

Jackie, Oh!

**Koo's Witty Hotel
Design Electrifies
the North Loop**

Plus:

Legat's Campus Green

Olympics Will Test Our Mettle

ALSO INSIDE:

**1 FIRM'S CAMPY SUMMER SHOW
DIRK DENISON PLAYS THE PIANO**

INVESTING IN STOCKS

Contemporary house plans go online; 3 Chicagoans included

Architect Zoka Zola, AIA, had developed 46 plans for houses on standard Chicago lots, designs that hew to her contemporary and sustainable style. But her efforts to get developers, aldermen and others interested had "dragged on forever," she says. Then along came Hometta: a startup from Houston that aims to put stock plans for contemporary and sustainable houses for sale online.

It was an irresistible match for Zola who, while acknowledging that signing on with a fledgling business is risky, says she is "very pleased not to be the one who is selling the plans."

Hometta is the brainchild of Mark Johnson, a Texas remodeler and developer of spec houses who wanted to offer an antidote to the "oversized, wasteful houses all over Houston," and gradually came up with a plan to sell stock plans for smaller and more environmentally sound homes. A fan of Brett Zamore, whose Brett Zamore Design homes adapt vernacular Texas home styles in up-to-date ways, Johnson

vowed to "make it possible for people who can't afford a full-service custom-build relationship with an architect to access really great design work from architects and designers."

Stock plans are nothing new, of course, but Hometta is trying a new take on the business: publishing only online (rather than in a traditional stock plan magazine) and focusing on the niche of relatively small (no larger than 2,500 square feet), modern-looking sustainable designs. On other sites, Johnson notes, "you find thousands of stock plans that are variations upon variations of the ranch house, the Cape Cod, the Tuscan villa, but truly progressive modern design is not there."

Aiming to fill that gap, Hometta debuted in June with designs from 25 studios around the country, including Chicago firms Garofalo Architects, Weathers, operated by Sean Lally, AIA, and Zoka Zola Architecture + Urban Design. What they have in common, Johnson says, is "they have the design chops. The quality of their work is what got us to them, and they can do plans for modern design enthusiasts."

Architects who participate are asked to be sensitive about costs to the end user, and to "design something they feel will meet an unmet need," Johnson says. That might be a design for a live-work arrangement, or one that suits an indoor-gardening locavore enthusiast.

The lion's share of the price paid for a Hometta plan goes directly to the architect. "They're making more from the sale than we are—significantly more," Johnson says. The site also promotes its member studios with companion editorial on the site that changes each week. Zola appreciates this aspect of the business plan, for the reach it provides a small studio like hers. Having her plans marketed and her concepts promoted on a website with national reach, she says, makes her hopeful that her plans "can influence what is being built better than I would be able to do on my own." → **Dennis Rodkin**

Photos courtesy of Zoka Zola Architecture + Urban Design



This stock plan by Zoka Zola Architecture + Urban Design, featuring an internal courtyard, is among Hometta.com's contemporary offerings.