

REAL ESTATE

BUILDING HOPE, PIECE BY PIECE: University of Detroit Mercy students design a house that will be built with salvaged material. Now they need a buyer.

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BY SUZETTE HACKNEY

FREE PRESS REAL ESTATE WRITER



People watch a digital slide show about the house designed by UDM architecture students.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

THE HOUSE

What: University of Detroit Mercy architecture students designed it using salvaged materials. Now they need a buyer. Its price is estimated to be \$230,000-\$260,000.

Where: Detroit's Woodbridge neighborhood.

Interested? Contact the Woodbridge Neighborhood Development Corp., 313-515-6224.

THE WAREHOUSE

What it is: The Architectural Salvage Warehouse is a nonprofit group that is one of the first deconstruction companies in the state. Crews take down houses piece by piece for reuse.

Its purpose: To save landfill space while encouraging others to reuse building materials.

What's available: Leaded windows, cherry fireplace mantels, oak crown molding, clawfoot tubs and materials such as lumber, hardwood floorboards and wooden doors.

For more information: Call 313-515-0399 or e-mail Carolyn Mosher at cmosheraswd@aol.com. The warehouse, 4884 Fifteenth St. in Detroit, is open 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Thu.-Sun.

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Inside the architecture building on the campus of the University of Detroit Mercy, nine students have spent nearly every waking hour for the last six weeks drawing, redrawing, designing, redesigning, constructing and reconstructing -- all to create a symbol of hope in the city.

The plans are finally complete. The final piece is to find a buyer who will support their cause: Building a house in Detroit's Woodbridge neighborhood using materials salvaged from a historic, 6,000-square-foot house in Highland Park, Ill.

"Being a student and designing something that is going to be built is really exciting," said Shannon

Sommer, 21, a third-year architecture student from Wisconsin. "This opportunity doesn't happen. Usually architecture students design something, but they never get to see the final product."

Because there hasn't been a new home built in the Woodbridge district in 85 years, the students wanted to ensure that the home would mesh with the neighborhood's historic feel. In addition, they hope their design can eventually become a reproducible model used around the city and beyond.

It is estimated that the house will sell for \$230,000 to \$260,000. Working with the Woodbridge Neighborhood Development Corp., the Architectural Salvage Warehouse of Detroit proposed a first-ever partnership with the university. The idea was simple enough: A group of architecture students would design a house using recycled goods from a historic mansion.

The students spent two weeks designing a house independently, before working to design the final product as a group. Over six weeks during the spring semester, the students spent hours in studio -- a design class -- working on the project. Ignored were basics such as eating and sleeping. Even the workload from the rest of their classes went to the wayside.

"This has been a real-life experience, and we really leaned a lot on each other," said Rachel-Yoon Meyers, 21, a third-year architecture student from Ionia. "This is the only studio that is one project instead of nine individual projects. It has affected how we view life and each other. We've really become friends, and probably shared too much together."

3 bedrooms in 3D

Using computer graphics, 3D models and elevations, the students have come up with a 1,640-square-foot house that has three bedrooms and two bathrooms.

There is a handicap-accessible bathroom at the front of the house and a downstairs bedroom. On the upper level, the master bedroom and bath, with a skylight and Jacuzzi tub, is right off the stairs. There's another bedroom, and a fourth room that could be converted into a bedroom. The students chose to use the area as an indoor/outdoor living space with slidable walls that can open to the elements.

Some of the house's other highlights include:

An expanded roofline to allow in more sun during the winter months. The clear story acts as a chimney, sucking out hot air and bringing in cool air.

In addition, during the summer, the large window panels can be covered with shades to keep out extra light and keep things cool.

A sloped roof and rain collection barrels for water recycling purposes.

An on-demand water heater that will be used to conserve energy.

Restored leaded windows on the north side of the home; they are protected from overexposure to the sun

All vegetation on the site is a native of Michigan, and is considered low maintenance.

The students were able to get historical materials after the owner of the Illinois house donated it to the salvage warehouse, whose employees traveled to Illinois to deconstruct the 1920s mansion.

In all, the twin entry doors, the flooring, the interior doors, the leaded glass windows, the bathroom

accessories and many of the kitchen materials were salvaged and will be used in the new home, to be located at 4429 Avery.

"The marriage of these two worlds is just tremendous," said Carolyn Mosher, president of the Architectural Salvage Warehouse of Detroit. "It's taking historic materials and rebuilding in a historic area. It's just the beginning of a tremendous reinvestment in that community."

Seeing plans come to fruition

Will Wittig, UDM assistant professor of architecture and salvage warehouse board member, said the closest previous architecture students have seen their plans come to fruition is an office interior and a gazebo in Detroit.

In this project, Wittig said, his students provided about \$10,000 in design architecture.

"There is a natural inclination to be provocative and inventive during studios," Wittig said. "But I was pleasantly surprised with what they came up with. The Highland Park house had a wealth of raw materials, but it was the students who made the concept work. An architect wouldn't do this much work, based on the amount of time that went into this project."

For now, the salvaged materials sit in a Focus: HOPE warehouse where they are being stored until a buyer is found. Though the students won't actually help build the house, if it is under construction by fall, they could return in an elective course to help design and construct some of the smaller details.

More importantly, though, they look forward to the day when they can return to see the house standing.

"We wouldn't abandon our house," said Julie Zelenock, 22, a 4th-year architecture student from Novi. "This house *will* be built. It has to be built."

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