



Traditional Swedish des res - lots of space

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The Soviet Union sent the first cosmonaut into orbit. The US were first to put a man on the moon. Now Sweden is determined to be the first to build a cute country cottage there.

Its space agency is working towards putting a little red house, of the type that can be seen everywhere in the Swedish countryside, on the moon by 2011. The Swedish Space Corporation carried out a feasibility study two years ago and concluded that the project was possible. An open competition is now under way, calling on all bright sparks to come up with the best design.

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The winner will be working for the good of mankind. "It will be a very small, very fragile symbol of the place the Earth has in the universe," explains artist Mikael Genberg, who initiated the project. "It will be a foundation for mankind to make the world a better place. It shows that the impossible is possible, that someone from a small town like me can work together with others to make something like this happen."

Genberg has worked for many years to get his idea off the ground. "In 1999, I saw a headline in a newspaper that said 'Sweden goes to the moon' [referring to the country's involvement in building a European moon-orbiting module] and I thought, isn't that something? I never let go of the thought and started working with the idea of a traditional red house. Later, I contacted the Swedish Space Corporation and they were really interested."

"When I first heard of this, I thought it was totally ludicrous," recalls Fredrik von Schéele, the head of the space development programme at the SSC. "But then I met Genberg and I began to think that we could combine his vision with trying out things that we wanted to do; for instance, how to perform a landing in a controlled manner."

The project is expected to cost around £53m. Since there isn't yet a design for the cottage, it is not clear what size it will be, although Genberg hopes it will be "big enough for two people to stand in". It would have to be made of a very thin material that can be folded; Mylar, for example, a type of polyester film. The package would be placed on board a rocket, which could be fired from the space port in Kourou in French Guyana, or from the one at Baikonour

in Kazakhstan. Once the module reaches the moon, it will attempt to land, find a good spot (ideally not too shady) and eject the section with the house. It could be inflatable or a flat-packed version that builds itself, which sounds like heaven for anyone who has struggled to put together an Ikea Billy bookcase.

There is even talk of getting the Swedish homeware giant to back the project. "We have contacted Ikea, as well as other companies, for sponsorship," says Genberg. So far, there has been no response, but Ikea may wish to boldly go where no furniture shop has ever gone before.

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