The Mad Housers

Mad Housers, Inc. is a non-profit corporation based in Atlanta, Georgia and engaged in charitable work, research and education. The Mad Housers are perhaps best known for a hands-on, pragmatic approach to providing shelter to homeless people, in particular through the design, construction and provision of small (6’x8’x10’) frame-and-plywood huts.

The History

The Mad Housers first emerged in 1987, founded by graduate students, Michael Connor and Brian Finkel, of Georgia Tech’s College of Architecture to address the problem of homelessness in Atlanta. Their first projects were based on their vision of improving upon other types of marginal housing being erected for the homeless. Both Connor and Finkel investigated the causes for homelessness, citing multiple socioeconomic trends, such as the deinstitutionalization of mental health hospitals, the increased cost of housing, and the reduction of federal housing aid. Even in the early years, the group grew, changed and progressed in physical hut design, group organization and their methods of operation, as they constantly tried to improve. Based on their research and plans, Connor, Finkel and three other architecture students built the first hut. It was a small 6’ by 8’ by 6’ plywood box with a bed and shelves for the client’s belongings. However, it was dry and kept out the wind and the rain.

The organization had a major shift in the mid 90s as some of the original Mad Housers left the group and the next generation of volunteers joined. The group became more focused on maintaining the current huts. Members developed items such as a cogeneration power generator out of a lawn-mower and a wood stove for the huts. Today the Mad Housers are still very active in providing shelter for the homeless and have panel builds and hut raisings regularly. Along with this, they do site recon trips to find new sites and “winterization” of the huts when they prepare the huts for the impending cold weather. In 2002, to raise awareness about homelessness in Atlanta, they built a hut on the Georgia Tech campus and slept in it that night.