



THE MAD HOUSERS

534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318 (new address) • 404.806.6233 • www.madhousers.org

BUILDING THE INVISIBLE CITY

By Jim Devlin

If you were driving down Martin Luther King Blvd. in Atlanta last February, you might have noticed some unusual real estate signs among those advertising new lofts and condos. The signs simply stated "FREE HOMES FOR THE HOMELESS, madhousers.org". If you followed these signs, you would have arrived at the SHELTER show on display at the Eyedrum Art & Music Gallery. For the show, Eyedrum invited local artists to create structures that expressed the essence of a transient lifestyle. As a result, between January 29th and March 5th of 2005 the Eyedrum's large gallery space was temporarily transformed into a small shanty town.

Standing in the center of the makeshift village, surrounded by the other artist's structures, was the Mad Housers' exhibit 'Building the Invisible City'. For the exhibit, the Mad Housers erected both of their standard shelter designs: the Low-rider and the Hut. Inside the Low-rider, a computer screen displayed a time lapse photo presentation of a shelter being built from start to finish. The presentation visually demonstrated the Mad Housers' efficient fabrication process. The adjacent Hut's interior walls were covered with forty-eight (8 1/2" x 11") photographs of existing occupied Mad Houser shelters. These photos illustrated how the shelters are eventually occupied by the clients. Posted on the back wall of the Hut was a brief written description of the Mad Housers' history and mission of providing shelters for the homeless community. In keeping with that mission, when the SHELTER show closed, both of the Mad Housers' structures were quickly disassembled, relocated and reassembled as new homes for a couple of homeless clients.



The Mad Housers install a full-height...



... and a Low Rider at Eyedrum

The exhibit was an excellent opportunity to expose the Mad Housers to a new audience. Visiting art patrons from all over the Atlanta region and Georgia learned first hand about the Mad Housers' work. In addition to the gallery exposure, the Mad Housers were interviewed on the Georgia Public Broadcasting show 'Georgia Gazette'. The exhibit also received positive reviews in the Atlanta Journal Constitution, Creative Loafing and the national magazine 'Art Papers'.

You may wonder what the Mad Housers, an organization committed to providing shelters for the homeless, was doing in an art gallery. Although art can take many forms, it is all too often associated with beautiful objects that eventually hang on the walls of the affluent. The Mad Housers represent an alternative approach to art: A beautiful act that eventually becomes the walls of the less affluent.

acknowledgments

The 'Building the Invisible City' exhibit would not have been possible without the contributions of the following individuals. Julie Buff graciously loaned her computer for the length of the exhibit. Nancy Ewing generously donated the photo sleeves that were used to hang the images. Adam Millman

continued on next page

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 21, Wednesday, 7pm

Panel Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Sept 25, Sunday, 10am

Panel Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Sept 28, Wednesday, 7pm

General Meeting

Octane Coffee (1009-B Marietta Street)

Oct 5, Wednesday, 7pm

Site Recon Planning Meeting

Octane Coffee (1009-B Marietta Street)

Oct 9, Sunday, 10am

Site Recon

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Invisible City	page 1
Client Interview	page 2
Mad Housers Reach Out	page 3
Volunteer Interview: Luke Perry	page 4
Hellos and Goodbyes	page 6
Down and Dirty	page 6



Printed by: Trans America Printing
70 Fairlie Street
Atlanta, GA 30303
www.tapatlanta.com

coordinated all the printing. Atlanta Vital Signs (www.atlantavitalsigns.com) printed the real estate signs free of charge. Standard Press (www.stpress.com) printed the high quality photographs at no cost. Photographer Clay Davis provided the beautiful photographs. And of course, the numerous volunteers who helped assemble and disassemble the structures were invaluable.

CLIENT INTERVIEW: "K"

(name withheld for privacy)

By Michael Ann Chastain

How old are you?

52.

Can you tell me about your family?

My mother and father is dead. I've got a son that's 27, and a daughter. She's 12. My sister is raising her in New York. She can't have any children, so she's raising her. I have one brother that lives in Bogart, GA. They worry about me. My oldest brother is in and out of prison. I'm just mainly here by myself.

Why Atlanta?

I've been here so long. I'm from Athens.

How long have you been homeless?

Ah, let's see. Well, 13 years. I don't know, somewhere in there. I don't know, I had a few problems. My mother died. She died of breast cancer that spread to her bones. She was buried on my birthday, and all kinda stuff like that. I can't really blame it on that. It's just something that happened.

A lot of things happened at once...

Yeah, a lot of things happened at once. What is it they say... when your mamma dies, you lost your best friend. It's always on my mind I should have spent more time with her.

Do you ever think about going to see your family in New York or your brother?

My brother. I go see him sometimes. But you know I like to have something when I go. If I go without money and no job... I can't share.

You'd like to be able to contribute something...

Yeah, I'd like to contribute. My brother always wants me to stay. He says just stay another week. And, you know, I like my privacy too. I'm a grown man.

How did you first hear about Mad Housers?

They came and approached me. I was up here off of Law Street. I didn't know anything about them. They came and approached me and asked me did I want a place.

"Well, I don't know safe. Where is safe? One place is just as safe as the other. The people I know are not really friends. They're just people I know."

Were you apprehensive when you first met the Mad Houser volunteers?

I was wondering. Yeah, I didn't know what was what and who was who. Like I told them, you know, it wasn't my property. I said I didn't want to be responsible. Everything could be alright, and as soon as they see, you know once some people see something like this, well then it's time to go.

How long did it take you to trust what the Mad Housers were all about?

It's convenient. I still don't know what it's really all about. It's a value, though. It's a convenience to what I was doing.

So, what kind of conveniences does the MH hut provide?

Warm, not wet. More privacy. More sound security, I mean, as far as people getting in, stealing your stuff. Somewhere to keep a little something.

So you can lock up your belongings and that's a lot better than the situation you were in before?

You go to the wash and you come back and everybody has stolen everything you got.

Before moving into the MH hut, would you carry your possessions with you when you went somewhere?

Just leave them there.

Just leave them there and hope they'd be there when you returned?

Not all the time. They just wait for you, for you to go. People get to know what you're going to do after while. They watch you. They know when you're here. They know when you're gone. You've got to change you're routine. If you do the same routine, that's a bad thing to do.

How long were you living in this area when the Mad Housers approached you?

I guess five, something like that, six years.

I would imagine, after living in the same location for so long, you felt pretty safe there?

Well, I don't know safe. Where is safe? One place is just as safe as the other. The people I know are not really friends. They're just people I know.

Do you feel that same way about the people at this camp?

I mean, people is people. If you've got something for them, or if you mind your own business, then you'll have less problems. If you don't deal with them, I'm not saying you don't deal with them at all, it's just if you get too involved, someday you'll have problems.

Do you have any hobbies? Anything you enjoy doing?

Well, right now I just listen to the radio - about the democrats and the republicans. I vote. That's really all the freedom I got.

Are you working now?

No.

How about in the past?

Yep.

What kinds of jobs have you worked?

Production and you know, just different kinds of jobs. Whoever is hiring. I've driven a gas truck, a produce truck, and done yards. I worked with chickens in Gainesville.

How do you get around? Do you use MARTA?

Walk. If someone gives me a little money, I'll use the MARTA. You do the best you can. I get plenty of exercise.

Did you ever attend school?

Yeah, I went to like trade school. Athens tech. – vocational school for auto repair. Jeffers Jr. High. Jr. high and high school. I was in the military- U.S. Marines for about 2 years, then I went to vocational school.

Did you enjoy school?

Sure. I enjoyed it more when I got out. (laughs) I missed it more at least.

Have you worked with your trade that you learned?

Yep. I worked with it. But, you know, around this area you just about... with the way things get now, you just gotta work for yourself.

So, are you currently looking for work?

Yep. Always looking for work. I've filled applications out – if you want to check on that? There's one on Boulevard. Wherever. The Boulevard area. Everywhere. Well, not everywhere, but a couple places.

Is there anything you might want to tell the reader of this newsletter?

Sometimes you might think something is good for you that might not be. It all depends on how you use it. Do you use it to your advantage or not to your advantage. If you have a chance to better yourself, take it. You know, I've always appreciated the person not for who the person is, but for the person's heart.



St. Joseph's Mercy Care | Photo by Karen Sanders

MAD HOUSERS REACH OUT

By Salma Abdulrahman

When the Mad Housers first met J.D. [**name changed to protect privacy*], he was living in the crawl space underneath a railroad overpass. Twelve feet above us, he sat next to his belongings on a narrow ledge of concrete and listened while we told him about Mad Housers shelters. When it came time to hand him a flyer, he said, "Wait right there, I'll come down," and limped precariously along the steep concrete retaining wall that angled down to the ground.

"What's wrong with your foot, man?" we asked.

"Well, I got a piece of glass in it a few days ago, and it went deep into my foot, I can't get it out."

"You should get that looked at," we replied. We all looked at the offending foot, covered in a worn sneaker, and then got back to the business of talking shelter.

You see, "shelter" is what the Mad Housers do best, and that's about all we do. As much as we would have liked to get the glass out of J.D.'s foot, we couldn't. We don't have the time or the knowledge to help any of our clients with their health problems. Our clients get sick, just like you and me, from bee stings to the flu to cuts and scrapes. We even have clients battling AIDS and cancer. But when we meet a potential client, all we can do is put a roof over their head. The rest is up to them.

That is until now. We realized that our clients have many needs beyond shelter, and so little by little, our group has started networking with other homeless service providers who can help our clients. And one of our most exciting successes was when we met Tony Stone of St. Joseph's Mercy Care.

St. Joseph's Mercy Care is a branch of St. Joseph's hospital that provides free health care for needy individuals and even brings mobile medical services to the homeless. Tony had visited the Stewart camp before, and the residents were used to seeing him and the occasional nurse stop by. But we wanted to make sure that Tony knew about all our clients and camps.

Our first meeting with St. Joseph's Mercy Care was spectacular! We were surprised to find ourselves meeting not only with Tony Stone, but also the President, Vice-President, and Director of the organization. They had all visited Stewart camp, but now they had a chance to put a face to the organization and to learn the full extent of our activities. They were extremely happy with the work we do, and we came to a mutually beneficial agreement that day: we would direct our clients to them for medical services, and they would notify us of new homeless camps and individuals.

"Well, I got a piece of glass in it a few days ago, and it went deep into my foot, I can't get it out."

Tony joined us for a hut build two weeks later and got to meet J.D., who still had the piece of glass in his foot. The next day, Tony came back with a doctor who took care of

J.D.'s foot and got him lined up for more treatment. At another camp nearby, Tony stopped and chatted with the residents and, after they warmed up to him, even checked their blood pressures. Our quest to collaborate with other groups has been a success, and all our clients, including J.D., can now breathe a healthy sigh of relief.

Tony Stone has since started working for the National Mental Health Association of Georgia. However, he is still involved with outreach work through the new Gateway 24/7 center.



Luke Perry has traveled the world...

VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW: LUKE PERRY

By Salma Abdulrahman

How did you first hear about the Mad Housers?

When I was working in Washington, D.C. for the National Coalition for the Homeless, a coworker and I were talking about my interest in architecture and he told me about the Mad Housers. So I looked at the website and thought it sounded pretty cool. It was an interesting mix between advocacy, direct service, construction, architecture, and a little more activism so it was definitely something right up my alley. And then last year when I came to the Structures for Inclusion conference in Atlanta, the Mad Housers were doing a build during lunch one day, so it gave me a chance to put some faces to the organization.

MH OUTREACH EFFORTS

The Mad Housers has been fortunate enough to network with other important community-based organizations over the past year, all of who have provided invaluable services to our group and to our clients:

- Joe Houston from the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless helps with client outreach by joining the Mad Housers on site recons and finding new clients and camps. Luke Perry keeps our group in touch with the Task Force by attending meetings and builds and sharing info and news. (www.homelesstaskforce.org)
- Brandie Haywood from Pathways Community Network has worked with the Mad Housers for two years on the Homeless Census, and has introduced us to Dr. Craig Burnette. Dr. Burnette is a valuable resource to our war veteran clients who are trying to obtain VA benefits. (www.pcni.org)
- The SOPO Bike Co-op, with the help of Johnthebaker, has created bike carts capable of towing up to 200lbs for our clients use. The carts attach to the back of a bicycle. They also offer our clients free repairs and training for their bikes. (www.sopobikes.org)

How did you get involved in working with the homeless?

I got involved in homelessness and direct service and advocacy was in college when I studying architecture at North Carolina State University School of Design in Raleigh, NC. I was sort of living in two separate worlds then.

What were those two worlds?

Architecture and design and then homeless services/housing issues. Since college it had been a struggle to find a way to bring these two things I was very passionate about together. When the Mad Housers came on the radar screen it seemed like something exciting that combined a lot of these worlds that I personally was very interested in.

What kind of family did you grow up in?

When I was about five, my family moved to Bolivia, South America.

Wow!

Well my parents were involved in founding a health care project in rural Bolivia to improve access to basic health care services and preventative medicines. So we lived in the Andes of rural Bolivia for about three years and since then my father has continued to be very heavily involved in international health in developing countries such as Bangladesh and

Haiti and India. It served as a stepping off point for me to get more involved with issues of inequality and poverty. I always figured I would end up in a different country, but when I got involved with homelessness in college it was very clear that there was a lot more work to be done here.

And what did you do after college?

After college I worked for the National Coalition for the Homeless coordinating the Homeless Speakers Bureau where we spoke to colleges, churches, and civic groups about homelessness. But it was actually people who were homeless at the time or had been homeless who talked about it themselves. So we were putting a real face to the issue instead of listening to the 'experts' talk about homelessness. After that I worked for a non-profit housing developer in Washington called Manna that developed affordable housing for first time, low-income home buyers. I worked on the construction crew actually building the houses there for about two years, but I was wanting to get a little more involved with architecture and design. About that time I came to the Structures for Inclusion Conference. I ended up staying with Anita Beaty who is the director for the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless. She is also a member of the Board of Directors at the National Coalition for the Homeless, which is how I got to know her. We talked a lot about community-based design and she

told me about Peachtree-Pine, the building that the Task Force had owned for about six or seven years in downtown Atlanta, about their ideas and hopes and dreams. It seemed like an interesting fit, and I ended up moving down here to work on developing a master plan for the whole building, as well as live in the building at the same time.

as well as improving our basic shelter and services, and continuing to build programs to help people get back on their feet, and something even like a roof garden...

developed over the years now.

What did you think of your first build?

It was good. It was a panel build, and it was just seven or eight folks giving two or three hours on a Wednesday night. It was definitely cool to be swinging that hammer and pounding those nails, and meeting different kinds of volunteers from college students, to professionals, to old retired guys. People who love to bring out their hammers and spend their free time doing something that they believe is worthwhile.

What was it like the first time you visited a camp?

The first time was an outreach session with Joe Houston, who serves as Outreach Coordinator for the Task Force for the Homeless. That was when we teamed up to do some reconnaissance and find some new clients. It's definitely eye-opening. Once you dig a little bit further, and you walk through the woods, you realize, Damn, there's a whole little community right here of makeshift dwellings. And as you look at some of them and the conditions of them, you instantly realize, you know the Mad Housers aren't going to end homelessness, but they are definitely serving a specific need. Everybody needs just decent, safe shelter. That's the most basic need. These people are just like any other folks, they're just living in a different environment. It's an interesting, hidden component which I guess is representative of homelessness. A lot of it's very hidden to the rest of society.

A roof garden?

Either building a green roof or planting a garden on top of our roof, which is right between downtown and midtown and has probably got one of the largest roofs in that area. So there are a lot of exciting opportunities to put a lot of unique pieces together in one place in a pretty extraordinary way. But for right now, our main focus is making sure people have a place to stay off the streets, very similar to the Mad Housers. Obviously there are a lot of parallels with our mission and the mission of the Mad Housers. The scale is just very different.

What was your first event with the Mad Housers like?

I think my first event was actually a general meeting at Jake's Ice Cream. I was sort of expecting a young group of rough and tough architects, but instead almost everybody had a Palm Pilot and was writing down information. There was a good mix of people, from regular business folks (and there were some architects) to folks like Frank Jeffers who've been around and who are living testaments to what the Mad Housers do. I was intrigued by the level of commitment as well as the number of volunteers who were just coming to a regular meeting. And the intensity and the knowledge about each client, their situations, the camps, all the little things, all the personal relationships that have been

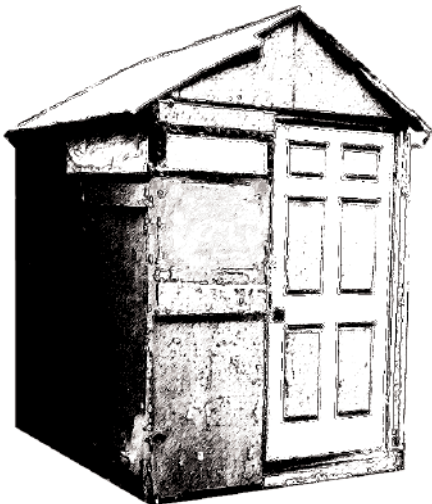
“...the Mad Housers aren't going to end homelessness, but they are definitely serving a specific need. Everybody needs just decent, safe shelter.”

You actually live at Peachtree-Pine? What's that like?

Um, it's a real ...'real' experience.

Real?

It's probably been a little more intense than I anticipated. It's fairly close, face-to-face, with the reality of what so many people on this level live like. Granted I have a separate room upstairs, so in many ways I'm nowhere near what most of these people are living like day-to-day. There's so much we hope to develop there with a lot of different components, from retail to more permanent housing options,



Additional Comments:

So what are your plans for the future?

Well I'm planning on going back to grad school for a Master's in architecture. I was actually planning to start in September at the University of Washington in Seattle. But I've decided to stick around another year and delay it. I definitely want to further my education and career and better my skills to be able to use them more effectively in areas of housing and community-based design and shelter and quality environments for anybody to live in.

So we get to keep you here in Atlanta for one more year?

(grins) Yeah. I mean one reason I'm not going back to grad school right now is that you can't just come to a place for a year and then just leave, because it pretty much takes that long to get to know

anything or anybody. I hope after grad school I can find a place to settle down and get to know people instead of bouncing around everywhere. Maybe even start a new Mad Housers chapter, and spread the word about a lot of good stuff going on around Atlanta too.

Luke has lived in Atlanta for ten months. He gets around by bike (his car went to 'car heaven' long ago) and he enjoys riding his bike and playing basketball in his free time.

The Mad Housers now hold general meetings at the new coffee shop, **Octane**. They have great coffee and sandwiches, lots of seating, and wi-fi. Visit www.octanecoffee.com for directions.



These residents of Bankhead camp have learned to get along despite their differences

HELLOS AND GOODBYES

We'd like to extend a warm welcome to Megan Anderson, the new Director of Furniture Bank. Furniture Bank is kind enough to rent out a portion of their warehouse to the Mad Housers, so Megan also happens to be our landlord. A big thank you goes out to Megan and Furniture Bank for continuing to let us use their space.

Tom Polk, our previous landlord, is leaving the Furniture Bank of Metro Atlanta to work on making Furniture Bank a national organization. We'd like to send him a fond farewell, and thank him for his years of generosity and understanding towards our group. Good bye and good luck Tom!

The Furniture Bank of Metro Atlanta is an Atlanta-based non-profit organization that distributes essential furnishings to people in need. (www.furniturebankatlanta.org)



This adobe structure is half-finished photo by David 'Ratsack' Mitsak

MAD HOUSERS GET DOWN AND DIRTY

The Mad Housers recently learned something new about building shelters. They joined David 'Ratsack' Mitsak for an adobe mud build. The volunteers

learned how to fashion adobe bricks from mud, sand, water, and straw. This centuries-old technique is still used in many developing countries, and thanks to Ratsack, that knowledge has been passed on to the Mad Housers as well. Ratsack teaches the adobe building process as part of the Soul Renaissance program of Youth Empowerment America. (www.y-e-a.org/soul)

FEEDBACK FORM

- I'd like to volunteer.
- I'd like to make a donation: \$ _____
- I have materials to donate.
- I know someone who needs shelter.
- I know a campsite.
- Please remove me from your mailing list.

You can use the back of this form for additional details.

Mad Housers, Inc. is incorporated as a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization. All Donations are tax-deductible.

Name

Address

City, State & Zip

Phone Number

call me

Email Address

add me to your email list

Send all correspondence to:
The Mad Housers, 534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318