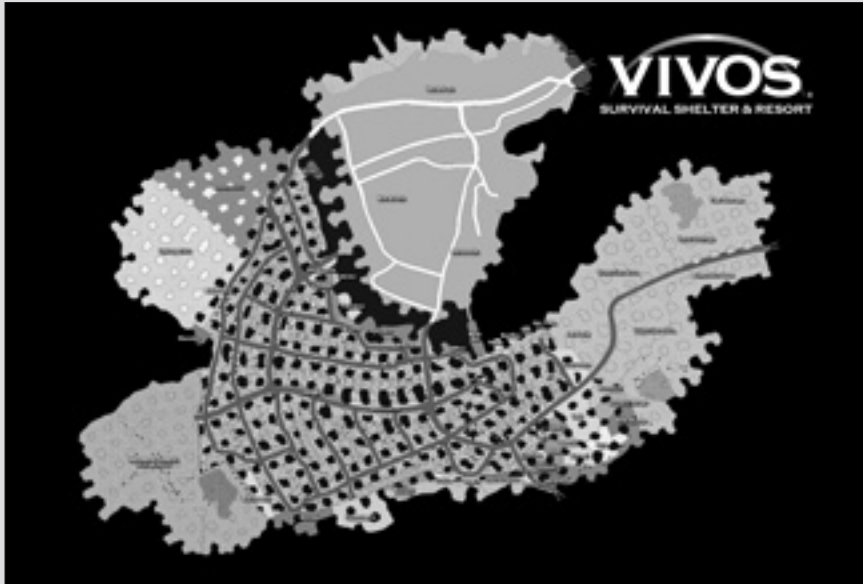


## Terra Vivos, or, the Reinforced Luxury of Post-Apocalyptic Dwelling

by Erin Schneider



Vivos Kansas Resort. Plan for a two-million-square-foot underground RV park in Kansas, where people can drive in and park their own RVs among limestone pillars 130 feet underground.

When it comes down to it, what does one need to survive? Air, shelter, water, food, sleep, sex. At Vivos, a multi-locational shelter system for post-apocalyptic survival, you are promised these fundamentals along with the “necessities” of showers, queen-sized beds, laundry rooms, kitchens, and entertainment centres with cup holders and flat screen TVs. As described on the television show, *Extreme Survival Bunkers*, Vivos will provide “10,000 square feet of reinforced luxury.”<sup>1</sup>

Robert Vicino founded Terra Vivos after receiving an apocalyptic message (source unclear) in 1980 to build an underground shelter for 1,000 people to survive an upcoming extinction event.<sup>2</sup> A former real estate mogul and inventor, he made a fortune from inflatables, including the automatic co-pilot in the movie *Airplane* (1980) and one shaped like King Kong he used to scale the Empire State Building in 1983. Vicino has since invested all of his money into Terra Vivos, “The Underground Shelter Network for Long-Term Survival of Future Catastrophes.”<sup>3</sup>

When I first discovered Terra Vivos in 2010, while doing research for my thesis about Cold War bunker reuse, the upcoming 2012 prophecy about the end of the Mayan calendar dominated the site.<sup>4</sup> Now that the ominous 12/21/12 has come and gone, the website warns of other threats that could send any concerned citizen underground. Videos on the site feature dramatic music and bold letters listing potential world-ending situations: nuclear war, bio-chemical war, terrorism, anarchy, electro-magnetic pulse, solar flares, polar shift, killer comet, global tsunami, and Planet X.<sup>5</sup> Though some are more plausible than others, each scenario has an icon and explanation about the potential effects of each situation, all leading straight to Terra Vivos’ unmarked doors.

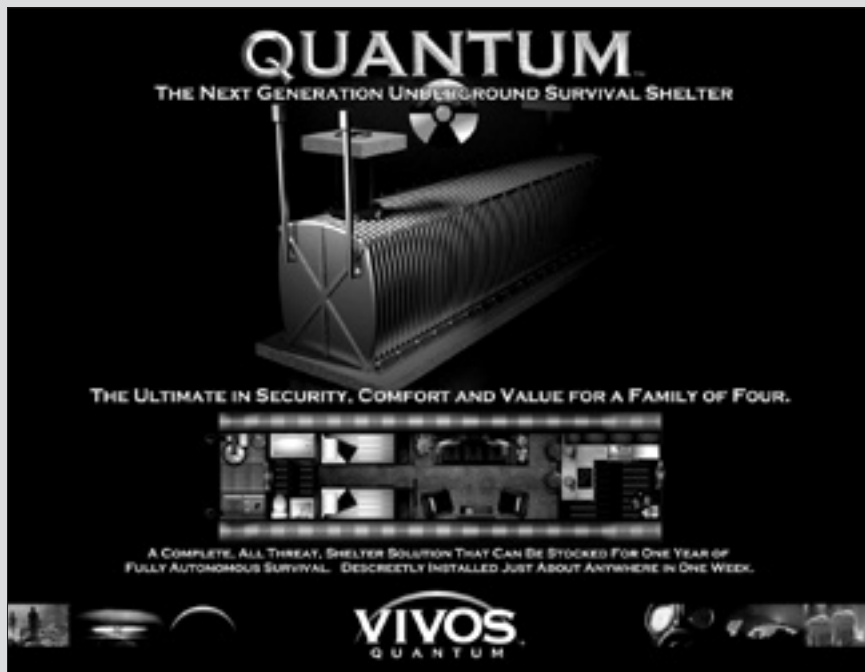
Membership is selective and expensive, though some (such as doctors and the military) are admitted at discounted prices, depending on their professional and survival skills. Otherwise, it costs around \$50,000 for adults and \$35,000 for children, with a \$5,000 down payment; presumably these costs to go towards the \$10-million expense of each shelter (plus retrofitting), as well as future Vivos installations.<sup>6</sup> Due to their top-secret locations, members and the media are not permitted to visit the sites. Other extreme survivalists have been threatening to destroy Vicino’s five-star enterprise, though there have been no reported attacks on the bunkers so far.

Vicino claims that more than 100,000 people have applied, and at least 1,000 already own space in the shelters. As promised on their website, “every detail has been considered and prepared for.” This includes detention chambers for misbehaving occupants and freezers for members’ DNA samples. Ultimately, Vivos wishes you to join them for the next genesis, though who will be in control of mating, accommodation, and discipline remains to be seen. Assumedly, those in power (Vicino and Vivos) will make the final decisions. As with all survivalist situations, both fictional and real, the line between

utopia and dystopia can quickly become very thin.

The speculative real estate of annihilation taps into our elemental fears of survival, with this band-aid promising all the comforts of a first-world home. By creating a space based on the fear of the apocalypse while lining it with the luxuries of Western civilization, the Vivos complex creates an extreme version of the privileged lifestyle: the rest of the world may be gone, but you can subsist on the luxuries that once defined a successful existence. Like the pharaohs, you'll have access to the excesses of the wealthy class to carry you over into the afterlife. Even if you are locked deep in a mountain with no access to the outside, at least you can theoretically live with hot showers and leather recliners. To what extremes would you go for the comforts of home while the rest of the world perishes?

Regardless of one's commitment to the Vivos lifestyle, at this time, the bunkers are stocked with only one year's worth of supplies for "autonomous survival." It is unclear what will happen after that. You may have to find another cable provider. But remember, "It's not a question of if, but when!"<sup>7</sup>×



Vivos Quantum Shelter. From the first page of a promotional pdf about private shelters that can be installed in your backyard.

#### Endnotes

- 1 "Vivos Bunkers," Travel Channel, <http://www.travelchannel.com/video/vivos-bunkers>.
- 2 Austin Considine, "Home at the End of Time," Vice.com, <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/home-at-the-end-of-time>.
- 3 Terra Vivos, <http://www.terravivos.com>.
- 4 Erin Schneider, "Apocalyptic Architecture: Cold War Bunkers, Reuse and the Everyday Landscape," 2010, [http://www.academia.edu/440251/Apocalyptic\\_Architecture\\_Cold\\_War\\_Bunkers\\_Reuse\\_and\\_the\\_Everyday\\_Landscape](http://www.academia.edu/440251/Apocalyptic_Architecture_Cold_War_Bunkers_Reuse_and_the_Everyday_Landscape).
- 5 Terra Vivos, <http://www.terravivos.com/secure/movie.htm>.
- 6 Considine, "Home at the End of Time."
- 7 Terra Vivos, <http://www.terravivos.com>.

#### Bio

**Erin Schneider** is an artist and independent scholar living in Los Angeles, CA. She adapted her Hampshire College thesis *Apocalyptic Architecture: Cold War Bunkers, Reuse, and the Everyday Landscape* for this issue of *Scapegoat*, focusing on the Terra Vivos bunker complex and post-apocalyptic excess. Her work explores the built environment through research, performance and installation, creating alternative methods of understanding space and place and their social, political and material histories. Recent works include *An Antagonist's Guide to the Assholes of Los Angeles* with the Llano del Rio Collective, a guided walk of Venice, CA with Ken Ehrlich for Pacific Standard Time Presents: Modern Architecture in LA, and a screening of films that use Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic Ennis House at The Public School LA.