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Doug MacCash *The Times-Picayune*

How to tour the Pink houses in the Lower 9th Ward

Posted by [Doug MacCash](#), [art critic](#) December 04, 2007 10:39AM

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Residents can go on driving tours of the 150 flamingo-colored fabric houses, stand-ins for actor Brad Pitt's "Make It Right" architectural project in the Lower 9th Ward.

The free tour, modeled on the Celebration in the Oaks holiday tour of City Park, features tent-like structures scattered between Tennessee Street and the Industrial Canal in the lower 9th Ward.



Staff Photo by Doug MacCash

All of the structures are wired to glow from within, with constellations of lights spaced across the ground between them, representing the lives lost during the

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2005 storm and flood. All occupy sites where the "Make it Right" project intends to build new homes.

According to project producer Stefan Beese, drivers are instructed to enter the neighborhood from Claiborne Avenue at Reynes St., and exit on Tennessee St. Visitors are welcome anytime from morning to late evening, Beese said. Markers will guide them through the installation.

Navigating the surrealistic neighborhood should be simple enough. Understanding it's meaning, may be a bit tougher.

"I guess I've got some explaining to do," Pitt said from an outdoor stage Monday morning, referring to the outlandish sight that he described as a kind of "social disobedience."

The film star said that some onlookers imagine that the pink house shapes represent the idyllic "little pink houses" of the American dream. Others, he said, imagine that they represent political protest, like "the pink elephant in the living room," reminding everyone of federal inaction. But the truth is, he admitted, he chose the startling color simply because "it screams the loudest." The preposterous pink tone, he hopes, will draw the most attention, and hopefully the most benefactors to his effort at rebuilding the neighborhood that was essentially wiped out by post-Katrina flooding.

Pitt explained that only one pink house thus far has its roof in place. The rest of the roof shapes will be lifted atop their companion blocks when the \$150,000 needed to erect each real house is raised.

"As each house is adopted, the roof goes on," Pitt said.

Beese, of Graft Architects, who created the strange pink village on Pitt's behalf, said that the inspiration for garish structures struck the actor during the filming of "The Strange Case of Benjamin Button." As Beese explained, a pink backdrop is sometimes used to isolate actors during special effects scenes, similar to the better-known blue- and green-screen techniques. Pitt incorporated the pink backdrops into his architectural concept.

Beese said that 40,000 square yards of ecologically manufactured heavy pink awning material was used to create the 150 houses and roofs. Over time, the shiny fabric will be recycled into tote bags (manufactured by Lighthouse for the Blind) and possibly umbrellas, sold to raise funds for "Make it Right."

French lighting designer Herve Descottes planned the 1,000 ground lights, which are powered by banks of solar panels.

Comparisons between the monumental pink fabric "Make It Right" installation and the work of internationally-known environmental artist Christo are unavoidable. For decades, Christo has wrapped buildings, bridges, mountains and even islands in brilliantly colored fabric, for the startling visual effect. The difference, in some onlookers minds, is Pitt's philanthropic purpose.

"This is beyond conceptual art," said 9th Ward artist Jeffery Holmes. "It grabs me. It's meaningful . . . It's life. It's growth. Art comes out of struggle."

MAKE IT RIGHT ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT

What: A driving tour of the monumental-scale, eye-catching installation of lighted

pink fabric houses, conceived by film star Brad Pitt.

Where: Stretching from North Derbigny to North Galvez streets, and Tennessee Street to the Industrial Canal. Enter from St. Claude Ave. at Reynes St.

When: From morning to late evening, through Jan. 7

