AFFORDABLE HOUSING

INNOVATIVE DESIGN DRIVES AFFORDABILITY

BY ROLAND LI
San Francisco Business Times

Affordable housing can conjure up images of monolithic brick apartment towers and repetitive gray facades. But increasingly, architects are building affordable housing with colorful skins, environmentally friendly features, community gardens and natural elements like grass and trees. Rather than bland, utilitarian blocks, the most innovative affordable housing projects provide human-centered living spaces while using smart design and construction techniques to keep costs down. Here are four envelope-pushing affordable housing projects that have been built in the Bay Area.

RENE CAZENAVE APARTMENTS

Address: 25 Essex St., S.F.
Units: 120
Developers: Bridge Housing, Community Housing Partnership
Architects: Laddie Mayurn Stacy Architects, Studio Sullivan Design Partners
General Contractor: Cahill Contractors

The eight-story Rene Cazenave Apartments, completed in 2013, are in San Francisco’s fast-growing Transbay neighborhood and provide homes for formerly homeless tenants. The $42.7 million project has three retail spaces, a community garden and green roof. Support services include counseling and psychotherapy inside the building. The units have floor-to-ceiling windows and energy efficient utilities. “We wanted it to fit within the design parameters that are going to happen around Transbay,” said Gail Gilman, executive director of Community Housing Partnership. The project acts as a gateway to Folsom Street, she added.

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1180 FOURTH ST., SAN FRANCISCO
Units: 99
Developer: Mercy Housing
Architects: Mithun/Solomon, Kennedy Architecture and
Full Circle Architects
General Contractor: James E. Roberts-Obayashi Corp.

This site, part of the Mission Bay plan, was designated to
provide family housing, said Jennifer Dolin, regional vice
resident of operations at developer Mercy Housing. The
project uses recycled building materials and Energy Star
appliances, with stucco cladding and perforated metal
roofs. The outdoor amenities are similar to those found in
market-rate projects: barbecue equipment, ping-pong
table and an outdoor movie theater. Exercise rooms in
the building open to the outside. Affordable projects "rout-
inely stand up to but exceed the quality of market-rate
spaces they're so tuned to their context," said Anne
Inney, partner at Mithun/Solomon, the lead architect for
the project, which was completed last year.

HUNTERS VIEW, SAN FRANCISCO
Address: Between West Point Road, Middle Point Road,
Wills Street and Hare Street
Units: 107 in phase one
Developer: The John Stewart Co., Devine & Gung, Inc.,
Ridge Point Non-Profit Housing Corporation
Architects: Mithun/Solomon, Daniel Solomon Design
Partners, Paulies Taggart Architects
General Contractor: Cahill Contractors, Nibbi Brothers.

This project was the first funded by the city's HOPE
SF Initiative, which includes a $450 million citywide
investment in affordable housing. The decade-long
process of reviving the area around Hunters View includes
renovating the outdated 207-unit public housing project.
The new buildings now use solar and wind power. "It looks
just like market-rate housing," said Chris Foley of Polaris
Paciﬁc, which is selling the adjacent parcels for mar-
ket-rate housing. The first phase was completed in 2013.
Additional phases will add 179 affordable units to the site.

CALIFORNIA HOTEL
Address: 3501 San Pablo Ave., Oakland
Developer: East Bay Asian Local Development Corp.
Units: 137
Architect: Gelfand Partners Architects
General Contractor: Cahill Contractors

The California Hotel was originally built in the 1920s
and in its heyday hosted singers including Billie Holiday
and Tina Turner. But it required major renovations
after being shuttered up in 1971. EBALDC preserved
the historic character of the building while installing
modern energy efﬁcient hot water heating and lighting
systems. The renovation project, completed in 2013, also
included a seismic retrofit with steel brace and concrete
reinforcements. A community garden provides vegetables
for residents of the 137-unit project.

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