

Lustron Homes – The “New Standard of Living”

Attention homeowners! How would you like to own a home that never needs painting – inside or out, one you could clean with soap and water – inside and out? This home is fire proof, rust proof, termite proof, vermin proof and comes in six appealing pastel colors. Does this sound too good to be true? Introducing the Lustron Home, a prefabricated, porcelain-enameled, post WWII home, manufactured right here in Columbus, Ohio.

Lustron Homes was the brainchild of Carl Strandlund, who worked for the Chicago Vitreous Enamel Corporation during the War. At the time, porcelain-enameled steel panels were used mainly for gas stations and store fronts. After the war, Strandlund asked the federal government for a loan to purchase more steel for more gas stations. The government had trouble justifying such a loan; steel was in short supply and veterans returning from the War needed affordable housing – not gas stations. Hence, Strandlund’s request changed from steel for gas stations, to steel for houses. The Feds approved a \$12.5 million loan in 1947. The Curtis Wright plant, which built fighter planes during the war, was chosen to produce the homes. Set on 23 acres in Columbus, Ohio, the plant was considered a perfect choice for both its location and size. It took a full year to set up the plant.

Strandlund’s idea was to mass produce homes like automobiles – run them off the assembly line, load them onto trucks and put them together on site. All the customer had to do in advance was find property and build a concrete slab on which the house would sit. A house could be up three days after delivery. Initial plans were to manufacture 150 houses per day! The first model was a 1,025-square-foot, two-bedroom home. Features included built in cabinets and bookcases, sliding doors (to save space) and radiant heating that warmed the home from the ceiling down – all for the cost of around \$10,000. The brochures for Lustron not only called the homes “The New Standard for Living” but also “The Home of Cheerful Convenience.”

Unfortunately, production of the Lustron Home did not make it into 1951. Its demise was due in part to a lack of dealers to sell the homes, poor distribution and problems with local building standards. In the end, the federal government foreclosed on the loan, which had grown to \$37.5 million. Only about 26 homes had been produced per day, for a total of around 3,000. These houses are scattered throughout the United States, with 60 homes located on the U.S. Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia. A handful can still be found on Columbus’s north side, East Long Street and along Mound Street.

Sources:

- Hendricks, Hays Birkhead, *Louisville’s Lustrons: Houses with Magnet Appeal*. Muncie, IN: Ball State University, 1994
- *Columbus Dispatch* (July 23, 1978)
- *Columbus Dispatch* (November 24, 1969), p.B24
- *Citizen Journal* (November 14, 1947), pg. 1
- *Fine Homebuilding* (August/September 1984)
- Website: www.lustronconnection.org