Building homes in one day with robots

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JOHN SEIGENTHALER, co-anchor:

Nearly two million new homes are being built this year. That's over 12 percent more than last year. So finding a quicker way to build your dream house, even if it means using robots, seems like a pretty good idea. NBC's George Lewis explains.

GEORGE LEWIS reporting:

It's a potential revolution in the making. In this lab at the University of Southern California's School of Engineering, professor Berokh Khoshnevis is inventing a new way of building houses using robots.

Mr. BEROKH KHOSHNEVIS: The main advantage is cost and speed.

LEWIS: The way it works is shown in this animation. In a process that looks a little like frosting a cake, the robot squirts out layers of wet concrete mixed with fiber and plastic materials to form walls. The goal: To construct an average house entirely by machine within 24 hours. For 20,000 years building has required intense manual labor, often costly, slow. Assembly line robots have revolutionized the auto industry, Dr. Khoshnevis says it's time the building industry catches up.

Mr. KHOSHNEVIS: As you can see, it is possible to build multi-story structures using this technology.

LEWIS: He says part of the inspiration for his work came from a visit to his native Iran last December. He was there when an earthquake destroyed the city of Bam.

Mr. KHOSHNEVIS: In a matter of few minutes more than 40,000 people perished in that earthquake.

LEWIS: He thinks automated home building could create new, safe and affordable housing in places like this.

Mr. KHOSHNEVIS: We can build dignified, stronger structures that would stand those earthquakes.

Mr. GREG LYNN: It's the first really fresh approach to house manufacturing that I've seen.

LEWIS: And what excites architects like Greg Lynn is that machines can easily be programmed to create all sorts of new shapes for building.

Mr. LYNN: You can still have little boxes if you love little boxes, but there's just a lot more options now with these kinds of tools.
LEWIS: By next year Dr. Khoshnevis hopes to have a full-sized version of his machine up and running, as he pushes the construction industry to think outside the box. George Lewis, NBC News, Los Angeles.

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