

FUTURE SEA CITIES:

Freedom's Final Frontier in Pictures

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Community Choice: "Refusion" by Team 3DA

Intentionally or not, it's a fitting name--"Refusion"--for a winning example of a futuristic homesteading concept based on refusal: refusal to be constrained by established governments or social mores or even by the fundamental desire for solid ground underfoot.

People's-choice award winner in a design competition for "seasteads"--oil rig-like, sovereign settlements in international waters--this proposed research facility by a group of Las Vegas-based 3-D artists includes "a number of environmental systems, such as greenhouses and renewable energy sources, which would enable absolute independence," according to a Team 3DA statement. "The aesthetic that emerged from this realization became influenced by a mixture of organic and mechanical systems operating in a symbiotic relationship."

Championed by California-based competition sponsor the Seasteading Institute, the high-seas homesteading movement is all about creating tiny frontier lands "where those who wish to experiment with building new societies can go to test out their ideas," according to the institute's Web site.

Though none of the winning designs--announced May 18, 2009--are intended to be built, they are "to inspire us with their vision of how seasteaders can make a home on the next frontier," said Seasteading Institute Executive Director Patri Friedman in a statement.

--Ted Chamberlain



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Best Picture: "Oasis of the Sea" by Emerson Stepp

"The culmination of a cruise or simply an extravagant vacation"--in the words of this open-ocean resort's designer, Minneapolis-based architecture grad student Emerson Stepp--the Seasteading Design Contest's Best Picture winner may seem a bit shy of the Seasteading Institute's stated goals of revolutionizing "the quality of government and social systems worldwide." But then unfettered freedom is what seasteading is all about, including the freedom to build something more Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous than Lord of the Flies.

And like any good hotelier, Stepp is attuned to the needs of his guests. "I tried to make the areas around the structure seem as much like a beautiful urban park as possible," he said in a statement, "to help people acclimate to the new setting."



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Personality: "Rendering Freedom" by Anthony Ling

"It's freedom in architecture," said Brazilian architecture student Anthony Ling of his concept, which, according to Seasteading Institute judges, "creates the best sense of human influence or presence" of all the design-contest entries.

"Freedom" here refers, at least in part, to constant reconfiguring made possible by the modular nature of the building units, four busy cranes, and plentiful docking options.

The human element is addressed by a mixed-use plan--homes, offices, hotels, and retail shops--and the under-building stilts, which allow for plentiful, green social space.



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Aesthetics: "SESU Seasteed" by Marko Jarvela

The "most visually appealing or enticing" entry in the Seasteed Design Contest, Marko Jarvela's ambitious design imagines "a mini-society of ecologically conscious enthusiasts" living "with the minimum input from the outside civilization and the minimum ecological footprint," according to a statement by the Estonian architect.

Jarvela's proposed research center is more than metaphorically green. "Passive solar design principles have been employed," he said, "and vegetation is used extensively to control indoor climate and provide food for the inhabitants."



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Overall Winner: "The Swimming City" by Andras Gyorfi

A true (if fictional) mixed-use community, the Swimming City would be geared toward "wellness," sports, entertainment, and "whatever you can imagine," according to a statement by its creator, 27-year-old Hungarian graphic designer Andras Gyorfi, who won the Seastead Design Contest's U.S. \$1,000 grand prize.

Like the rest of the entrants, Gyorfi based his "city" on the Seasteading Institute's patent-pending platform. The platform remains entirely virtual, though it has a real-world precedent, the world's smallest "country," Sealand, which won't be winning any design awards.

The institute, though, is sailing into the future with plans for tangible seasteads. Their strategy starts small: First, "Pintstead," small enough to float in a pint of beer. Next, "Aquariumstead." And on to "Coaststead," a giant, slow-floating houseboat--the final step before a full-blown seastead for, as the institute puts it, "a new society of ocean pioneers."

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