

Good Design for Everyone



Marvin Rand / Courtesy Pugh + Scarpa

While affordable housing remains perilously scarce throughout California, there's a crop of extraordinary projects by respected architects that could set a new national standard. The designers include Michael Maltzan, Daly Genik, Koning Eizenberg, and Kanner Architects in Los Angeles, and Pyatok, David Baker + Partners, Paulett Taggart, Leddy Maytum Stacy, and Anne Phillips in the Bay Area. These architects have created humane, light-filled buildings with private living spaces and generous courtyards that provide both intimacy and a sense of community.

Beyond the familiar (and always admirable) motivations of social responsibility and pressing need, many of these designers are entering this complex field for a more unexpected reason: as an outlet for creativity. Innovative clients like the Skid Row Housing Trust in Los Angeles and the Citizens Housing Corporation in San Francisco have also discovered that good contemporary architecture can help attract funding and pave the way in neighborhoods that might have shunned them otherwise. "It's hard to be afraid of something that looks so nice," said Mike Alvidrez, executive director of Skid Row Housing Trust, whose organization has built 20 projects in LA since 1989.

In San Francisco, nonprofit developers and architects have been able to encourage middle and higher income residents to live alongside lower income housing in spite of little profit and a constant struggle to balance low budgets with very specific requirements. But they all agree it is worth it. According to LA architect Larry Scarpa, "It is hard, and it does wear on me," he said. "It's just a piece of what we should all do."

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David Baker + Partners Architects



Courtesy David Baker + Partners Architects



FOLSOM DORE SUPPORTIVE APARTMENTS

SOUTH OF MARKET SAN FRANCISCO

2005

David Baker + Partners Architects partnered with nonprofit developer Citizens Housing Corporation and designed 98 units of affordable housing with several ground-floor areas for social services and casework spaces.

The building is located in a San Francisco neighborhood dominated by low-lying warehouses and industrial red brick facades. Residents range from tech workers making \$65,000 a year to the formerly homeless living on subsidies from various government and nonprofit groups. The architects chose to celebrate that diversity with bold colors and forms. Orange and other hues demarcate the stairways and corridors, making them appealing and easy to navigate.

Folsom Dore is also a green building and was recently recognized with a LEED Silver rating. To preserve air quality, the architects chose low-VOC paints as well as formaldehyde-free cabinetry. Corridors open to the outdoors, and the building has a rooftop photovoltaic system, energy-efficient central water heating, a well-insulated building envelope, and energy-efficient windows.