

MULTI-HOUSING NEWS

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Building Trendy in the 'Burbs

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Looking for ways to combat suburban sprawl, developers are bringing to market creative, high-density communities in mature suburban locations across the United States. From townhomes to mixed-use apartments to "Big House" designs, new developments are offering residents a rich variety of stylish housing options outside of city limits. Here are case studies of three recent projects that stand out for their designs and innovative use of land—resulting in apartment communities whose appeal rivals that of any single-family home.

City Embraces "Double Density" Due to Striking Design

When it comes to the density a suburban city will allow, a daring design

can make all the difference in the world. Case in point: Waterford Place, the \$125 million mixed-use development that Shea Properties opened in late 2003 in the City of Dublin, an East Bay suburb of San Francisco.

The development, which blends 390 apart-



Chic suburban developments, such as these townhomes, mixed-use apartments and Big House designs, are cropping up around the country.



ments and 125,000 square feet of grocery-anchored retail space, sits on land that was originally entitled for a 16-acre shopping center. But after some extensive studies, Shea, based in Aliso Viejo, Calif., concluded the area would not really support such a large, retail-only project.

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Building in the 'Burbs

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for, but Harwick found a way around the obstacle. "Density and unit-size challenges were overcome by using a very efficient building module; we tried to keep the amount of unit types to a minimum," Harwick explained.

The property features individually plotted townhomes that are part of larger, four- to six-unit buildings. "By doing that, it became a much more efficient plan, and we were able to squeeze it all on one site," Harwick said.

One of Puls' recommendations included that ZOM look at a two-story site plan rather than a three-story one. Although a three-story approach would obviously allow for more density, Puls predicted that the older demographic prevalent throughout Prestonwood would be more likely to accept the two-story walk-up.

In something of a compromise on this question, the townhomes are predominantly two stories with a third-story loft element found in some. In another nod to the lifestyle preferences of the likely residents, the architects designed many of the two- to four-bedroom floorplans, which average 1,680 square feet, with

a first-floor master bedroom to accommodate those empty nesters who want the convenience of basically living on just the ground floor with guest rooms above.

To add diversity to the townhomes exterior, architects embellished elevations with elements such as a window in some kitchens or a bay projection on some buildings. "The idea was to make it more distinct for the individuals so every townhome wouldn't be the same," Harwick said.

The individually plotted townhomes also allow ZOM to easily convert the community to a for-sale product whenever practical—a time Puls opined might be now, considering the success of higher priced townhomes in the area. "It appears to us there is a good probability to convert the property to for-sale townhomes, and I am suggesting that it might be that time right this second," Puls said.

Creeks, Contours and Competing with Single Family

Whoever said multifamily can't compete head-to-head with single-family homes? In the Cincinnati suburb of Montgomery, Ohio, Apartment Investment and Management Co. (AIMCO) is proving it can.

After a tornado tore through a community owned and operated by AIMCO here in 2002, redevelopment of the site was inevitable. "When I looked at the site after the tornado went through and realized we couldn't fix what was there, the idea was to tear it down and build new," said Joe DeTuno, executive vice president of redevelopment for AIMCO. "And realizing that we were in the middle of a very high-end community, I wanted to put in a higher-end product there as well."

DeTuno set out to match the quality of the buildings to be erected by AIMCO to that of the neighborhood's single-family homes, which average about \$500,000. Having just completed a community in Chandler, Ariz. using Humphreys & Partners LP's Big House design, DeTuno concluded that was the best route to go.

"The idea was to create a neighborhood, not just an apartment complex with a sea of parking and no relationship to anything," DeTuno said. "So what we did was adapt the Big House concept to fit this neighborhood."



Apartments in Glenbridge Manors, a new 290-unit community in the Cincinnati suburb of Montgomery, are located in large single-family-like structures characteristic of Humphreys & Partners' Big House design concept.

The 290-unit Glenbridge Manors, comprised of 10- and 13-unit buildings scattered across nearly 26 acres, is Cincinnati's first Big House community. This, according to Mark Humphreys, CEO of Humphreys & Partners, has given AIMCO a real competitive advantage.

"This property is different from any other product out there," Humphreys said. "When a prospective renter-by-choice—a person who can definitely qualify for a home, but just doesn't want to buy one—goes out and looks at other apartment projects in the market, there will be few that have attached one- and two-car garages, island kitchens, 11-foot-deep walk-in closets and all the amenities that you would find in a single-family home."

While the developers wanted a community that could compete with single-family homes, they also wanted one with a fair degree of density. But one of the biggest challenges they had to overcome on the planning and designing front was the topography of the site, which has a lot of contours and a creek running through it.

To maximize density, the decision was made to use a two-three-split design. In other words, buildings along the creek were built to three stories on the creek side and two stories on the front of the building—providing four additional units per building at those locations. As a result, the project was able to hit 11 units per acre—less than ideal, but enough to satisfy AIMCO.

Initially, the surrounding community did express concern about what would be replacing the destroyed design community. But the upscale design plans quickly won their support.

"Once we showed the community the design, they realized that this was a benefit to them rather than a detriment," DeTuno said. They recog-

nized, according to DeTuno, that Glenbridge Manors was clearly a high-quality, class A community of predominantly two-story buildings: much more desirable than what was situated on the site before, a nearly 40-year old complex of four- to six-story, brick walk-ups.

At a construction price of \$61 per square foot, the community cost little more than an average apartment property, according to Humphreys. "The Big House design is very economical to build because it is designed somewhat like a

breezeway, where units are back to back and all the plumbing stacks," he said. "The difference is that in a breezeway, you have to build an eight-foot wide, 60-foot long breezeway for the stairs twice on each building. We don't have that here."

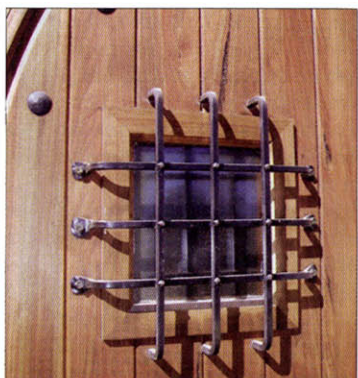
The Big House takes that common area and divides it between all the units, allowing apartments in Glenbridge Manors to average from 629 square feet for a one-bedroom to 1,518 square feet for a three-bedroom unit. In fact, the only aspect of the development that proved costly was the garages. "Each garage in a Big House such as this costs about \$4,000 or \$5,000," Humphreys said.

Moreover, Humphreys is confident that Glenbridge Manors is doing well with the female demographic—which he specifically designed the community to appeal to.

"We targeted the design to women, who we believe are the primary decision-makers on where families are going to live—at least if men are smart," he quipped. "Women generally are more cognizant of what makes for a better floorplan and an acceptable home. So we designed for them."

And the community is doing quite well on the leasing front. After opening in late 2003, the units—priced from \$685 to \$1,580—are receiving ample attention from prospective residents, 60 to 70 percent of whom are homebuyer qualified.

"This project underscores the invalidity of the myth that you can't compete against single-family homes. So many developers are building old style apartments and complaining they are losing their tenants to homes—well there's no wonder," said Humphreys. "I don't believe that Glenbridge Manors is an apartment; we provided a home." ■



Distinctive accents add a unique touch to the building interiors and exterior elevations of the Estancia Townhomes in North Dallas.