

Building a Prefab House

» In its upcoming season, *This Old House TV* uses innovative modular building techniques to construct a new house with historic charm

BY ALEXANDRA BANDON

LEST ANYONE THINK A SHOW with the word “old” in its title can’t look to the future, check out *This Old House*’s latest project. The TV pros are working side by side with Bensonwood, a design-build company, to erect a brand-new panelized timber-frame house for Amy and Pete Favat. When the television season premieres this month, you’ll see how the house comes together in prefab sections—complete with wiring, plumbing, windows, insulation, and finishes—that are then trucked from Bensonwood’s shop in New Hampshire to the site in Weston, Massachusetts, to be assembled by *TOH* general contractor Tom Silva’s crew.



AN OLD-STYLE HOUSE

TOP: The next *TOH TV* project is new construction: a prefab timber-frame house with barn-style details. ABOVE: Homeowners Amy and Pete Favat with *TOH* general contractor Tom Silva at the job site.

What makes this project special is technology and timing. Shop construction means a controlled building environment and minimal waste, thanks to computer-driven precision on every cut. The Bensonwood team makes the house’s parts more quickly than could be done on-site, too, while Tom’s crew does simultaneous duty back in Weston—getting the foundation built, plumbed, and inspected. “In the same two months they’re working on their part, we’re working on our part,” says Tom. “That’s months shaved off the project.”

This cutting-edge process includes a lot of modern thinking about what should go into the house. Reused timbers and finishes, solar hot water, supplemental solar power, energy-efficient systems, and a rain garden to protect adjacent wetlands are just some of its eco-friendly features. “We wanted to be super-thoughtful about how we could be green and efficient in every little detail,” says Amy Favat.

Which is not to say the new home won’t have old-house charm. The couple wanted it to echo Weston’s many presuburbia farm buildings. They were inspired by timber-frame structures, as well as colors, textures, and other details they picked up from dilapidated barns, faded road signs, and yellowing photographs. But they also liked the industrial look of urban lofts. The resulting design, by Bensonwood architect Chris Adams, is a modern take on the timber-frame barn: an open-plan space pairing worn beams and wide-plank floors with metal staircases and stainless-steel appliances—a new house perfectly suited for its old neighborhood. ■

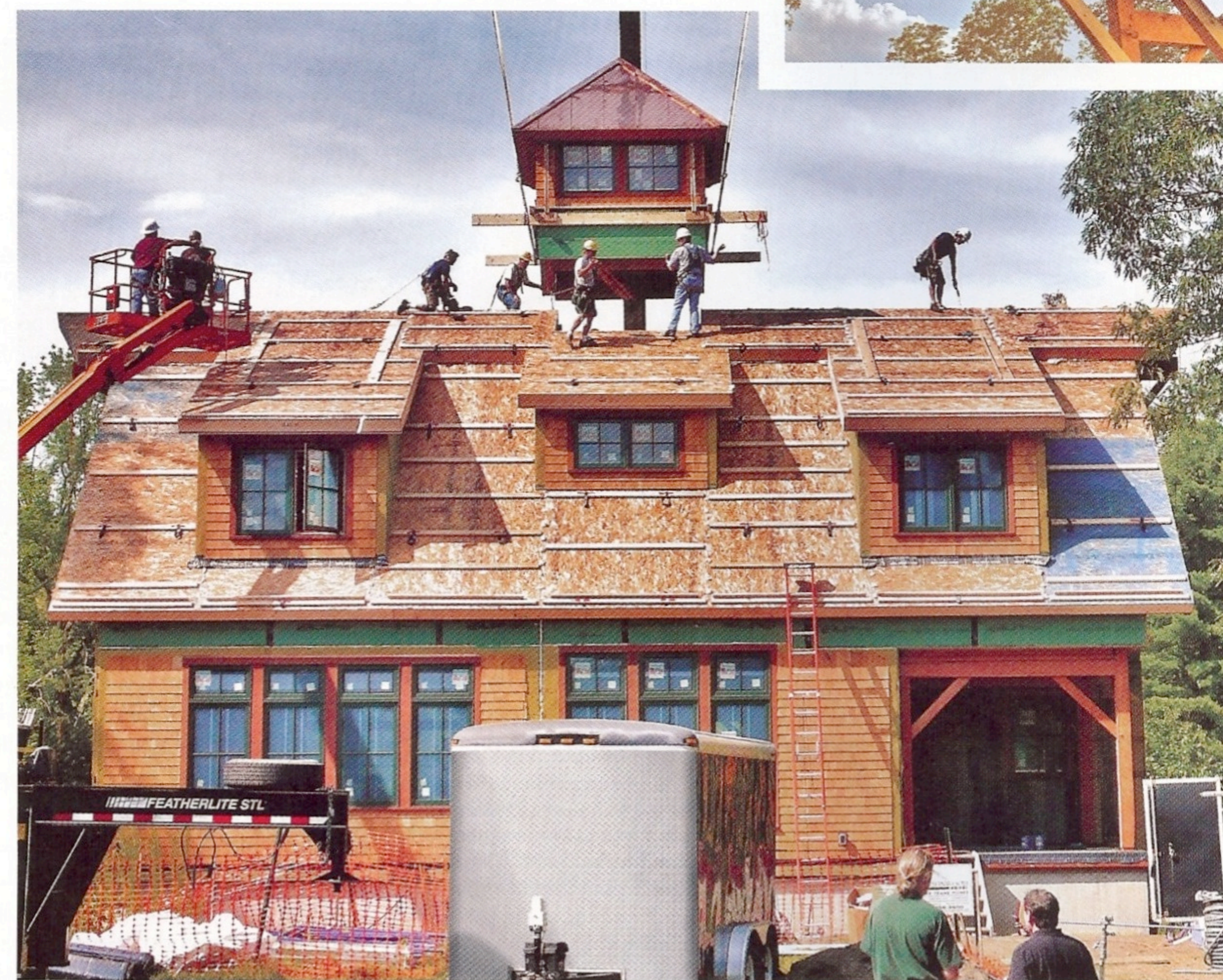
The new season of *This Old House* television premieres on PBS October 2. For more information, go to thisoldhouse.com/tv.



BUILT WITH MODERN TECHNOLOGY

What makes this season’s TV project different is the way it is constructed.

TOP: Panels come together, with the aid of computers, in the Bensonwood shop in New Hampshire—complete with insulation, rough plumbing, and electrical chases built in. Meanwhile, on site, Tom Silva’s crew prepares the foundation before the first timbers go up (MIDDLE). Finally, the panels arrive by truck to be craned into place, a process that takes mere days. RIGHT: The crew guides the house’s large cupola to its destination at the peak. Just a couple of more months of finish work and the house is complete.



peek
behind
the
scenes

Read the homeowners’ blog and watch the webcams to see the house being finished, at thisoldhouse.com/shortcuts