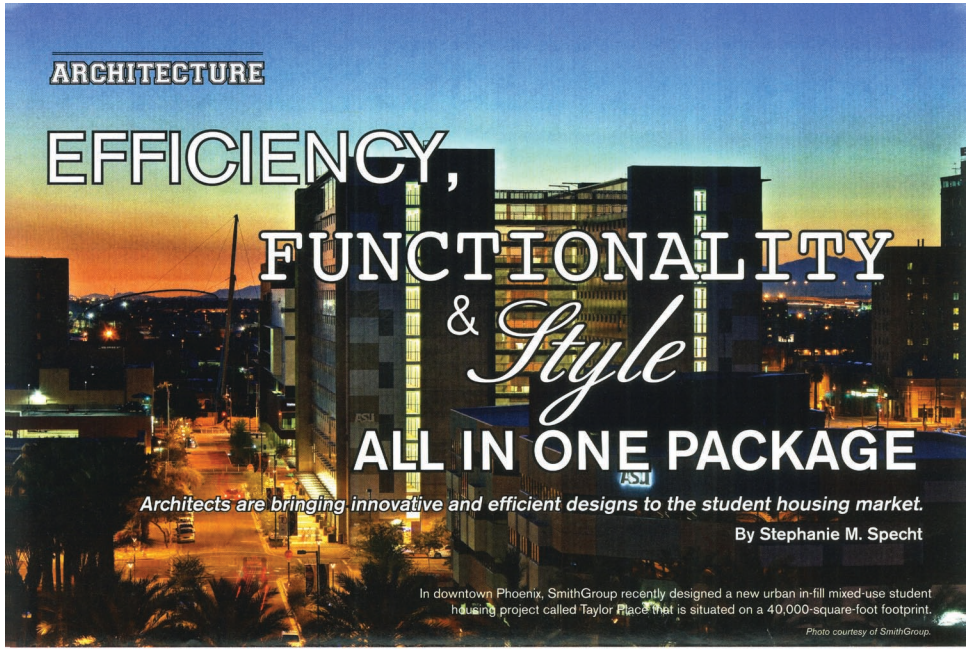
EFFICIENCY, FUNCTIONALITY & *Style* ALL IN ONE PACKAGE



Architects are bringing innovative and efficient designs to the student housing market.

By Stephanie M. Specht

In downtown Phoenix, SmithGroup recently designed a new urban in-fill mixed-use student housing project called Taylor Place that is situated on a 40,000-square-foot footprint.

Photo courtesy of SmithGroup.

Efficiency, functionality and style have all moved to the forefront when it comes to designing student housing in today's market. However, as developers contend with increasing land and construction costs, the most efficient and best use of each site has become imperative. So, how do student housing developers bring a stylish and functional product to the market that is also efficient and affordable? They start at the source — the architect.

Today, architects are meeting the needs in the market and bringing their most innovative designs to student housing developers. Many are taking cues from market rate apartment projects that are being built in urban centers throughout the U.S. After working on several urban, mixed-use residential developments, Robert Weeks and Richard Wilden of Cleveland, Ohio-based ka Architects designed a prototype called University Village that utilized some of the very same design aspects that had worked for their most successful designs.

"At ka we were doing a lot of market rate housing and in looking at what was done traditionally for student housing, we thought that there were better ways to do it," says Wilden. "We used all of the lessons that we have learned from market rate housing to make a better student housing model."

For example, Wilden and Weeks used multiple design characteristics from a recent urban infill project, Velocity in the Gulch, for the new prototype. The mixed-use project in Nashville, Tennessee, was being marketed to urban-minded professionals, so it needed to be stylish and functional; however, because of the odd-shaped 3-acre site situated in Nashville's urban core, the development also had to be extremely efficient and cost effective.

"Despite the small lot size, the land costs require that you still put a lot on that site," explains Weeks.

For this particular scenario, Weeks explains that ka utilized a podium building design to create efficient layouts and maximize space. A podium building features a concrete structure on the first floor and the remaining floors are constructed of wood. To maximize space, the first floor will house a different use than the remaining floors, retail space in the case of Velocity in the Gulch.

"A podium building is the kind of building that you want to deploy on a site where your land costs are high because you can do more things with it," says Weeks. "It provides a pretty efficient model for proforma."

Through such specific techniques, ka was able to include 268 residential units, a 145,000-square-foot parking structure, and 21,000 square feet of retail space within five stories.

Utilizing the podium building concept as a base, Weeks and Wilden designed the University Village prototype for use in just about any type of site or any market. Essentially, the prototype can work with any variables that a developer might have to contend with.

"One of the drivers behind the design was the flexibility. That is why we call it a prototype because we saw a lot of opportunity in denser urban sites near campuses where this design prototype would fit very well," Wilden says.

Weeks explains that flexibility is incredibly important because the student housing market is constantly shifting as new materials and trends hit the market. The prototype features a modular approach to make it efficient, but this approach also keeps it from looking repetitive or cookie cutter, and it allows for changes down the road.

"I think the key behind it was to try to strike a really good balance between efficiency, affordability and flexibility," says Wilden.

And while the cost and efficiency often results in smaller unit sizes, the elevated design helps disguise the size and makes a project extremely marketable.

"The University Village prototype design lends itself to higher ceilings, lots of windows, clean detailing and modern materials, all things that make the space very appealing and seem bigger than it is," says Wilden. "Again, that seems to resonate in the market rate housing field as well as student housing."

Humphreys & Partners Architects, an architectural and urban design, master planning and land-planning firm headquartered in Dallas, is also taking cues from its own residential projects. In 2007, the firm created the e-Urban, a revolutionary design concept for market rate apartment buildings. According to Mark Humphreys, CEO of Humphreys & Partners Architects, the new concept was created as a solution to increasing land and construction costs. It was designed to get the most efficient use out of a site's footprint, save money and also provide an attractive, high quality and revenue-producing product.

The e-Urban concept reduces the amount of common space, such as long hallways, and creates more efficient floorplans that allow for more units per acre. This results in a proficient building that costs less to build per square foot, lowers overall operating costs and allows for more units per acre. In addition, there is generally enough space left over on the site to build surface parking rather than the more costly alternative, structured parking.

"We found that we could do 40 to 50 units more per acre without a parking garage. We could do surface parking instead," explains Humphreys. "We eliminated 50,000 square feet of hallways, which is probably around $3.5 to $4 million and we eliminated a $3.5 to $4 million parking garage, a huge savings."

ARCHITECTURE

Photo courtesy of Humphreys & Partners Architects.

Construction was recently completed on Canopy Apartments in Gainesville, Florida. The three-story e-Urban Student concept with surface parking includes 240 units/770 beds, an average of 45 beds per acre.

Humphreys adds, "If you are eliminating half of your common area, approximately 50,000 square feet on a normal sized project, your operating costs go way down because you don't have to light that space, you don't have to clean that space and you don't have to air condition that space. That is a huge drop in your operating costs, which is environmentally important and is good for the operator of the property."

The concept has been extremely successful for multifamily developers and not long after introducing the e-Urban for market rate apartments, Humphreys received calls from two student housing clients looking for a solution to decreasing costs. The plans for each development called for 60 to 62 beds per acre with a parking garage, but the numbers just did not work. Both developers asked Humphreys if he could utilize his e-Urban design for student housing to yield 60 to 62 beds per acre but allow for surface parking rather than structured parking. Humphreys created the e-Urban Student design concept and was able to get 90 beds per acre with surface parking for each developer, an incredible savings and greatly increased efficiency and rentable space.

ARCHITECTURE

Rendering courtesy of ka Inc.

ka Inc.'s University Village prototype is designed to go in urban areas.

Photo courtesy of Humphreys & Partners Architects.

Centennial Campus Housing in Raleigh, North Carolina, features one-, two- and three-bedroom units with a total of 326 total units, which equals to 33 units per acre. The units range in size from 568 square feet to 1267 square feet.

Several e-Urban Student projects have already been completed or are underway across the U.S. Construction was recently completed on Canopy Apartments in Gainesville, Florida. The three-story e-Urban Student concept with surface parking includes 240 units/770 beds, an average of 45 beds per acre. The Canopy offers two-, three- and four-bedroom units that average 1,326 square feet. The three-story building also features surface parking.

Heritage Square at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, features 374 beds on 3.66 acres, yielding

102 beds per acre. This four-story e-Urban concept is a podium design with surface parking that features one-, three- and four-bedroom units that range from 518 to 1,321 square feet. Heritage Square also features 3,500 square feet of retail space.

Rebel Place at the University of Las Vegas, contains 156 student apartments units on 5.4 acres, totaling 480 beds. The complex offers two-, three- and four-bedroom units that average 816 to 1,368 square feet. The e-Urban Student design concept utilized at this site allows for 90 beds and 29 units per acre.

Centennial Campus Housing in Raleigh, North Carolina, features one-, two- and three-bedroom units with a total of 326 total units, which equals to 33 units per acre. The units range in size from 568 square feet to 1267 square feet.

"I believe that we are in a new paradigm, and because of that housing has to change," says Humphreys. "That is why we are doing this concept."

In downtown Phoenix, SmithGroup, an architecture and engineering firm, recently designed a new urban in-fill mixed-use student housing project — Taylor Place. Situated on a 40,000-square-foot footprint, the firm needed to make the most of the site by bringing form, function and multiple uses into play.

Photo courtesy of Humphreys & Partners Architects.

Rebel Place at the University of Las Vegas, contains 156 student apartments units on 5.4 acres, totaling 480 beds.

The result of SmithGroup's efficient design is a new 352,000-square-foot, mixed-use structure that features two 13-story towers of residential student housing, a dining hall, 11,000 square feet of retail space that is open to students and the general public at street level and a variety of student amenities at each level. Taylor Place was developed by Capstone Development Corp., and is one of the anchor buildings on the Downtown Phoenix campus for Arizona State University.

"By putting retail and public interaction spaces on the ground floor of this mixed-use building, and the living areas on the floors above, the site was maximized to its fullest potential," says Mark Kranz, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, design principal for SmithGroup.

Tower One is designed for first year students in a two-bed-per-room format, while Tower Two is designed for non-freshmen with a private, one-bed-per-room arrangement.

ARCHITECTURE

Photo courtesy of Humphreys & Partners Architects.

Heritage Square at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, features 374 beds on 3.66 acres, yielding 102 beds per acre.

Photo courtesy of SmithGroup.

Taylor Place was developed by Capstone Development Corp., and is one of the anchor buildings on the Downtown Phoenix campus for Arizona State University. Pictured is the dining hall.

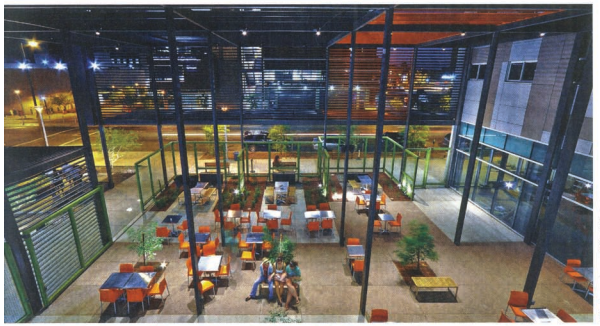


Photo courtesy of SmithGroup.

Taylor Place in Phoenix is the result of SmithGroup's efficient design. The complex is a new 352,000-square-foot, mixed-use structure that features two 13-story towers of residential student housing, a dining hall, 11,000 square feet of retail space that is open to students and the general public at street level and a variety of student amenities at each level.

Tower One will accommodate 744 beds with the option to have one or two students per room. Tower Two offers 540 beds designed for two students in a suite, each with their own room. Each unit in both towers has access to an HVAC unit with a thermostat and bathroom. Each floor of the two towers is connected by an open-air bridge and incorporates outdoor student spaces as part of the overall design. Tower One also features a two-story, enclosed student lounge providing a panoramic view of the Phoenix skyline and South Mountain.

However, it is not just about creating an efficient design to fit as many beds as possible, the SmithGroup was able to use the space so efficiently that they were able to incorporate a multitude of amenities for a comfortable, active and cohesive student environment.

"Taylor Place is an urban response to student housing, infused with unprecedented amenities for downtown student housing," says Kranz.

Unique amenities for students include an outdoor shade garden that is open to both students and the public, an on-site fitness center is located on the second floor, and a cafeteria that is also open to the public is located on the ground-floor. Students also have access to special 'pods' located on the bridges that connect the two towers. These quiet spaces offer a place for students to study and enjoy the weather. A Starbucks on the corner is another perk for students in this mixed-use building. The mixed-use nature of Taylor Place was designed to integrate the students with the rest of the population downtown; however, security was important to the university and the developer as well.

"The goal was to merge students with the public but provide a level of protection at the same time," says Kranz.

In order to allow for a certain level of integration, but also keep students safe, Taylor Place has 24-hour security, card readers and it incorporates glass into the design to embrace a high level of transparency. The shade garden remains open during the day but is locked at night, and the public is only permitted on the ground floor with the student spaces on floors two through 13.

"Taylor Place is the epitome of sustainable, technologically advanced urban student living. This isn't your parents' dorm room, as the adage goes," says Kranz. "Arizona State University's Downtown Campus, which Taylor Place is a part of, is unique in that three major campus buildings are located within blocks of this student housing building. Students are being lured by the amenities, openness and vibrancy of this facility, and are excited about living in the downtown core."

In terms of student housing, today's architects are creating endless possibilities that are not only eye-catching but also efficient, functional and affordable. **SHB**