

Projects of Note

Eight Housing Projects Prove "Design Counts"

Housing PIA honors one single-family house, five multifamily dwellings, And two community-level designs



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"The single most important message the AIA Housing PIA can deliver through its annual awards program is that design counts," said this year's Housing PIA Awards jury members when they convened March 8 in Washington, D.C. This tenet is

true whether a development is an upscale urban infill or affordable community housing design, agreed Chair Diane T. Georgopoulos, AIA, Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency; Jane Kolleeny, Architectural Record; and Michael K. Medick, AIA, Medick + Associates.

The jury said that in selecting this year's winners they were looking for architects who recognized "the opportunity to elevate the experience of place into a positive memorable event." The designs they selected, they said, embody this distinctive character by elegant use of historic detail, use of materials in particularly inventive ways, and being stylistically transcendent yet still of their time.

"We must not fail to appreciate the significant role housing plays in simply setting the stage for the dialog between what we need to live and how we'd like to see ourselves living," the jury said. To that end, they selected the following eight projects.

Single Family

The Newman Residence, New York City, by Cooper Robertson & Partners

"The architect showed discernment in the basic geometry of the building and used historic elements to create a very elegant reconstruction," the jury said of the Newman Residence, New York City, by Cooper Robertson & Partners, the only project to win in the single-family category this year. The Newman House is a restoration and adaptive use of an 1869 Greenwich



The sleek modern interior of the restored Newman House takes advantage of a rare opportunity in Manhattan to capture light. Photo © Bret Morgan.

Village brick commercial building that the architect intends to use as his private home and "retreat from the pressures of urban life." Serendipitous use of its "long side to the street" orientation and back façade on a courtyard offered an unusual opportunity in the Big Apple to capture light-filled space. The architect enhanced this opportunity by literally raising the roof and creating a living-area loft space across the entire footprint of the building.

The architect's house is the first building on its block to be restored. "The Newman Residence is an adaptive reuse that sets the standard for redevelopment in the district," the jury concluded. "It offers excellent use of appropriately interpreted details, and a good, clear floor plan."

Multifamily

Johnson Street Townhouse, Portland, Ore., by Mithun

Johnson Street Townhouse offers a "great platform from which to watch the world," according to the jury. "It's a good urban insertion that meets the street well." The Portland Ore., project, designed by Mithun, transforms a former urban brownfields site into 13-unit three-story townhouse units, replete with private courtyards and rooftop terraces and living space of 2,800 square feet per unit. The careful and clever design and landscape elements belie the project's density of 26 units per acre.

The architects say that their challenge was "to create a project that blended with its context

and promoted a strong pedestrian link to the street." They gave the project a strong street presence, while raising the units several steps up and employing street-level planter boxes for visual privacy. Picking up its cues from the surrounding warehouse district, the project employs masonry construction, simple forms, and large, square-paned expanses of glass to extend the newly created upscale district's sense of place.



Johnson Street Townhouse offers a strong presence on its residential street. Photo courtesy of the architect.

Park West Condominiums, Charlotte, by David Furman Architecture



Park West employs varied massing to break up the bulk of 30 units on a 1.8-acre site. Photo © Tim Buchman.

For the Park West Condominiums project in Charlotte, David Furman Architecture set out to "create as many units as straightforward and affordable as possible on a 1.8-acre site." Working at a density of 16.6 units per acre, they were able to fit 30 units (ranging from 1,050 to 1,400 square feet) on a site that sits behind a street-front development on a major traffic corridor.

Varied massing, in the form of two- and three-story pods, adds interest to the projects and allows the range in the units' sizes. Open plans for the interiors and wood siding and details on the outside give a feeling of space and visual interest. The architect reports that "the unique aesthetic, affordable pricing, and in-fill location resulted in a quick sell-out."

The jury particularly liked the privacy, exterior places, parking, and scale of the unit plans. "This project shows that there are alternative solutions," they said. "This is anything but your typical garden apartment!"

Radford Court Apartments, Seattle, by Mithun



Radford Courts, a village for married students, shares community facilities with the surrounding neighborhood. Photo © www.DougScott.com.

Architect Mithun faced two major challenges as they set out to design Seattle's Radford Court Apartments containing 400 units of affordable housing for married students: a resistant neighborhood and a steep-sloped site. The architect suc-

cessfully replaced 22 acres' worth of World War II military housing (turned student housing) into a series of "neighborhoods," saving 70 percent of the property's trees while doubling the density. The architects report they paid particular attention to "traffic patterns, pedestrian paths, bicycle usage, and mass-transit opportunities to foster a family-oriented community." "This is a difficult site with an orderly insertion; it works well with grade and creates a sense of place," the jury acknowledged.

The overall project appealed to the jury members, who cited the "village atmosphere with walking paths and parking," as well as the "inventive use of materials, colors, shapes, in a modest scale." The neighborhood residents have also come to welcome the project, perhaps especially its public central area that offers a campus green, a community center, and daycare facilities for the children of students.

Victoria Townhomes, Seattle, by Mithun

"This urban infill offers an incredibly comfortable addition, said the awards jury of the Victoria Townhomes in Seattle, by Mithun. "It manages the public edge with privacy—and offers a well modulated urban scale." From the start, the project required creative solutions from the architect and a need to work closely with the local design review board and surrounding neighbors. It was paired with the renovation of a historic neighborhood's turn-of-the-century apartment building into condos, which in itself required 60 additional parking spaces. The plans called for a partially buried,

two-level parking garage with the Victoria Townhomes project above.

Working closely with the review process and all the neighborhood players, the architect was able to obtain all the major variances necessary to complete the project (which under existing code would have required two buildings). Careful use of materials and contextual forms—such as sharply pitched roofs—gained neighborhood support. Each of the 2,200-square-foot townhouses has an individual stair up from the garage and a gated entry at



Victoria Townhomes, built over a two-level garage, live harmoniously with their neighbor, a restored, turn-of-the-century apartment building. Photo © Robert Pisano.

street level. The jury was attracted to the forest-green coloring and the "almost whimsical steeply pitched roofs—almost like a fairytale land."

Community Design

Howard University-LeDroit Park Revitalization Initiative, Washington, D.C., by Sorg and Associates PC

The awards jury pronounced the LeDroit Park Revitalization Initiative, Washington, D.C., by Sorg and Associates PC, a "100 percent improvement . . . because the original site was so neglected—and the architect's accomplishment is so above the ordinary." The project addresses the National Historic Landmark District of LeDroit Park. Established in 1873 as a gated "whites only" community, it became a thriving African American neighborhood in the 1920s and has been a neighborhood in decline since World War II.

Sorg's phenomenal plan addresses three levels:

- Streetscape—began modestly to address repairs such as fixing sidewalks and streetlights, the plan expanded into many special elements that would celebrate African American history, including a new "Jazz Walk" at Howard University Theatre, street memorials dedicated to the neighborhood's distinguished residents, and recreation use around the landmark McMillan Reservoir
- Land Use—emphasizing new commercial opportunities, such



Suman Sorg, FAIA, made her vision of beautifully restored housing in Washington, D.C.'s LeDroit Park a reality. Photos © Hoachlander Davis Photography.



as the first national African American Museum

- Housing—restoring 28 historic houses and constructing 17 new houses on vacant sites.

At the housing level, the jury complimented

the architect's balance between sensitivity to the existing neighborhood and design originality. They further remarked on the award submission's "extraordinarily beautiful presentation materials."

WaterColor, Watercolor, Fla., by Cooper, Robertson & Partners with associate architects Looney Ricks Kiss

WaterColor, designed by Cooper Robertson & Partners with associate architects Looney Ricks Kiss, is situated near Seaside, Fla. When selecting it for an award, the jury declared that they were "tipping our hat to the New Urbanism." They applauded the fully integrated community, calling it "elegant and well-thought out." WaterColor, a vacation home spot initially, is designed to evolve into a year-round community. Thus, its master plan calls for retail, office, and community-service buildings.



WaterColor, Seaside's new neighbor, has aspirations to grow from a vacation place to a year-round community. Photo © Arvida.

WaterColor makes good use of its natural bounty and "celebrates its natural qualities—trees, plants, marshes, and varied water systems, as well as its resident fauna." Like its neighboring predecessor, WaterColor strives to accommodate pedestrian-oriented streets and sidewalks and incorporates residential elements depicting "the most beloved aspects of American towns," from porches to public squares. WaterColor also strives to connect to older neighboring communities, creating what the architects call "logical extensions of one another rather than separate or mutually exclusive precincts." The jury agreed. "We appreciate the interconnectivity with Seaside," they said. "This project delivers what was promised in the developer-builder scenario."

continued

Innovation Design

House at Santa Barbara, Montecito, Calif., by Barton Myers Associates Inc.

Barton Myers Associates Inc. explains that the design for the House at Santa Barbara, Montecito, Calif., had a twofold objective: first to "create a sustainable environment that would preserve and enhance the natural landscape of the site" and, second, to "further the architect's earlier explorations in steel housing, in which industrial materials are used in a new context." The project consists of four freestanding steel loft buildings—the studio, main residence, garage, and guesthouse—on three terraces that climb the site.

The structures virtually eliminate the need for mechanical cooling with their overhang roofs and natural ventilation courtesy of overhead clerestories and doors. Insulated, industrial coiling doors do their part to keep the interiors comfortable. These doors, plus evaporative-cooling roof ponds, offer fire protection so necessary to California's canyon country. The roof ponds cascade into one another and into ground-level troughs via a recirculating pump system so that "the sight and sound of the water echoes the continuously flowing creek that shares the site with the house," the jury noted. "Its great use of materials and an incredible site make it easy to like. The architect chose the perfect plot on the site to nestle in."



The House at Santa Monica gracefully combines an industrial aesthetic with energy-conserving features, such as natural ventilation and a series of evaporative-cooling roof ponds, to virtually eliminate the need for airconditioning.

Photo © Grant Mudford.