

# Getting Residents Back into Their Homes



**Jordan Wyatt shares his experience with a rebuild in unincorporated Malibu.**

**BY SARAH SHMERLING**

Architect Jordan Wyatt has spent more than a year working with a resident on a rebuild in unincorporated Malibu after she lost her home in the Woolsey fire—and now he’s sharing what he has learned in an effort to help others get back into their homes.

For those just getting started on a rebuild, or maybe those who are looking to jump back in after a false start, he noted that since the window for getting expedited permits is closing soon—time is of the essence.

“It has been a humbling experience to work hand-in-hand with our client the past year through design development, contractor budgeting and selection, and the many layers of the permit process,” Wyatt who operates Y8 STUDIO, said.

Wyatt has been working closely with officials through the County of Los Angeles. The homeowner was back in Malibu the first day her neighborhood was clear for repopulation, and was lining up help very soon after.

“She has been organized and active to rebuild as quickly as could be done—and

we’re still at the stage where we don’t have a permit,” Wyatt said, adding that they are “very close” and should have within a month.

“It’s been a long haul,” he said. “There are a lot of hurdles, it’s not just simply pulling a permit to build a house.”

One complication of a rebuild is that many of the lost homes were built some time ago and may not meet current code requirements. There is a framework that allows for a faster approval permit process if the homeowner builds in-kind—meaning more or less the same footprint of the home that was lost (or maybe up to a 10% threshold maximum for an increase).

Wyatt pursued the “like-for-like” path with his Malibu client, as she wanted to get back into her home as quickly as possible.

There are three main elements, he said, of a rebuild: design, agency approvals and construction. At a high level, success is a result from continual communication and coordination with a broad team of partners (engineers, contractors, and subcontractors, and agency officials) to navigate each phase of the project.

Like all home construction projects, there will be hurdles along the way, but a fire rebuild carries a unique set of challenges—it is in its own category of complexity.

“There has been a lot of constant communication and discussions,” Wyatt said. “Though there can be a lot of back-and-forth [with officials], and a lot of coordination to get these conversations to

occur and get to an agreement, everyone has been very, very positive and responsive to the extent that they can be.”

Trusting your team and having patience are the most important assets a fire victim can bring to the rebuild effort, as it will be a “long, arduous process, but one with an end in sight if you trust and stick with your team,” Wyatt explained.

Rebuilding in a high fire zone is also about how to prevent a house from being lost in the next fire.

Y8 STUDIO focuses on sustainable design and uses the approach of “passive house design principles,” which aligns with homes in high fire hazard regions. It means being as energy efficient as possible—using better insulation, more efficient mechanical systems, and high-performance glazing in windows and doors. Building envelope air tightness, for example, is best practice in minimizing ember infiltration, a common cause of home loss in wildfires.

Wyatt explained that although hurdles will arise and there is a lot of waiting—whether it’s for responses or reviews of plans—everyone is working honestly and diligently to try to get people back into their homes, and to make sure these homes and properties are safe for those living there. ■

*Y8 STUDIO is an architecture practice focused on sustainable design and urbanism, and is award-winning for having positive impact on the environment. [y8studio.com](http://y8studio.com)*