

# dwell

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in Unlikely Places

AT HOME IN THE MODERN WORLD

## Modern Across America



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## Pioneering the DMZ

The Heyri Valley in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea is a sprawling area with lush, rolling hills. But despite the luxurious landscape, little has been built here since 1948, when the two countries split, due to the site's reputation as both neutral terrain and a political no-man's-land. The times, though, are definitely changing, and the Heyri Art Valley, a community recently settled by teachers, writers, artists, and filmmakers, is as sure a sign of it as any. While the Heyri Valley is less than an hour away from Seoul, South Korea's superdense capital, it is worlds away from the political tensions that exist on the divided peninsula.

Consisting of nearly 400 single-family and mixed-use lots, Heyri was planned by Jun Sung Kim and Jong Kyu Kim. The two enterprising developers invited a cadre of young Korean and international architects to design buildings for this artistic utopia. The budgets are low, but the opportunity to create compelling projects has attracted firms like New York-based ShoP/Sharples Holden Pasquarelli and Amsterdam-based NL Architects.

One of the first houses to be built was the Pixel House, so dubbed by its architects, James Slade of Slade Architecture in New York and Minsuk Cho of Mass Studies in Seoul, for its Lego-like brick pattern. Designed for junior high school teacher Young Hyo Jin, his wife, event planner Sook Hee Chang, and their two young children, five-year-old Sukwon and seven-year-old Gaeul, the house is situated at the end of a street filled with modern row houses, and is intended to reinforce Heyri's master street plan of subtle curves and nuanced topographies.

"We wanted the house to become something between a building and a piece of the landscape," says Slade. Since the stacked and staggered bricks curve, certain recesses create shadows that move in the light.

The 3,000-square-foot lot—"definitely the smallest in Heyri," says Cho—is being built out in phases, with other freestanding structures scheduled to complement the 900-square-foot house in the future, as the children grow older and more funds become available. Dwell recently talked with Jin and Chang about their life in Heyri. ▶



The front of the house features a large storefront window that wraps around two sides of the structure, revealing the kitchen to passersby. A small terrace on the second floor provides the family with an optimal outpost for taking in fresh air and neighborhood happenings.

### What attracted you to the Heyri Art Valley?

**Jin:** First, I wanted to escape from the city. Second, I wanted to raise my kids in a rural setting while at the same time giving them access to culture.

**Chang:** We found out about the plan for Heyri Art Valley, and we thought, This is it! The plan had nature, culture, and people. It also had a past and a future. It also fit us, financially. We could pay for our home gradually, and build when we could afford it, as opposed to the way people typically buy homes—which is to buy all at once.

### How is this different from your life in Seoul?

**Jin:** We're able to see changes in nature day by day. When we go to bed, we can hear frogs croaking. When the sun rises, we hear chickens clucking. There is a community starting to form here. Every month, there's a town meeting, and two or three times a week, I teach yoga. We garden together and have barbecues.

**Chang:** We discovered at night when it was so dark, we could see shooting stars from our house. Every night since then, we have been coming outside to wait for the same experience, wearing heavy winter jackets.

We were so happy in the winter. Unlike snow in the city, which melts quickly, here it came up to our knees. We'd stay home from work and school and spend a day playing with our dogs, our neighbors, and their kids. We made snowmen and watched snow gather on tree branches and the bricks of the Pixel House. This is really the life that I've always wanted to live.

### What is your favorite part of living here?

**Chang:** I like the texture of the house. It's concrete brick but it feels like stone. Although we didn't complete all the structures as planned, someday, when we can afford it, we plan to have two other buildings for a yoga room and one that we share with the children for various activities. The way the architects maximized such a small space is so excellent. In the end, I love everything about the house.

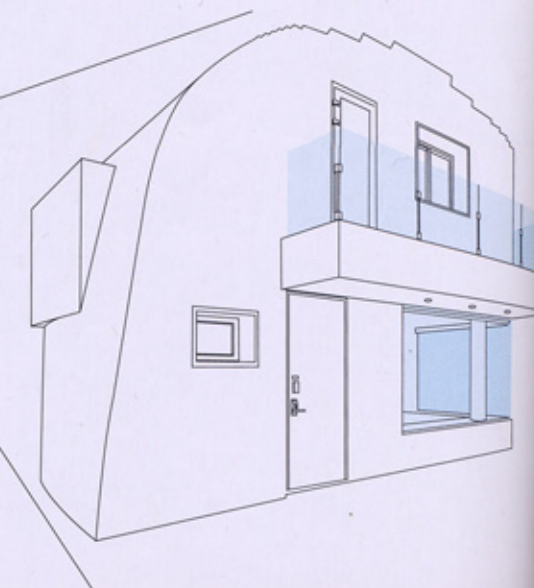
### What kinds of communities do you think will spring up in the DMZ near Heyri in the coming years? Does it make you optimistic about North and South Korea's relationship in the 21st century?

**Jin:** Both North and South Korea have recently agreed to stop their loud propaganda, which I think is a breakthrough. Heyri is the first community that has benefited from this improved situation. It's a concentration of people who dream about reunification.

**Chang:** When we go up to the hill of Heyri, we can see North Korea so close. It's only five minutes away. It's as if it's waving at me to come over. I want to take a walk along the chicken-wire fence that keeps us away. We are living our past, present, and future since we are confronted by the fact that we are living in a separated country every day. I want to invite children all over the world and have a peace camp at Heyri. I want to send a message of peace and tolerance all over the world. If I can't do it, my children will do it, with the other kids in Heyri. ▶



A / North Korea  
B / Heyri Valley  
C / South Korea



The interior (above) follows the exterior's gently curving lead but is warmed by the use of stained wood floors and plenty of books.



The tapered concrete brick walls (left) gently bow, closing off the house to the adjacent street to the south and creating an open courtyard to the east. The bunkerlike back is composed entirely of brick, with a single seven-foot-wide window for exposure.