

THE HOMEMAKER

KARL TARANGO KEEPS
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA'S
PREEMINENT PREFAB
FACTORY HUMMING.



Importing foreign architects to design American buildings is common practice, but actually constructing them tends to be a local affair. And that goes double for factory-built structures whose parts need to be trucked to the job site as efficiently and cheaply as possible. Overseeing a slice of the prefab pie, at least in Northern California, is modular building veteran Karl Tarango, general manager of Zeta Communities' factory in Sacramento. Tarango got his start in the 1990s building modular and HUD-code projects in Colorado before graduating to custom, multifamily homes and then to "selling builders and developers on urban infill and commercial structures." He tells us about his unoutsourcable end of architectural manufacturing.

"If you came into the factory today you would see single-family units and a couple of different types of school projects," Tarango says, "including a childhood development center that's about 1,900 square feet and consists of seven modules." At the moment, business is booming, and he and his team of some 50 workers are sitting on an enviable backlog of work that includes commercial spaces, plans for single-family homes designed by Marmol Radziner,

and 22 net-zero-energy homes set to be installed in Stockton, California.

At capacity, Zeta's 91,000-square-foot Sacramento plant produces between 1,500 and 2,200 modules per year, which in housing terms equates to between 500 and 600 units. "Our primary focus, and our mission really, is to do urban-infill multifamily projects," Tarango says, but he notes that landing large projects can take time in the development stage, making smaller projects critical to keep Zeta's perfectly located fabrication team busy.

"The Sacramento facility is ideal for a lot of reasons," Tarango says. "It's right along I-80 and I-5, so it's very accessible. Location and ease of transport are huge concerns for the modular industry. The logistics need to work."

Those logistics helped Zeta to expand its range to Oregon and Utah, but Tarango doesn't see these projects becoming the norm. "There's no question that even regional projects sometimes don't make sense," he says. "Zeta would love to have a factory that would ship no more than 300 miles. It might take a while to develop that kind of market stability, but to stay cost-effective and green, we'd love it."

