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Demonstration home erected on San Francisco Civic Center Plaza

House built exclusively of scrap and salvaged material

SAN FRANCISCO – The name says it all: “ScrapHouse”—a green demonstration home built entirely of salvaged material on Civic Center Plaza adjacent to San Francisco City Hall. With walls sheathed with everything from street signs and shower doors to fire hoses and phonebooks, ScrapHouse is a sight to be seen.

Built in conjunction with World Environment Day 2005, “ScrapHouse illustrates the possibilities—as well as the challenges—of green building, recycling, and reuse,” according to architect John Peterson, Founder of Public Architecture, the nonprofit organization that has coordinated the effort.

“ScrapHouse is about much more than the materials though; it’s the product of unprecedented collaboration between local architects, artists, builders, contractors, and engineers,” said Laurence Kornfield, chief building inspector for the City of San Francisco, who pitched the idea to Public Architecture in mid-April. The concept of ScrapHouse was conceived by a local documentary filmmaker, Anna Fitch, who came in contact with Kornfield, and soon after, Public Architecture. Fitch and her company, Building 39 Films, have captured every step of the way for a forthcoming documentary.

Over the course of just six weeks, an eclectic team of volunteers scoured Bay Area dumps and scrap yards, often discovering unused materials with the price tags still affixed. A group of architects, interior designers, landscape architects, lighting specialists, and metal fabricators gave these materials new life and ScrapHouse its final shape. Based on their design, ScrapHouse has all the amenities of a traditional American home: a kitchen, a bathroom, two bedrooms, a deck, and beautifully landscaped yard. The design is intentionally bold: an L-shaped layout, with a mezzanine-level bedroom, and a roof inverted like the wings of a butterfly.

Still, what is most intriguing about ScrapHouse is the creative use of previously discarded materials—most of which were destined for the landfill. On one wall, 500 old phonebooks, stacked vertically, provide both insulation and texture. Another room’s floor is tiled with leather scraps, leftover from upholstery jobs. For landscaping, day-old flowers from local outlets surround the house in hundreds of tiny vases cut from garden hoses, which protrude from the green grass lawn.

Led by Matarozzi & Pelsinger Builders as well as SF Garage, dozens of skilled laborers and other volunteers from around the Bay Area turned out to build ScrapHouse. Collectively, they drew curious stares from German tourists and other passersby. “There’s no such thing as ‘scrap labor,’” noted Peterson. “This never would have happened without the leadership and generosity of the professional community, particularly Rudolph & Sletten and Shoreinstein construction companies who provided crucial financial support.”

ScrapHouse will be open to the public for four days—10am-8pm, from June 2 to June 5—in conjunction with other events for World Environment Day 2005. After the open house, the house will be disassembled and moved to a permanent location, funds permitting.

“ScrapHouse is the epitome of reduce, reuse, and recycle,” said Kornfield. “We thought it was a perfect way to celebrate World Environment Day, and to show how San Francisco is a world leader in terms of green cities.”

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About Public Architecture

Established as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in 2002, Public Architecture puts the resources of architecture in the service of the public interest. The organization identifies and solves practical problems of human interaction in the built environment and acts as a catalyst for public discourse through education, advocacy, and the design of public spaces and amenities. Rather than waiting for commissions, Public Architecture takes a proactive leadership role by identifying significant problems of broad relevance that require innovative research and design. The organization's 1% Solution program, through which architecture professionals or entire firms pledge a portion of their time to the common good, aims to mainstream public interest and pro bono practice in the design professions. Please visit www.publicarchitecture.org for more information.

About World Environment Day

Established by the United Nations' General Assembly in 1972, World Environment Day (WED) is hosted every year by a different city and commemorated with an international exposition through the week of June 5. The U.N. uses WED to stimulate awareness of the environment and enhance political attention and public action. San Francisco is the first U.S. city to host WED in its thirty-year history. It will do so June 1-5, 2005, with an array of events throughout the city. WED 2005 will be co-hosted by the San Francisco Mayor's Office and Department of the Environment in conjunction with the United Nations Environment Programme. Please visit www.wed2005.org for more information.

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Images

See next page for samples; others available at www.scraphouse.org or by request.

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