

Sandtown Green

A West Baltimore rowhouse rebuild proves that eco-friendly living isn't just for the moneyed set.
by Martha Thomas



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When Kevin Wiggins saw his new home for the first time, the roof was somewhere in the vicinity of the basement. The house, recently acquired by Sandtown Habitat for Humanity, was one of about twenty slated for rehab last year (the group has fixed up close to three hundred since its founding in 1989), and Wiggins had been given a choice between two houses: this wreck, which was little more than a basement filled with detritus and walls so collapsed the contractors couldn't get an accurate measurement of its width—or a somewhat less daunting place around the corner on Fulton Street.

But Wiggins had heard it was going to be a "green house" and that the athletic clothing company Under Armour was involved, so he went for it. And he's glad he did. "I never thought I would live in a place like this," Wiggins says today. "They pulled out all the stops."

From the outside, the 1,100-square-foot, two-story, brick-fronted building looks like a typical Baltimore rowhouse: 13 feet wide, with a narrow red door a few steps up from the sidewalk and even narrower windows looking out on a vacant lot across the street. But if you look up, you'll see the silhouette of solar panels on the roof. And if you could look down at those sixteen panels, you'd also notice that the roof is painted white, to repel the blazing summer sun and keep the house cool.

Just inside the door, there's a wooden storage bench built of knotty pine from beams reclaimed from another Sandtown Habitat project, with a nook for shoes beneath it. Jonas Risén of the firm Ziger/Snead, architect for the project, says that storage for grubby shoes and a mat affixed to the floor help keep particles of dust and dirt from the air, thereby improving indoor air quality. Even these small things bring the house closer to its goal: a platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

If it succeeds, the modest house on Laurens Street will be the first in Baltimore City to claim LEED's highest rating. (At least one commercial building has already attained platinum certification: Baltimore Medical System's Highlandtown Healthy Living Center. See "Healthy By Design," Nov. '10 Urbanite.) Even if it doesn't, the place is still a shining example of how a long-suffering structure can be transformed into a model of minimal impact. "From the



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Facelift: This Sandtown rowhouse blends in with its neighbors, but it may well be the most eco-friendly home in the city.

