

Urban green

SUNSET'S IDEA HOUSE BRINGS ENERGY EFFICIENCY TO LIVING IN THE CITY

By Michele Chandler for the Mercury News
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This three-story renovated house and attached two-bedroom apartment in San Francisco's Mission district definitely makes a statement.

For starters, you can't miss the white wind turbine constantly whirring atop the third-floor deck, providing much of the residences' electricity. While that alone is a unique feature, you can bet that few, if any, other houses in the neighborhood have a natural-gas filling station in the garage that can be used to power up an eco-friendly natural-gas car. And when residents of [Sunset magazine's](#) 2007 Idea House are ready to power down, they can take a dip in the home's sizable, solar-heated indoor lap pool, then head off to a cozy steam room and dry sauna.

Sunset's Idea House contains dozens of cool features guaranteed to please greenies and luxury-seekers alike. The 3,600-square-foot home and attached 1,500-square-foot apartment are open for tours through Jan. 27.

Home design and lifestyle magazine Sunset launched its Idea House initiative in 1998, collaborating in the construction of two themed homes built in the Western United States each year. The Mission district Idea House is the first to be built in a dense urban area. Magazine officials said they wanted to demonstrate ways to maximize construction on a compact site while illustrating cutting-edge conservation technologies.

Driving not required "This is not an acre out in a new development. We are close to transportation. We are close to services. People don't have to drive. That really is a key component to being green," says Matt Golden, chief executive and president of Sustainable Spaces, the San Francisco firm that helped design and install many of the energy-saving features in the Idea House.

The Mission district home will be one of the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified residential remodeled houses in the nation, Sunset says. LEED certification is a recognized standard for measuring how efficiently buildings use energy, water, materials and land in comparison to other structures that are simply constructed according to the general building code. Green buildings are also designed to provide healthier indoor air quality.

Both the Idea House's main home and attached apartment rely on innovative water systems. Water from the showers, sinks and the washing machine is filtered and pumped to the roof, then slowly trickles back down, providing water to the many water-thrifty plants in the rooftop garden, patio and yard as it goes.

There's also a separate rainwater capture system. Rain is collected on the roof and diverted to one of four 2,000-gallon tanks buried in the back yard. That fresh water is used in the house and apartment for flushing toilets and washing clothes.

Toilets are dual-flush, meaning that people can select the level of water required depending on, well, the user's need.

"A lot of what you are seeing here is cutting edge," Golden says. "A lot of what we are doing is breaking new boundaries. It's providing technology that is going to become really essential in the future."

Certified wood All of the wood in the house and apartment is FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified, meaning the wood comes from fast-growing trees harvested in ways not detrimental to the forest's continued growth. Some lumber used in the two-bedroom apartment and three-bedroom main home was produced from reclaimed barn wood that was re-milled and fashioned into doors and paneling.

Other features of the main house and apartment are just designed to be super-cool.

In the apartment's master bedroom, artwork is printed on a shade that can be raised with the press of a button, revealing a flat-panel television embedded in the wall. Window shades automatically go up or down based on the outside temperature. And the custom railing in the stairway leading to the apartment's second floor is constructed from thin slices of empty metal pipes of different sizes that are welded together, giving a bubble effect.

In the apartment's oversize master bath, water tumbles down into the jetted tub from the ceiling. The tub has "chromatherapy" lights, enabling bathers to sit in a blue tub of water if they desire, says Robin Wilson, general contractor with the company that renovated the duplex, [Meridian Builders & Developers](#) of San Francisco.

Over in the main house, the main living area is up two flights of winding glass steps on the expansive third floor, which was added during the renovation. That's where you'll find the kitchen, living room, wrap-around rooftop garden and knockout city views.

The kitchen cabinets look as if they're made from an exotic wood, a no-no in a home showcasing so many sustainable elements. Actually, those cabinets are covered with wallpaper made from a photograph of an exotic wood that's been enlarged and mounted behind glass. The bedrooms, bathrooms, laundry area and walk-in closets are on the house's second floor.

Wilson owns the 1908 property and had lived in the duplex before renovations began last year. She plans to move back in to the main house next month.



The apartment, however, is for sale at an asking price of \$1.1 million.

Exterior of [Sunset San Francisco Idea House 2007](#)
(Thomas J. Story / Sunset Publishing)

