**

I am an angry houser. I house because I see so many people unable to get housing for themselves, chained and barred from it by invisible and impenetrable tangles of systematic and individual injustice. I house because the anger can only sit for so long, because tapping, and pushing, and pounding at the locks can only go on so long before hopelessness becomes a way of life. I house because we need somewhere to stay while we wait for the locks to break, I need somewhere to keep my anger. So I keep it in storage sheds, in low-riders and full huts, beneath nails and between plywood and under a hundred pounds of roll roofing, so someone has a place to sleep for now. So someone has a door to open to for now. So I can put my anger down for now. Until the locks break.



**CLIENT INTERVIEW:
GORDON SMELAND**

We spoke with Gordon Smeland, a Mad Housers client, in the Fall of 2006. He lives in a Low Rider hut, with his friend, D___ [name withheld for privacy], in a second hut nearby.

My name is Gordon Smeland, and I'm 54 years old. Getting close to 55. And I've been here for about 10 months.

How did you hear about the Mad Housers?

I heard about the Mad Housers through my neighbor here. He told me about it. Before mine was built, I slept in his because he had a room for about a month. So I slept in his 'til y'all came out and built mine. He's got camouflage painting on his, and it's really hard to see. Most people seem to walk right by it. Nothing catches their eye so they just keep walking. I don't think they'd see it unless they knew what they were looking for – which is good.

What were you doing before you moved into the hut?

Well, my mother passed and she left me a condo. But she had a loan out and they repossessed it on me. And I got foreclosed on... put out... and it was about a month

before I came out here. Nick was real nice about things. And I really like it... when I get here, in the daytime... I mean, I call it home. And I feel secure here. I really don't worry about it. I leave it in God's hands.

When you got foreclosed on, what did you manage to bring with you?

Well... a knapsack, and that's about it, really. I put some of the stuff in a few more bags in neighbor's houses. Then I called a friend of mine who had a van, who was really the only one who came to my rescue. I had a hard time finding somebody to at least get some of my stuff. So I called him, and he was a great guy to come out and do it. And I still appreciate everything he did for me. Because it's hard to find somebody when you need them in a place like this. I had heard about it from D___, and I was paranoid from the start thinking, you know, 'People are gonna walk by on the railroad tracks'. But I haven't seen but two people walk by here since I've been here. I guess since April. Anyway, I feel totally safe here. Not totally, but pretty much so. I haven't had any problems with anybody.

(Continued on page 3)

Gordon Smeland (Continued from page 2)

What are your long term goals here?

Well... I got injured with burns, and had pneumonia, and some busted ribs and everything... but I'm getting my strength back, and I got though Social Security. They finally awarded me that in my favor. So I've been getting a monthly check which I've been putting up and saving so I can get me an apartment, or a room in a house. Actually I'm pretty close to there, hopefully. But as far as work goes, I'm not able to work yet. I'm not quite healed, and I'm weak, but I'm getting there.

So you don't see yourself in this hut much longer?

No... but I really don't want to give it to anyone else. But if they need it, and I'm in a place, then I'd be glad to let them have it. Because I know how it is, and it can be pretty rough. Especially in downtown Atlanta at night, if you've got nowhere to go – it's not hard to get hurt, or end up in jail.

Were you surprised to find that you could have this hut for free?

Yes I was. I thought at least I'd have to pay for materials. But the Mad Housers furnished everything, a porch, and ... I was just amazed, really, at how comfortable it was. I got used to it pretty quick.

And do you mind if I ask what you do for food, and typical daily activities?

Well, I go to a few meetings in town. And I go to meetings too, because I quit drinking fifteen years ago. I go to meetings, like Samaritan house, and I get my meals there at lunchtime every day. And I get food stamps – but that's come down now since I've been awarded my Social Security. But as far as meals go, I wasn't one to eat much for breakfast anyway. But you fill up pretty good. And there's numerous places around town where you can eat if you're homeless. You have to want to get yourself together, and stay away from the drinking, and the things that can get you in trouble. As long as you do that, you can build back things that you've lost. And I don't mean just materialistic things, but, it's not as hard as it can be. If you're a survivor, you can find a way to get through it.

What's it like trying to get Social Security without a mailing address?

Well, that's why I go to the meetings I go to Samaritan House, which is run by Miss Jean Owens, who's been fantastic to me. It's been a year and a half waiting on



Social Security to come through but, it's finally come through. I mean, I might not have another chance, and if it's God's will of course, I'm not gonna let myself slip up. Because I don't know that I'll have another chance. And I don't know what he's got in store for me, but I believe it's something.

Tell me a little bit about what you did before you became homeless.

Well, in my case, I was taking care of my mother. She was 92 when she finally passed. The nursing home wasn't working out. She wanted to be home, in her house. And I had a few problems with the care she was getting at the nursing home so I brought her back home. And I took care of her until... what we thought was laryngitis, turned out to be congestive heart failure. She went back in the hospital, and it was just getting too hard for me to do – as far as the medical things that needed to be done. And like I said, she was 92 years old, so she lived a full life. And I miss her very much. I'll never get over that. But you can get around the... the depression. And that was rough at first. And then of course losing everything on a foreclosure on a loan that they say she owed. Which I'm finding that questionable now... because it was a non-secured loan, and I didn't think they could just come take away the house that she left me. I have no brothers and sisters. So, I missed her greatly. I'm just... just turning everything over to God and not let myself get too down about it.

How do you find the strength to go on?

Well if you don't.... you can just dig yourself deeper into that hole, of sorrow. You know, death's a part of life and you have to go on. And it took me a while. I sank into a good year, year and a half, of depression. Not even going out, just staying home, paying the bills with some stocks that I sold. But it gets old after a while. I just had to... God found a way of getting me to D___, who lives next door here, and then I talked to y'all. And y'all came out and built me one, without me having to furnish a penny. And it's just really great. I can't work yet, but I will be back to work within a year, hopefully. [laughs] Sooner, if I find a non-physical job.

Tell me a little more about your interests, and what you're into.

Well, that's another sad part, but I guess it worked out for the best though. I had a dog that accidentally got loose. And I lost him somewhere, I don't really know where. He got out of a friend's yard. But, ah...I've been a roofer and a carpenter all my life. Like I said, I'm 54. I can run a crew. But I've also done some accounting, things like that. I'm really trying to change my career, to not be in physical work. I also like to play the guitar, and I play the drums, and piano. Which all got put out when I was evicted. But I managed to keep my guitar, but that it's in the pawn shop right now.

What else do you do out here?

Well... [laughs] I've gotten back into reading, which I hated to do when I was in high school, and college, but you know, I've read ten books this year. At least!

What's one last thing you'd like to tell people?

Stand by the Mad Housers - 100%. I locked myself out of here one night. And Nick told me, 'Before you put a hammer to it and start taking it apart, call me.' And I called Nick and he came right out, and clipped this [points to the padlock], got me a new lock and got me in. He's just a great guy. And everybody that I've met that's worked out here. I mean, I didn't help you at all. I moved that big rock behind you, and that's about it. That took three of us. But that's about the only work I did on it. But when you're down to nothing, and there's an outfit out there like the Mad Housers, it helps so much to know that there's people out there that still care. And it's not all downhill. You just gotta keep trying, and it'll work out. 🙏

THE GIFT OF SIGHT

Mad Houser volunteer Keif Schleifer, has found a way to obtain free eye exams and free glasses for our clients through the Gift of Sight program!



Brandi and Joe test out Joe's new bifocals after his prescription was filled.

Says Keif, "My friend Tom Brillante and I have many times discussed creative ways to provide vision care to the under-served. Tom, an optometrist who works with his wife Renee at their Oakhurst office, Decatur Eye Care, told me about the Gift of Sight program and made the connection with the management of the Cumberland Mall LensCrafters for us... Tom offered up his services and performed eye exams for Joe and Pete. The team of folks over at LensCrafters performed Frank's eye exam and filled all of the prescriptions. All of this was provided free of charge. We were made to feel so welcomed every step of the way by everyone we encountered and I am very grateful that this program exists."

Asked about his experience, Frank said: "I couldn't read small print. The optometrist was very concerned and very caring. It was a positive experience. I've never had glasses before. I'm 60 years old, and I can finally read small print."

It was also Joe's first time getting glasses. He said about getting glasses: "It restored my vision. I couldn't read small print before, now I can read everything."

Joe, Pete and Frank are the first Mad Housers clients to benefit from the Gift of Sight program. The Housers are grateful to professionals and organizations that can intervene in some way to improve our clients' health and well-being. Interestingly, while screening for glaucoma, a thorough eye exam can also help reveal if a person has diabetes--an added benefit for many of our clients without access to healthcare screening.

You can learn more about the "Gift of Sight" program at www.givethegiftofsight.org

R&D REPORT: THE KATRINA STOVE

The Mad Housers has traditionally filled the need of getting the homeless out of the wind and the rain and giving a lockable space so they can begin accumulating other things necessary for survival. But most folks today, used to obtaining their needs by pushing buttons or paying money, don't have survival and camping skills. When exiled from society, they don't even know where to begin.

The Katrina stove R&D project is designed to give people a head start on yet another crying need: obtaining a good enough diet. Homeless people are usually too nutritionally deprived to hold a consistent job, or even think clearly, and soup kitchens are often so under-funded they can only provide minimal fare. If clients can do hut-site cooking, then they can avoid spending exorbitant money for bad food at "Awful House" or McDonald's, and they can avoid the time-wasting and sometimes futile trek to a soup kitchen. Money spent on a single fast food meal can buy basic ingredients for a half dozen meals.

We need something better than wood burning campfires. Campfires use a lot of fuel for what they get done. They make a lot of smoke and give away the position of the camp. They're too smoky to use under shelter, and hard to use and keep going on a rainy day. Wood is heavy and cumbersome to transport and difficult to keep dry enough to use.

Our answer was another Mad Housers 'guerrilla manufacturing' product: a basic third world charcoal cookstove that can operate on little fuel, under shelter, and in semi-enclosed areas. This inexpensive "scrounge fuel" cooker runs like a gas stove for hours on a few pounds of charcoal. It's almost smokeless and odorless and can be turned up to heat a really big pot, or down to perk a coffee pot.

And charcoal is light and easy to obtain. You can make charcoal by burning down sticks in the cooker itself, or you can shovel coals in from a fire or a fire barrel, or use charcoal that has been made at other times and saved, or you can use charcoal pellets you buy at the store.

I had been playing with the cooker idea a long time, but it didn't work all that well. One day I saw a stainless steel colander inside a Wal-Mart for \$3.88 that I thought could go in the cooker as a reflective fire basket. I modified it by cutting off the



About the author: Frank Jeffers has volunteered with the Mad Housers for nearly twenty years. Currently on the Board of Directors and Head of R&D, he was President of the organization for several years.

handles and cutting a hole in the bottom, in which I put a stainless steel grate, and then installed the resulting fire basket in our cook stove attempt.

This design really worked! It burned charcoal hot enough to make 'producer gas', injected pre-heated air into the hot producer gas, and produced a smokeless, odorless, extremely hot flame emerging from under an ordinary gas stove 'spider'. Adding a wok ring around the burner opening protected the fire from wind.

A pot placed on the spider quickly reached boiling. Two pounds of lump charcoal kept a large pot boiling for several hours. Later I bought a 20 pound bag of commercial charcoal briquettes.

Six pounds or so of briquettes filled the fire basket, which produced gas-stove like performance for about 3 hours. Then the fire dwindled away for another 3 hours, suppressed by the amount of ash covering the fuel still burning. Although no longer producing enough heat to cook, the stove still was able to heat a 3 gallon pot of water enough for washing dishes, etc.

The board urged me to move this item toward mass production. I began a search for the components it would be easier for

(Continued on page 5)

R&D: Katrina Stove (Continued from page 4)

us to buy than to manufacture. The stove body and lid are only standard ‘shop bucket’ parts, which we buy in bulk to make the heat stoves that go in the 6’x8’ hut. The fire basket can be bought at Wal-Mart. So far I haven’t located a supply of the wok rings used for wind protection, but I think that part can be manufactured fairly easily.

The ‘spider’, or cast iron grate that goes on the flame opening was salvaged off an old gas stove in the woods. I found these were difficult to get from appliance manufacturers and expensive from that source. However, on the suggestion of Don Young, I tried the Habitat for Humanity thrift store in Athens and got four ‘spiders’ for \$2. When I told the fellow working there what I wanted them for, he said he’d save any that came their way and I could have them. Off the top of my head, I called the stove the ‘Katrina stove’, which seemed to strike a chord.

I plan to make four or five at my place to nail down the production method, then distribute them at camps where we know the people would put them to good use. If everything works out I’d suggest we then take one on each build, fire it up and make coffee or steam potatoes for everybody, then ask the clients if they want it when we leave. 🍵

REMINDER

Keep checking our website for the very latest news and information about what’s up with the Mad Housers.

www.madhousers.org

SWEDISH SUPERGROUP TOURS WAREHOUSE

This April, the Mad Housers got some international attention from a group of architecture students from Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. The students stopped in Atlanta as part of a two week study abroad trip across the southern United States. They were excited to meet with the Mad Housers, and we were happy to accommodate them.

Volunteer Jim Devlin gave them a tour of our warehouse, showed them completed panels, and explained the Mad Housers build process. Erik Stenberg, the group leader and Department Head, said “Jim did



Jim uses photos and completed panels to demonstrate the process of building a hut.

a fantastic job showing us the work you do. We were stunned and impressed. I think all of our students came away invigorated.”



32 architecture students and four teachers from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden, visiting the Mad Housers. The theme for their trip was

FEEDBACK FORM

- I’d like to volunteer
- I’d like to make a donation: \$ _____
- I have materials to donate
- I know someone who needs shelter
- I know a campsite
- Please remove me from your mailing list

Name

Address

City, State & ZIP

Phone # Add me to your email list

Email Address Call me

You can use the back of this form for additional details.
Mad Housers, Inc, is incorporated as a 501(c)3 charitable organization. All donations are tax-deductible

Send all correspondence to:
The Mad Housers, 534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318



MAD HOUSERS 20TH ANNIVERSARY!

Volunteers old and new converged at Manuel's Tavern, the original meeting place for the Mad Housers. Cake, beer, and righteousness was had by all!



A great big thanks to everyone who came!

MAD HOUSERS DOCUMENTARY

Zachary Alig is a fourth year film student at the Savannah College of Art and design. His senior thesis film, *Shelter*, is a documentary about the Mad Housers. Says Zach, "The problem of homelessness is an uncomfortable one to address. Many would rather ignore it than deal with the people it affects. Often, the first thing that is forgotten is that the homeless are regular people in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Rarely do charity groups focus on providing the homeless not just resources, but dignity as well. *Shelter* is a documentary focusing on one group that does do this: The Atlanta based Mad Housers."

You can check out the documentary at www.shelterdocumentary.com

UPCOMING BENEFIT

Gimme Shelter Benefit at Eyedrum.

Saturday, Sep. 22 , 8pm.

Music by: Lucky Stray, Mr. Kill, and the Amazing Lizardos

Performance Art by: Cecilia Kane, Steve Seaberg & the Atlanta Naked People, Big City Burlesque & Vaudeville

Come on down!

THE MAD HOUSERS
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