



When it's a SHED, one of London's new flat-pack microhomes. We stepped inside one to find out why these tiny houses make a lot of sense »

Words / Rose Dykins

L

ondon is one of the world's most expensive cities in which to live. Rents continue to rise every year, even as wages remain the same.

As a result, various alternatives to conventional housing have sprung up. One of these is property guardianship, which installs tenants in empty buildings, such as pubs, schools and warehouses, to dissuade squatters from moving in.

Since property guardianship first appeared in the early 2000s, it's become a popular choice: more than 4,000 people live this way. There is a problem with these schemes, however, as they require substantial outlay from landlords. To make the accommodation viable for rent-paying professionals, they have to make them habitable by fitting bedrooms and other facilities.

"When the owner needs the building back, there's a big financial and environmental waste," says Tim Lowe, founder of property-guardian company Lowe Guardians and the man behind an innovation that looks to evolve the idea. "We wanted a concept where we could create an internal living unit that we could assemble, take back down and move on to the next site," he explains.

Teaming up with Studio Bark, an architectural practice that creates cost-conscious environmental architecture, Lowe Guardians developed a modular concept. Called SHED, it can be built and taken down within a day. Units are easy to erect, meaning guardians can have a go at building them themselves but, if DIY isn't their strength, Lowe Guardians can

"We've modelled the SHED on an IKEA flatpack"

lend a hand. "We've kind of modelled it on an IKEA flat-pack," says Lowe.

The materials for SHED's sustainable components – from its SmartPly and polycarbonate panels to its lambswool insulation – are sourced from the UK.

Lowe Guardians' tenants can live in a SHED for £300 (€335) per month – compared to Londoners' average rent bill of £1,564 – with bills and utilities thrown in. At the moment, there is only one SHED, but Lowe plans to have up to five sharing a communal space. "And we're looking at a site in central London where we're hoping to take 50 SHEDs."

He thinks SHED will be as popular with tenants as landlords. "We found that the young, creative, socially responsible professionals we target want something a bit more bespoke," he says. "And there's a great interest from people in having a self-build."

"There's so much political pressure now to build more housing. We do agree that London needs this but, rather than just building everywhere, we're advocates for using space we've currently got in the best possible way." loweguardians.com/shed



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DIY installation
The insulated and soundproof SHED takes just one day to build and dismantle – all you need is a mallet and a drill



Multi use
SHED could also be used to help alleviate homelessness and the refugee crisis

Sustainable materials
SHEDs are made from SmartPly wood and insulated with lambswool

More tiny spaces



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YOTEL, LONDON

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