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**HOME, SWEET HOME**

Eric Anderson, Jean Callahan and son, Soren, in left window; Arturo Guerrero, Ana Larrea and their daughters, Blanca and Lola, in right windows; and Craig Tooman, the architect, and his sons, at house on East First Street.

**HABITATS/East First Street**

A Green Building Custom-Made For Two Families

By PENELOPE GREEN

"I TRY to live in the city," said Eric Anderson, explaining how a life philosophy makes a lifestyle. "Not on it, or above it. I'm not always successful."

Mr. Anderson, a builder and developer of moderate-income housing with his two companies, Urban Green Equities and Urban Green Builders, has been exploring this idea in his own neighborhood, on East First Street between First and Second Avenues, for 15 years.

He helped his neighbor Gabrielle Hamilton start her quintessential neighborhood restaurant, the appealingly eccentric (and wildly popular) Prune, in the ground floor of the tenement they both lived in (and about which Ms. Hamilton declared, "I wanted to cook for my neighbors — for the woman upstairs in my building who sells pot.")

He built, with Craig Tooman, an architect and a friend from Columbia, a winsome-looking food kiosk with a voluptuous copper roof in First Park down the block, elbowing out the drug dealers. And in the rubble-filled lot next to his old tenement building, he has built a concrete and steel two-family town house, designed by Mr. Tooman, for Mr. Anderson's family — Jean Callahan, project director at the Vera Institute of Justice, and their son, Soren Callahan — and his friends Arturo Guerrero and Ana Larrea and their two daughters, Blanca and Lola. On the

ground floor is a community center being used by the Lower Eastside Girls Club.

Mr. Anderson, 43, grew up in California and became a builder of moderate-income housing in 1989 (after dropping out of Columbia's Ph.D. program in Semitic languages) because, he said, he wanted to help homeless New Yorkers. "I would pass by so many on my way to school every day," he said, "and it just didn't make any sense to me."

His first project was an S.R.O. renovation on West 116th Street; his first construction project was middle-income housing on West 133rd Street. With Mr. Tooman and his firm — Cutsogeorge Tooman & Allen — which has designed many of Mr. Anderson's projects, he is committed to holistic building practices like using recycled materials and renewable or efficient energy sources.

His new building on First Street, completed early last year, was a slowly unfurling project that showcases these green-building tenets, as well as an elegant modernism and Mr. Anderson's hope that his neighbors will be his friends, and that he will give a little back to his neighborhood. The lot had been rubble since the 1970's, he said, and was owned in the last decade by someone who sold it to Mr. Anderson in 1994 for a series of interest-free payments.

Though he declined to give the lot's purchase price (its former owner had bought it from the city), Mr. Anderson estimated that its cost, combined with the building's cost,

was less than \$200 a square foot. "I always say the building is about 8,000 square feet," he said, which suggests a total cost of about \$1.6 million.

There were rafts of cobblestones and two maple trees in the rubble, all of which Mr. Anderson tried to save. The maple trees were transplanted to the back edge of the lot (only one survived); the cobblestones are now the floors of Mr. Anderson's two terraces. Knobby and worn, they make these outdoor spaces seem as if they've been there forever. Soren, 2, patrols the first one like a little old man in charge of his block, the mayor of First Street. "Hey, icky," he likes to yell to the garbage trucks. "Hey, baby," he'll yell to everyone else.

The walls and skin of this building are poured concrete — an inexpensive, tough, urban-gritty material that has been scored in a gridlike pattern, to make a stern and lovely facade, which, with its vast steel-framed windows over the living areas and narrower ones over the stair area, is as tightly composed as a Mondrian painting. Or so it looks to the untrained eye. Mr. Tooman can see imperfections that still make him twitch.

He described the process of building a poured-concrete structure. If you've ever watched a foundation being poured, you can extrapolate: a plywood form is built for each floor, within which are placed fillets of wood to create that grid-pattern facade, whose plan Mr. Tooman meticulously plot-



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DESIGNS FOR LIVING

Part of the Guerrero/Larrea apartment, left; part of the Anderson/Callahan apartment, below; and the Guerrero/Larrea outdoor area. The walls and skin of the building are poured concrete.



Photographs by Frances Roberts for The New York Times



ted and drew. "But your typical foundation guy, which is who we used, isn't so interested in how the thing looks at the end of the day," Mr. Tooman said with an audible shudder.

Pours take a day, and the forms are removed after a week or so. Concrete takes 28 more days to set, after which the workers would lay the concrete-planked floors, which were covered with pipes for radiant heat; then came another pouring of concrete for the finished floor.

Halfway up Mr. Guerrero's living room wall is entombed the plastic lid of a coffee cup — a modern fossil and a tiny monument to the human factor.

"Eric thought it was funny," Mr. Tooman said, "but I went bananas. Arturo was at first annoyed, but, being a painter, is much more accepting of 'the hand' in things than I am. Ultimately, I've come to accept the coffee lid." (Herein lies a life lesson: accept the coffee lid.)

Mr. Anderson had planned "a dinky rental" for the second-floor space, but over dinner at Prune one night, he and Mr. Guerrero

made a plan for Mr. Guerrero to join the project and custom-make a home for his family. The family was living in TriBeCa, the girls growing up in a mezzanine bedroom with a five-foot ceiling. (On First Street, Blanca and Lola, now 15 and 13, have their own bedrooms.)

"When do you ever have a chance to make your own home in New York City?" said Mr. Guerrero, who is also an architect and who stopped painting for half a year to design and then do the finish work on his new home. (Tendinitis in his right hand accrued after sanding the bookshelves he built.)

With its rich blocks of color — his concrete floor looks like warm, rusty iron — and sensuous shapes (a curved wall, a bathroom paved with river stones) the two-level, two-bedroom "house" looks like one of Mr. Guerrero's paintings. Even the coffee-cup lid is beautiful: a whorl in the cement.

Mr. Anderson's space is less labored over (and, in the way of a builder's own home, unfinished), though beautiful for its starkness — and massive scale. "Scale is always an issue," said Mr. Anderson, who is 6 feet 9 inches tall.

Water towers supplied the cedar and redwood planks that make Mr. Anderson's kitchen cabinets, Mr. Guerrero's window frames and the planks on Mr. Anderson's living room wall, the bolts of which are hung with Tibetan prayer flags. The planks were "harvested" from old towers taken down by that venerable New York water-tower institution, Issek Brothers.

There's no air-conditioning in any of the spaces — a choice made, Mr. Anderson said, as much for environmental as budget reasons. On a recent sticky morning, both apartments were airy and cool, as a draft funneled from the front half of each space and out the back.

Mr. Guerrero's back "yard," with its pigmented stucco walls, Spanish tiles and river stones, looked like a Spanish bar on a beach. "It's a great place for a beer," Mr. Guerrero said, pointing out the concrete and steel table he made himself.

Mr. Tooman stopped short. "I've never had a beer out here," he protested.

"That's O.K.," Mr. Anderson said in a mollifying tone. "We've had many for you."