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Green Is the New Black

Two local architects prove style and eco-friendliness aren't mutually exclusive.

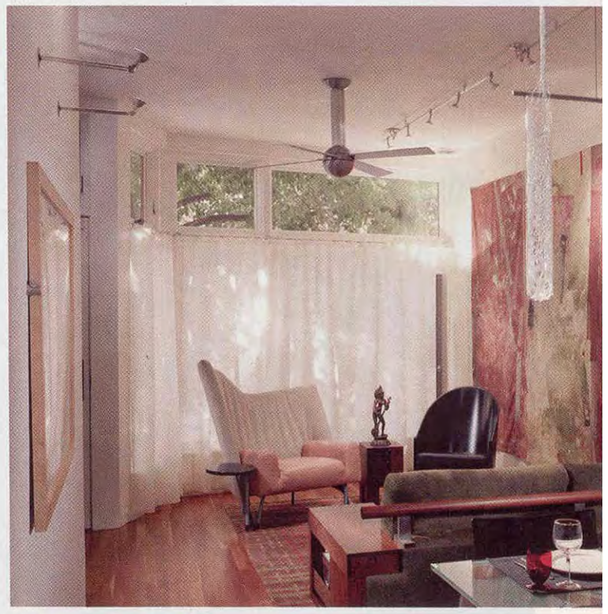
When husband-and-wife architects Paul Thompson and Laura Blau purchased an old empanada shop on Seventh and Carpenter, they drew up plans to transform the dilapidated building into a modern live/work space.

Before the junky building could become a home and office for their company, BluPath, the shop and the two apartments above it needed to be gutted. In the eyes of the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)-accredited architects, the complete overhaul wasn't just an opportunity to show off their professional skills, it was a chance to enlighten Philadelphia about the possibilities for an earth-friendly home design amid the city landscape.

"The perception is that green residences are something that's done in the country," Blau says. "We wanted to show it's also feasible in an urban environment."

Two years of renovations and $250,000 later, Blau and Thompson's Bella Vista project landed them a Commonwealth Design Award from the group 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, an organization committed to improving the state.

The project's environmentally conscious details include the paint (an odor-free, minimal-pollutant covering), the furniture (crafted by local artisans) and the windows (double-paned to retain or repel



Opposite page: Walnut veneer warms the kitchen and leads to a small garden where the Blau-Thompsons grow fresh herbs.

Above: Double-paned windows retain heat in the winter and keep the home cool during summer months.

PHOTOS BY BARRY HALKIN

Live Green!

A wall-mounted toilet, floating double vanity sink and skylights open up the master bathroom.

They've done exactly that. The sleek chrome tub and shower fixtures (and one sensuous living room chair) are by Philippe Starck. Blau's original art lines the walls, while rich cherry wood and natural Indian slate cover the floors. The master bath's glass spa-shower looks better suited for a Borgata suite than a South Philly row home.

"You don't need to sacrifice style or comfort to be eco-friendly," says Blau. Opening the master bedroom's Thai silk curtains, she adds: "It's not an either-or. It's … both." —*Adam Erace*

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The cantilevered artist's alcove off the den makes the most out of the home's space.

heat). Extra light is absorbed by solar energy collectors on the roof, which heats most of the water in a solar boiler in the basement. Blau and Thompson's gas bill is minuscule, with only a tiny spike in the coldest winter months.

The Blau-Thompsons' rainwater catch system recycles water to supply five sinks, two tubs, one walk-in shower and three levels of radiant heated flooring. Even the air-conditioning condensation is harvested, mainly for irrigating the pocket-sized garden off the kitchen where mint, oregano, blueberries, tomatoes and basil grow.

The phrase *green living* may conjure up stereotypes of hut-dwelling tree-huggers, but the couple's digs are more hedonist than hippie. "We wanted to create beautiful spaces within our house," says Blau, pointing to the cathedral ceiling in the master bedroom.