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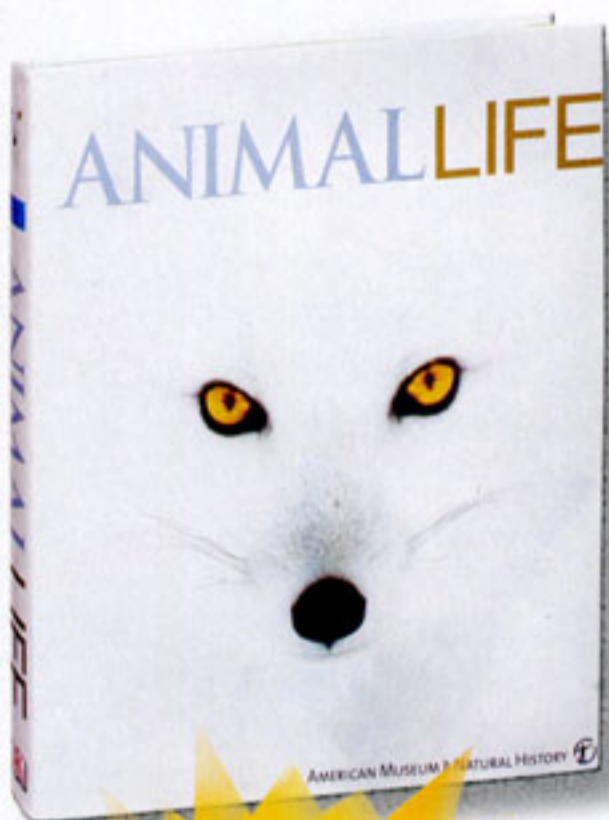
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Discovery

THIS OLD HOUSE

RENOVATION

Green-minded homeowners take note: affordable energy retrofits are within reach, even for drafty mid-century homes. The Now House, an innovative retrofit project in Toronto's Topham Park neighbourhood, turned an energy-sucking Second World War-era home into a model of efficiency that generates almost as much energy as it uses, proving that you don't need to build new to go green.

There are nearly one million wartime houses across the country (four million in the United States), and the so-called Victory Homes are perfect candidates for green retrofits, says Lorraine Gauthier, the Now House project president.

Originally meant to provide temporary housing for war-effort factory workers, the 800-to-1,100-square-foot bungalows and 1½ storey cottages quickly became fixtures in Canada's suburban landscape. Large lots, winding streets and small but efficient floor plans made the mass-produced and sometimes prefab homes attractive to thousands of returning veterans, as well as new immigrants and, later, baby boomers pining for a piece of suburbia.

But with minimal insulation, outdated heating systems and leaky windows, the homes are showing their age, contributing an estimated 9.7 million tonnes of



greenhouse gasses per house annually. Retrofitting wartime homes alone could meet three percent of Canada's Kyoto Protocol commitments.

That's where the Now House comes in. Aiming for near zero energy costs, the plans include improvements that will decrease the home's greenhouse-gas emissions by nearly 60 percent (down 5.4 tonnes annually), slash the annual natural-gas bill to \$227 (from \$1,267) and hook rooftop solar photovoltaic panels into the city's hydro grid to offset any lingering energy costs.

With a budget of \$85,000 and a four-month timeline, the Now House project team reinvigorated the house from the foundation to the peak of its steep-sloped roof. "Although we didn't hit near zero energy *use*, we came very close," says Gauthier. "But we're hitting near zero energy *cost*."

She hopes owners of aging houses will see that they, too, can make simple changes that can have a major impact on the environment and their annual energy bills. As fuel prices rise, the greening of existing homes will become an important factor for homebuyers.

"We see the Now House as a way of helping to maintain communities," says Gauthier. "There are a million opportunities across the country to do this again."

Blake Eligh

The original Now House community (BELOW), and drawn by neighbourhood kids (TOP).

