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PRINT

Bahia Senior Housing, Novato, California, United States

Thursday 15 Apr 2010

Green design for the golden years



EDITORIAL

Standard's senior housing concept finds inspiration in Native American history

Too often plans for affordable senior housing skipped good or even interesting design in favor of conformity or the familiar. Standard, a Los Angeles-based design partnership of architects Jeffrey Allsbrook and Silvia Kuhle, has come up with a model that is both affordable and sustainable and offers the premise that one's golden years need not be spent looking at four dull walls.

Standard

The design for Bahia Meadows, which recently received an honorable mention in the California Senior Housing Design Competition, draws inspiration from the indigenous people who formerly inhabited the North Bay area. Standard designed a sustainable senior housing complex that blends a historic low-tech precedent with modern technology to create a new community for active residents.



The Bahia Meadows complex in Novato, California features 30 accessible, low-energy senior dwellings and a range of community spaces. The dwellings are inspired by the wooden, turf-roofed structures of the Coast Miwok people whose territories once stretched from Marin County up to Bodega Bay. In this environmentally sensitive area, grass roofs promote biodiversity by replacing the ground displaced by the housing.

On each suburban-sized parcel, groups of up to three south-oriented dwellings, including duplexes, are placed side by side. Slight variations in orientation of the homes prevent monotony and create unique spaces. This planning strategy fights suburban sprawl and encourages social interaction between the residents while allowing for their privacy. Grouping the homes within a compact footprint reduces the effect on the environment and integrates passive solar energy.

The floor plans and sections are carefully designed to balance natural light, heat gain and loss, access and views. Wood decks on the east facing ends of each home offer sweeping views over the protected river estuary and the San Pablo Bay.

The 24-foot wide dwellings are wood framed with a raised floor, substantially prefabricated offsite to reduce impact of construction. Eco-friendly materials and systems are integrated throughout the project to minimize natural resource consumption and waste, including engineered lumber, natural linoleum, recycled carpets, non-off-gassing cabinetry, and low-VOC paints. Photovoltaic and solar water heating panels are mounted on trellises at one end of each home, to shade the parking and offset the already low energy use of the dwellings, targeting "net zero" energy consumption.

Although it is still a concept design, Bahia Meadows offers some thought-proving ideas on greener and more fun senior housing.

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16/04/10 Elizabeth Madrigal, Ridgefield, WA
This design actually thrills me - as it should everyone else. As the editor of greenlandlady.com, I write about sustainable living, building and reduced footprints and applaud both Jeffrey Allsbrook and Silvia Kuhle for using common sense from the past and innovation.
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