

# Casas

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## An 1878 House is rebuilt for low-income families

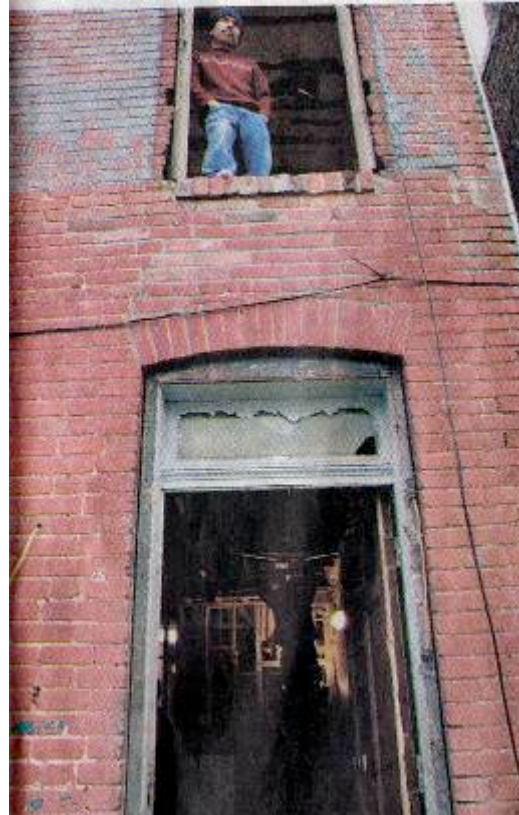


*Mi Casa Inc., the DC Government and the television program This Old House work on the rehabilitation of a house that remained abandoned for several years.*

By **MILAGROS MELÉNDEZ-VELA**  
*El Tiempo Latino*

Construction workers walk in, hauling buckets full of bricks and pieces of wood. They walk up the makeshift wooden stairs that lead to the second floor as the pounding of a hammer resounds throughout the house and the cameraman prepares to film the scene.

David Vos, producer and director of the television program This Old House, speaks to one of the workers in Spanish:



“Please walk through here with the buckets.” Then in English to the actors: “Walk towards this area and show the ceiling,” he says.

A few meters away, Fernando Lemos, director of Mi casa, Inc. a non-profit developer that helps low-income families acquire affordable housing in DC, observes the scene.

It is not a fiction movie that is taking place; quite the opposite, it is a rehabilitation project directed by Mi Casa and he television program This Old House, who together will make a moderate-income family’s homeownership dream a reality.

The beautiful structure of high ceilings and long corridors would be valued in the current housing market at around \$800,000. However, it will be sold to a family, possibly of Latin origin, for around \$260,000, Lemos asserts.

Mi Casa, Inc., in the past 13 years, has helped dozens of Latin families become homeowners. The organization has helped 250 homebuyers and 450 tenants in the purchase and rehabilitation of their buildings. A large part of Mi Casa’s work is to buy and rehab buildings to then sell them at affordable prices. To date, Mi Casa has renovated 35 structures.

“We work on rebuilding houses with funds from different sources to be able to

offer housing priced considerably lower than the market,” said Lemos.

In this case, the 3,000 square foot structure, built in the Italian style in 1878, was bought by Mi Casa from the DC government through the Home Again initiative, launched by Mayor Anthony Williams. The organization was contacted by This Old House, who was interested in the project and is helping finance part of the rehab.

The team began work in November and has not stopped since then to rebuild this Shaw neighborhood house, located some 10 blocks away from the White House, which for years had been abandoned, serving as home to vagabonds and drug addicts.

In February, the house will be finished, with its 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, living-room, kitchen and finished basement.

“This used to be a very bad area but it is now being revitalized since the construction of the new Convention Center,” Lemos added. The house is

located two blocks away from the Convention Center.

For This Old House, directing the project has been a challenge. The building was completely uninhabitable. “Each house we renovate has its history and challenges, but the Washington house possibly exceeded all its precedents” comments Jim Nash on the webpage of “This Old House”.

“When we saw it for the first time, the condemned house was being occupied by crack addicts. Intense fires had turned all the interior brickwork black, debilitating beams and causing structural damage,” he added.

The scope of work for the project includes:

- Restoration of the façade, maintaining the original design and historical quality
- Recreation of the details of the Historic Victorian style of the entrance and roof ornaments
- Repairing water damage in the interior staircase. A modern and

elegant semi-circular staircase will replace the damaged one.

- Modern home appliances will be incorporated to the project, like a fully equipped kitchen, a central air conditioning system and a laundry room.
- Repairs in basement level to make it habitable.
- Creation of a backyard space that can be used as a refuge from the bustle of the city.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned for February 14<sup>th</sup> and will be attended by DC government officials. The transformation of the interior of this house, its historic value and the culmination of the project will be televised nationally in a series of 8 episodes starting on the second week of February. In Washington, the show will be transmitted on WETA, every Saturday at 9 a.m. starting on February 11<sup>th</sup>.