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Low Energy Home Designs  
for Puerto Rico

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## Introduction

Puerto Rico is fortunate to have one of the most consistently comfortable climates in the world. High summer temperatures average about 88°F in September, the hottest month, and winter lows in February, the coldest month, are typically around 68°F. This is indeed fortunate since high energy prices make mechanical air conditioning a costly option.

The houses in this book demonstrate how conscientious design can create comfortable houses without the use of mechanical cooling. They borrow some good ideas from traditional island architecture, such as light colored materials, window-shading overhangs, and heavy concrete walls, and update them with special modern features like the parasol roof shading system, special ventilation features, and solar water heating. A description of the thermal design features of each house design is included with the individual plan. Wherever possible, landscaping

is used to provide shade, and the houses are oriented to take advantage of prevailing breezes. The result is pleasant, practical, low-energy homes.

All the house plans in this book have been reproduced at a standard scale of one-eighth inch to the foot. This gives the builder the option of working at this scale or producing full-size working drawings. Each house plan includes elevations, floor plan, and sections.

High energy costs in Puerto Rico make even modest investments in low-energy building features quickly pay for themselves. This is true not only of the house itself but also of water heating. Electric water heating is expensive, while the abundance of clear, sunny days makes solar water heating a practical alternative. Thus, solar water heaters have been incorporated in the Tow? energy house designs to further reduce energy consumption.

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## Plan A

Two-story, 1,706 square feet

3 bedrooms, 2 1/2 baths

Attached or Detached

This two-story home is well suited for urban sites where lot sizes are small. The building contains 1,706 square feet of living space, including three bedrooms and two and one-half baths. It is oriented to catch the eastern trade winds to cool the house by means of cross ventilation.

Solid walls on the north and south sides are suitable for a duplex or row-house arrangement. Living areas on the ground floor open to a partially paved, tree-shaded patio. An open stairwell with a whole-house fan above further enhances ventilation. At the second floor level, the bedrooms are cross ventilated through a combination of jalousie windows, louvered casement windows, and

Clerestory jalousie windows at the roof level. Further cooling is achieved through the use of exterior shading devices.

The concrete roof slab is shaded with a "parasol," a light metal secondary roof system. The south and west sides are also shaded, the south by means of an ivy-covered shading screen and the west through the use of hollow concrete block grilles. The glass block in front of the stairwell allows for light and privacy at the same time. All exterior walls and the roof are insulated with 2-inch rigid polyurethane insulation.

Individual window air conditioning units may be installed over windows and doors at transom level. A 50-gallon breadbox solar water heater has also been incorporated into the design and is located above the stairwell. Rainwater from the roof may be stored in a 100-gallon water-storage tank over the east side's second-floor windows and used for flushing toilets, bathing, and watering plants.

Landscaping has been carefully planned for this small lot. In the patio, two medium-sized trees of sparse foliage provide shade but allow the breeze to filter in. On the southwest side, a large tree provides some

additional protection from the afternoon sun. Ground

Cover is grass. Exterior finishes on the house range from

exposed concrete on the north and south sides to

Vigh:-solorea cement plaster on the east and west.

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PLAN A

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Plan A: Three Bedrooms, Two and One Half Baths

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PLAN A cont)

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WEST VIEW

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Plan B

?One story, 1444 square foot

3 bedrooms, 2 baths

## Detached

This house has been designed to compete with the most widely built and accepted type of housing in the Puerto Rican market today--the suburban development home. Its living space of 1,844 square feet includes three bedrooms and two baths. The long axis of the house runs north to south to catch the easterly trade winds. Wooden louvered windows are generously used along the east and west sides of the house. In combination with a ventilation monitor over the central hallway, they help provide cross ventilation.

Solar heat is rejected through the use of a secondary light metal roof over the concrete roof slab and 1" rigid polyurethane insulation on all exterior walls and the roof. Both the east and west walls are protected from the sun by a series of silicon painted hollow core wood screens ("brise-soleil") fastened to the wide overhang by galvanized steel angles. South walls are shielded by 3 series of ivy-covered chain-link sunscreens. Service areas have been located on the west side, keeping the humidity away from the house and acting as a buffer zone for the late afternoon sun.

A 50-gallon breadbox solar water heater is located

over the master bedroom at the southernmost part of the house. Suggested landscaping includes grass, for ground cover and some shade trees. Exterior finishes are mostly Light-colored cement plaster with some accents of exposed concrete.

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PLAN B

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Plan B: Three Bedrooms, Two Baths

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EAST VIEW

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PLAN B (Cont.)

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WEST ELEVATION ?i\_}??1. veer

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NORTH ELEVATION 2-23

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## Plan C

One story, 648 square feet

3 bedrooms, 1 bath

Attached or Detached

This house has been designed as a basic, compact unit. The layout is derived from traditional Puerto Rican residential architecture, with the main living areas occupying the center of the house and all other rooms branching off this central area. This arrangement precludes the use of circulation hallways.

The floor area of approximately 648 square feet accommodates three bedrooms and one bath. The house is 10 meters wide, the width of a typical urban rowhouse lot. Service areas are located on the south side.

Cross ventilation is achieved through the use of wooden jalousie windows in combination with a ventilation duct running north-south over low storage areas. An exterior terrace on the southeast corner, shaded by a canvas awning, provides additional living space. A 30-gallon breadbox solar water heater is located over the bathroom. A hollow concrete block grille shields the west wall from the late afternoon sun. In addition, the roof

is protected by light metal panels acting as a secondary roof over the roof concrete slab, which in turn is insulated with 1-inch rigid polyurethane.

The exterior of the house is coated with cement plaster painted with light colors. Landscaping is limited and consists mostly of grass for ground cover and some shade trees for the east, south, and west areas.

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PLAN C

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WEST VIEW

Plan C: Three Bedrooms, One Bath

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PLAN C cont)

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NORTH ELEVATION +i\_+

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SOUTH ELEVATION #} { Fate

Plan C

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