

She put her money where her *house* is

Richmond woman fights blight with green rehab of neighboring house that has family ties

(Richmond, Va.)—Thirteen years ago Greta Harris purchased her Ginter Park home next to a large stately Foursquare home in desperate need of repair. Harris had no idea at the time that more than a dozen years later she'd be the one designing, implementing and yes, paying for a complete gutting of the house.

Harris isn't a house flipper—just a concerned homeowner, who happens to be an architect. She decided to rehab and sell 3607 Noble Ave. so she'll have new neighbors in a house that sat empty for five years.

“We gutted it down to the studs,” said Harris, who plans to show the house for the first time October 11, 2009. “It's really a labor of love.”

Surprise family ties

Harris developed an affinity for the property after befriending the previous owner. She was surprised to learn her next-door neighbor, Jesse Jeffress, had relatives who also been next-door neighbors to her family in Red Oak, Va. years earlier. “Jesse's grandparent's farm was adjacent to my grandparent's farm. He knew my dad well—decades before we met. I named my company Red Oak Ideology because of my family connection to that part of Southside Virginia.”

After Jeffress died, his young children weren't able to make the much-needed repairs. The house became overgrown with weeds, was hit by a tree during tropical storm Ernesto in 2006 and served as home to a family of raccoons. Today, the 91-year-old house looks like the winning contestant on a makeover show.

Situated mid-block, between Laburnum Avenue and the Ginter Park Recreation Association, the American Foursquare home now boasts an EarthCraft certification, making it an ENERGY STAR home. It has three zone heating and cooling, a gourmet chef's kitchen with chocolate cherry wood cabinets, granite counters and, of course, stainless steel appliances. Some of the floors still have the original maple, others have brand-new oak. There are two sets of grand pocket doors, new roof, 30 recessed lights and each of the 39 windows is framed by 11 pieces of wood, “to respect the historic nature of the house,” Harris said.

Now, with a spacious rear addition to accommodate the great room, eat-in breakfast area and family lounge, the three-story home has more than 3,000 square feet of comfortable, open living space situated on a third of an acre. Outdoor living space is ample with a 400-square-foot wrap-around front porch plus a 300-square-foot rear deck, with storage underneath.

Affordable heating and cooling

“Some people might balk at the thought of heating or cooling a house of this magnitude, but we’ve blown in cellulite for insulation and have the highest efficiency windows,” Harris said. “Those bills should be miniscule.”

As typical of older homes, originally the house had very few small closets and just one bathroom. With the renovation, the closets have been expanded and the second-floor master suite features a walk-in closet and a roof deck. The house which began with one small bathroom now has 3 ½. The master suite and two bedrooms sit on the second floor, while fourth bedroom occupies the entire third floor.

The house also features modern amenities including a mud room, second floor washer/dryer closet and soaking tub in the master bath. Exposed brick fireplace and sitting room round out the master bedroom. The exterior features restored stucco and new Hardie Plank.

Neighbor celebrates renovation

The nonprofit Center for Responsible Lending estimates that neighboring homes suffer a 1 percent valuation drop for every vacant home in the neighborhood. That’s just one reason Harris’ neighbor Carol O’Brochta is thrilled with the facelift on her block. “Watching that house that had such beautiful bones and beautiful structure sit for so many years was sad. That house needs a family.”

O’Brochta who lives across the street is a lover of old homes, but also appreciates the environmentally-friendly rehab job Harris is doing. “She has taken something beautiful and made it better than it was before. The house that has so much character now has integrity!”

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Editors please find the statistic on vacant and foreclosed homes at:

<http://www.responsiblelending.org/mortgage-lending/research-analysis/subprime-spillover.pdf>