

# Barn-House: Affordable House - Undocumented Immigrant Workers + Family

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There are an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States and housing for a large number of them is becoming a social problem that they themselves have to begin to solve. The political climate around the issue of immigration has made it more difficult for undocumented individuals to demand adequate housing from their landlords. Several cities have tried to pass laws that punish property owners that rent to undocumented tenants.

According to 'Build a Better Nation' (A report from Workers Defense Project in Austin) 50% of surveyed construction workers in the industry identified themselves as undocumented in Texas. They estimate that as many as 400,000 Texas construction workers are undocumented. In 2011 Texas accounted for 16% of all new housing construction permits in the U.S. which was more than Florida and California combined. This vibrant economy has continued to attract young professionals and continues to increase the price of available houses within the urban cores of major cities.

People are beginning to look further than the suburbs for affordable housing. Moving to rural areas to avoid city ordinances and the requirement to use general contractors is becoming more common. This is the case of the homeowners of this Barn-House.

The owners of this home are a young undocumented couple and their 6 year old son. By saving over a few years they were able to purchase two adjacent lots in a county with no city ordinance. Their property totaled about two and half acres. The trend in areas like this is to buy a prefabricated trailer home and place it on these large properties. Isolation seems to be a driving factor when looking for places to live. When the owners approached me (designer) they wanted to talk about the feasibility of building a home they could afford – something not much more ambitious than the trailer homes scattered across the landscape.

The limitations of the owners dictated many of the decisions that led to the final design as well as the phasing of construction. The clients saved enough money to get a substantial amount of the project done within a year. The rest will be done as cash becomes available through their business ventures. Because of their legal status, access to a construction loan was out of the question, although they never really wanted to get in debt to do the project.

The first few iterations of the house were considerably smaller, the final design is 1,200 square feet with a foot print of 17 ft. x 75 ft. and the goal is to build it for under \$90,000. The house has two bedrooms, one and a half bath, a lofty office space and roof deck. The

roof deck was the inspiration for the project as it serves as a space for the young child to look at the landscape and the sky.

To be within the projected budget, the building has been constructed through informal sub-economies - hiring contractors that are not registered (probably because they are also undocumented) and being flexible with construction schedules.

Construction started in October of 2015 and we expect the family to move in sometime in 2017.



# BARN - H O U S E

AFFORDABLE HOUSE - UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WORKERS + FAMILIES

*"...the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace."*

- Gaston Bachelard



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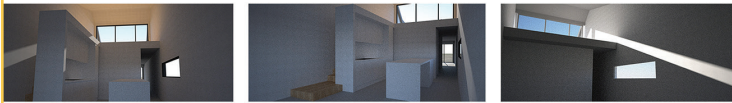
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Louis Kahn told us that "a city is a place where a small boy, as he walks through it, may see something that will tell him what he wants to do his whole life". So what do you do when you are outside the city? This was the question we wondered about and found that the connection with the Texas vast landscape and big sky made for a powerful context in which a kid could wonder and dream.

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**"50% OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS REPORTED THAT THEY WERE UNDOCUMENTED"**

