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## Building Better in Fishtown

by John Steele

Cheaper might also be greener.



PostGreen artist rendering of the 100K House

Over the last five years, the real estate market in Fishtown has fluctuated to such a degree that it has prevented the type of wild gentrification made famous by NoLibs neighbors to the south. Home prices skyrocketed during the housing boom and have not entirely come down. So what's a young, hip artist-type who wants to move into an up-and-coming neighborhood to do?

The creators of PostGreen may have the answer. The Fishtown-based environmental home builders have created the "100k House", a new style of home building that keeps construction costs at a minimum through a series of frugal common-sense innovations.

"Most new construction in Philadelphia comes in around \$400,000 to \$500,000 that's just the way the numbers work out," says PostGreen founder Chad Ludeman. "But we took a step back and asked 'Why are we building houses that we can't afford, that none of our friends can afford, that no regular Philly resident who is not making six figures could afford?'"

Ludeman came up with a hypothesis: That you can create a certified green home for cheaper than traditional construction without sacrificing serious quality of life. So Ludeman and his PostGreen colleagues started testing the theory online via a blog, 100khouse.com, letting their ideas take shape in front of an audience of potential investors and friends. It was at the blog that discussions for cost-saving amenities took shape: **modern, minimalist ceiling fans**, cheap-but-durable cabinet materials and other design quirks.

You may be scratching your heads as to the tenets of the 100k design brand. It starts with certification. The environmental impact of real estate is judged by LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), a certification company that has become the standard for new development companies. All 100k homes are LEED Platinum Certified. Beyond that, marketing director Nic Darling says the main focus is on simplicity.

"'Green building' isn't just a term that gets thrown around," Darling says. "We look at PostGreen as sort of a step beyond all that, to where green building is really just smarter building, more responsible building."

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There is no doubt that the innovations here go towards budget concerns more than environmental ones. There are no solar panels, no green roofing, no biodiesel electricity. The idea was to make a more minimalist home for people interested in paring down their lives. For example, the average American has 2,500 square feet. The 100k house is 1,000 square feet. The house doesn't have a basement, a feature that often costs homebuilders upwards of \$30,000 from digging and refinishing just for an entire floor of storage space. By filling in a foundation slab with radiant heat tubing as opposed to digging a basement, the project saves a ton of money. The copious, large, west-facing windows reduce lighting costs to just 3 percent of the total energy usage. The floor plans are minimalist, open and lack a lot of wall and door space, keeping costs way down and using less building materials. The result is a simple, affordable, modern home design.



After struggling to claim title of the plot of land at 2100 E. Susquehanna Ave. and Chad had to wrangle with another unwieldy city institution: the neighborhood of Fishtown. Having already shown that they are willing to invest in the neighborhood for the long haul, both Chad and Nic live within spitting distance of the 100k site in spaces they bought and designed. "We have been living here for the past few years so we have presented the idea to some of the neighbors but we still have to make a larger announcement to let people know," Ludeman says. "They seem excited about it."



The young builders are in good company. Several modern redesigns have popped up in the East Kensington section in the past year. The most recent, [a \\$400,000 rehab just one block away from the 100k site](#), was completed in May.

This neighborhood connection is important. While Fishtown continues to attract large redevelopment projects, the longtime residents still rule the roost. At a community meeting this week, Philly uber-bar-developer Avram Hornik floated the idea of turning the vacant former Global Thrift into a music venue resembling the World Café. He was nearly ridden out on a rail by neighbors concerned about the current bar scene in their neighborhood.



But with tacit approval from the city and several Fishtown movers and shakers, Ludeman and Darling are set to break ground in two weeks. And it can't come soon enough. It is clear the pair have their sights on bigger things.

"We are coming out with a line of homes with the same architectural ideas but with different floor plans and sizes," Ludeman says. "We would like to see more in Philadelphia but we also think this has the potential to go national, not necessarily with us building them, but selling the plans to other builders."

"We would of course ensure that the builders are building what they say they are building," Darling says. "You have to protect the integrity of your brand."

The pair has also experimented with the idea of mixed-use properties on the upcoming Frankford Avenue Arts Corridor, with the same minimalist design not necessarily under the umbrella of the 100k brand.

The first 100k house has an estimated construction time of 12 weeks. After that Ludeman and his wife will be moving into the house, moving the PostGreen offices there and putting his case study to the ultimate test. Will he survive? Will he enjoy it? Will Americans buy the unassuming, modernist, affordable bungalows? [Tune in to the blog to find out.](#)

The 100K house has been added to [Philadelphia Weekly's Green Map](#). Got a suggestion for the map? Send it to [jmathis@philadelphiaweekly.com](mailto:jmathis@philadelphiaweekly.com).

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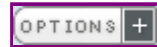
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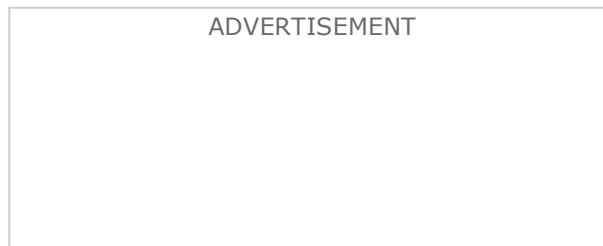


**Chad Ludeman** 2 months ago

Thanks for the great article John. You really captured the concept well. We just put the first house up for sale yesterday that will be built right next to the 100 Lots of extra goodies to a buyer prior to Oct 1st.

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