

## Forging the Way To Modern Living: Quonset huts

Quonset huts are a unique architectural phenomena, a revolutionary concept in temporary housing. Quonset huts are in basic terms lightweight structures that have been manufactured using iron that is galvanized and has a semi circular cross section. The design of Quonset huts was inspired from the Nissen hut model and was made popular by the British during World War I. Since the original design of the Nissen prototype was an intricate array of corrugated iron panels both inside and the thermal protection came from the space between the panel arrangements, the Government came up with a variation to avoid setbacks during shipping and reassembly. Quonset huts were named after the first manufacturing site, Quonset Point, Danisville, which was part of Rhode Island. The first approved design had a surface area 5 x 11 m and was constructed from hemispherical iron rods with a 2.4 m radius, and these were then covered with ribbed iron panes. The doors and windows were designed off the side of the main structure with regular ply, and the insulated interior contained a wood floor.

The very idea of this type of provisional housing facilities increased in use post 1941 when the US Navy needed reliable shelters for its military bases. The answer lay in constructing a lightweight shelter that could be readily shipped anywhere and did not require expert hands during assembly. The structures needed no special flooring to assemble on and could be placed as easily on the ground as on steel pilings or hard concrete floors. The interior space is an open area allowing maximum flexibility, which means the facility could be used as housing, office or medical space, military storage units or even barracks. Quonsets instantly provided the US troops with better comfort than did other temporary shelters such as tents with wooden platforms, which were the common structures used then.

From its application as military shelters, many other contractors began developing their own versions of the Quonset hut for other uses. From its initial design, Quonset huts have seen many enhancements, and the last significant one was in 1943 when the Quonset Point manufacturing factory was taken over by the Great Lakes Steel Corporation and established as the Stran Steel Division. This modified Quonset hut was more stretched out and had a structure that used the original full arch rib. Some variations of the Quonset hut structures were created to serve special needs, such as the wooden Pacific hut, and many of these did save valuable metal resources. Some designs of Quonset huts were even constructed as air raid cover. Other bulky Quonset hut structures and multi arched variants have also been built to meet specific Government orders as well as civil demands. Although Quonset huts began as a product of a military necessity, it has rapidly diversified into an iconic symbol of sorts. Quonset huts have with time become a more accepted mode of housing and are a reflection of the American spirit of invention. Quonset huts are certainly an exclusive phenomena, where the novel and the extraordinary merge seamlessly.

## About the Author

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