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NEWS

01.26.2009

Green Goes the Neighborhood

Syracuse unveils sustainable home competition winners



ARO AND DELLA VALLE BERNHEIMER'S *R-HOUSE* FEATURES AN AIR-TIGHT, POLYCARBONATE-AND-ALUMINUM STRUCTURE. COURTESY SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Green architecture has long shed its reputation for stodgy looks, but the field still struggles with the perception that it is more expensive than traditional construction. Now comes Syracuse University, which has unveiled the winners of its design competition, "From the Ground Up: Innovative Green Homes": three housing schemes that marry design and sustainable strategies—and can be built for \$150,000. The three winning teams are New York-based ARO/Della Valle Bernheimer, Cook + Fox, and Philadelphia's Onion Flats, and the initial plan is to build one each of the winning designs on Syracuse's Near West Side.

The program is a partnership between the school of architecture, local not-for-profit housing group Home HeadQuarters, and the public-private Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems, and the latest in [a series of initiatives](#) that dean Mark Robbins hopes will strengthen the school's connection to its city.

"The university can provide seed capital to develop strategies in a way that the marketplace can't afford to," he explained. "If we make research and design a part of the curriculum, we are building capacity for the students and for the community." The jury included the Museum of Modern Art's Barry Bergdoll, David Lewis of Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis, Julie Eizenberg of Koning Eizenberg Architecture, Bethaida González of the Syracuse Common Council, Robbins, and local resident Carol Horan, among others.



COOK + FOX'S LOFT-LIKE *LIVE-WORK HOME* IS WRAPPED IN A PERFORATED SUN-SCREEN.

The initial rollout is modest, according to Robbins: Home HeadQuarters will build one of each design. "It feels as if we ought to be building 180, but we hope to move the conversation [about housing] forward," he said. The three winning designs will undoubtedly do that. ARO/Della Valle Bernheimer's *R-House* is a single-family, polycarbonate-and-aluminum gabled structure with an airtight envelope and a highly efficient heating system. Cook + Fox wanted its *Live-Work Home* to provide an alternative to the plethora of single-family housing in the area, and so developed a loft-like building with moveable partitions wrapped with a perforated sun-screen. Onion Flats' design is a 1,100-square-foot house that can also be modified into two duplex units, and uses active venting to dramatically reduce summer cooling costs. All three projects consider sustainability in the broadest sense of the word, and try to address the social networks and financial realities of the neighborhood.

"We look at the designs as a suite of possible solutions, rather than one single answer," said Robbins. "We are trying to model different approaches, and not just focus on new construction." He explained that students are also working on design-build renovation projects to combat the sense that it is generally cheaper to tear down an older structure. "We are really trying to develop a community design process. Over the course of the next two years, we plan to develop an array of tools."



ONION FLATS' DESIGN, WITH AN ACTIVE VENTING SYSTEM, CAN BE MODIFIED TO CREATE TWO DUPLEX UNITS.

Anne Guiney

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