Reweave the Urban Fabric

Create, repair, and enhance connections within existing neighborhoods.

Bridging a residential-industrial divide, this bright new LEED Gold neighborhood replaces decrepit public housing, an abandoned pasta factory, and defunct train tracks.

Tassafaronga Village, 2010
Oakland, California
167 affordable apartments and townhouses

An urban freeway collapse and removal left behind a scar of damaged lots. Contextual urban housing with pedestrian-friendly retail helps heal the fractured area.

300 Ivy Street, 2014
San Francisco, California
63 affordable and market-rate apartments

Isolated local amenities—such as the library, school, and park—were connected by new landscaped paths and traffic-calmed roads.

Housing and services revive a disused industrial block near a transit line with access to downtown. Mid-block passages add gathering spaces and safe pedestrian connections.

Armstrong Place, 2010
San Francisco, California
116 affordable senior apartments and 124 family townhomes

9 Ways to Build Community with Urban Housing

David Baker Architects
Design a bold and interesting shape that defines the building.

A strong architectural form lends a building a sense of place and character without needing to rely on materials.

A three-story portal frames access to the plaza, playground, and residential entryway.

Station Center Family Housing, 2012
Union City, California
157 affordable family apartments

An elliptical tower with a ground-floor café space transforms the narrowest corner of the site into a dramatic point of entry.

888 Seventh Street, 2012
San Francisco, California
224 affordable and market-rate flats and townhomes

This building “steps down” toward the adjacent lake, easing a transition between existing high-rises and low-scale residences and creating space for a fifth-level community suite with panoramic views.

Lakeside Senior Apartments, 2014
Oakland, California
92 affordable apartments for low-income and homeless seniors
Concentrate premium materials at points of shared enjoyment. Keep it simple everywhere else.

A swooping corner volume clad in metal and wood defines the building, while basic materials make up the bulk of the construction.

- Textured concrete – $25/sf
- Ipe tropical hardwood – $50/sf
- Rheinzink – $75/sf
- Stucco – $18/sf

Richardson Apartments, 2011
San Francisco, California
120 affordable studios for homeless individuals

The “80-20 Rule”: Build 80% of the design with economical, durable, and low-maintenance materials. Create impact with 20% high-end finishes.

A rich copper ($75/sf) and hardwood ($50/sf) entry and custom planter create focal points at the center of an otherwise straightforward construction of stucco ($18/sf) and fiber-cement panels ($30/sf).

Fillmore Park, 2013
San Francisco, California
32 affordable homes for first-time buyers

Hand-cut boulders ($150/sf) highlight a predominantly concrete ($9/sf) plaza. A custom Cor-Ten steel stair tower ($75/sf) sets off the corner of this stucco ($18/sf) building.

The Rivermark, 2015
West Sacramento, California
70 affordable family apartments
Energize the streetscape with a generous, mixed-use ground floor.

Setting the building back creates more room for community. This recessed ground floor and widened sidewalk combine to feature a vibrant restaurant (Monsieur Benjamin, designed by Aidlin Darling), street seating, bicycle parking, and plantings.

300 Ivy Street, 2014
San Francisco, California
63 affordable and market-rate apartments

Activate the Edges

Residential stoops create direct and lively connections to the neighborhood on all sides of the building.

300 Ivy Street, 2014
San Francisco, California
63 affordable and market-rate apartments

Prioritizing active uses like shops, stoops, and seating—rather than blank walls and garage façades—keeps the surrounding sidewalks safe and engaging.

A public plaza linking the sidewalk with the community room creates a flexible, multi-use space for the larger neighborhood.

The Rivermark, 2015
West Sacramento, California
70 affordable family apartments
Set a positive tone with a bright and engaging entryway.

Be Welcoming

A glass and steel gate balances security and transparency. Planters extend outward toward the public realm.

300 Ivy Street, 2014
San Francisco, California
65 affordable and market-rate apartments

A transparent lobby provides a peek into the life of the building and the central courtyard beyond.

Bayview Hill Gardens, 2013
San Francisco, California
73 affordable apartments for homeless families

An illuminated artisan gate opens into a “decompression garden”, a quiet green space for transitioning between the gritty city street and home.

8th & Howard/SOMA Studios, 2003
San Francisco, California
162 supportive studios and affordable family apartments

Set away from the busy corner, this entry provides an accessible “front porch” for the building.

Bayview Hill Gardens, 2013
San Francisco, California
73 affordable apartments for homeless families
Place compatible uses together to add convenience and support social encounters.

Cultivate Connection

Connecting high-use spaces creates opportunities for chance meetings, decreasing isolation. Thoughtful adjacencies make daily life easier.

A multipurpose community room opens widely onto the central courtyard, which offers bicycle parking, seating, a grill, and access to the community kitchen, laundry room, resident lounge, and on-site counseling clinic.

Richardson Apartments, 2011
San Francisco, California
120 affordable studios for homeless individuals

Flexible spaces support a wide range of activities. Here, residents gather after a cooking class in the community kitchen while kids play.

The Rivermark, 2015
West Sacramento, California
167 affordable family apartments
Bring light and fresh air into hallways and stairs to connect with nature and encourage walking.

“Green” stairs and other outdoor circulation connect the building entry, apartments, and open spaces.

Ample glazing and transparent walls bring in natural light from all directions.

Richardson Apartments, 2011
San Francisco, California
120 affordable studios for homeless individuals

Breezeways provide sheltered passage throughout the building, and balconies and patios connect directly to the courtyard.

La Valentina Station, 2012
Sacramento, California
63 affordable family apartments

Open-air stairs and corridors entice residents away from the elevator and offer views out to the surrounding area.

The Rivermark, 2015
West Sacramento, California
70 affordable family apartments

Enlightened Circulation
Reflect the character of the community and offer opportunities for expression.

Basketry from Botswana inspired the window graphics for this new building in a predominantly African-American neighborhood.

Bay-view Hill Gardens, 2013
San Francisco, California
75 affordable apartments for homeless families

Front-door photo shelves and lobby display areas allow residents to make their mark.

Lakeside Senior Apartments, 2014
Oakland, California
92 affordable apartments for low-income and homeless seniors

To honor the history of the site, this courtyard is “wrapped” with a “quilt wall” inspired by West African textiles and oversized adinkra symbols (signifying wisdom, unity, and security).

Armstrong Senior Housing, 2010
San Francisco, California
116 affordable apartments for seniors

Individual garden plots give residents a chance to grow their own food and get their hands dirty.

Curran House, 2005
San Francisco, California
67 affordable family apartments

Get Personal
Use artwork to invigorate common spaces, help with way-finding, and create a strong visual identity.

A licensing partnership with Creativity Explored—a non-profit studio for developmentally disabled artists—makes dramatic, large-scale works affordable.

Bayview Hill Gardens, 2013
San Francisco, California
73 affordable apartments for homeless families

A four-story “shield” sculpture inspired by fractal geometry adds texture to the residential entryway.

Bayview Hill Gardens, 2013
San Francisco, California
73 affordable apartments for homeless families

“Taking Root”—a towering mural created by artist Mona Caron with help from building residents—blooms in the public entry plaza.

Station Center Family Housing, 2012
Union City, California
157 affordable family apartments

An existing mosaic mural on the adjacent structure was preserved, framed by the courtyard, and showcased for the enjoyment of all.

Richardson Apartments, 2011
San Francisco, California
120 affordable studios for homeless individuals

Art for All