



photos by Steve Keating

The nine-acre, 241-unit complex consists of 18 low-rise buildings, courtyards and play areas.

Affordable Housing Renews Hope For L.A. Residents

by Lynn Sharer

Strathern Park Apartments, an in-fill affordable housing project located in Sun Valley, almost didn't happen. Yet after five years of planning and development, Strathern Park Apartments has survived sure defeat and beaten the odds.

The project was originally sited for market-rate apartments. But after a key lender backed out because of a nearby shooting, developer Tom Safran & Associates had to seek governmental and private funding to continue the project. "To create this

complex, we assembled nine parcels and a variety of financing and subsidy programs," said Tom Safran.

Safran was able to get funding and continue the project as a low-income development. Funds came from HUD (\$5 million), the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (\$10 million), and various private institutions.

The complex was built on nine acres of land, formerly occupied by several abandoned single-family houses that vagrants had converted into a "tent city."

The 241-unit apartment complex consists of 18 low-rise buildings, and

was conceived as a composition of "internal neighborhoods." The buildings surround landscaped courtyards dotted with large pepper trees. The gated project includes a large recreational area, laundry facilities, benches, barbecues and a library. The complex was designed without interior hallways in order to discourage possible troublemakers from congregating.

Those associated with Strathern Park say the project has had some interesting immediate effects; all units were rented within the first day of leasing, and the project has exerted a positive influence on the

surrounding neighborhood. Now, one year later, the \$25 million project has a waiting list of more than 5,000 prospective tenants.

"Residents love this place," said Philip Eddy, resident manager. "Other buildings in the area are run-down, abused, broken into. But we seem to be a model for the good that can happen."

David Ferguson, project manager for the developer, classified the development as "a soft environment, with lots of trees and places for families and friends to gather." He also pointed out that exterior features of the project sets it apart from others in the neighborhood. "The wood shingles are inviting and a real contrast to the stark hard-edged kind of architecture you usually see in an inner-city situation."

Another important element of the project is a focus on openness. "We tried to place an emphasis on light and air," said Safran. Features which maximize the airy effect include vaulted ceilings and off-white and neutral interior colors.

Strathern Park not only survived its shaky start, but went on to claim some prestigious industry awards. At the 1992 Pacific Coast Builders Conference, Strathern Park won a Gold Nugget Grand Award for "Best Affordable Housing Development (Attached)" and a Gold Nugget Merit Award for "Best Apartment Project (1 to 2 Stories)."

Project architects, Withee-

Malcolm Partnership, had the tough job of creating an architectural plan that would work with a limited amount of space. They were able to place 28 units per acre on a total of 8.6 acres, while giving the project a roomy feeling. Sizes of the floorplans range from 605 square feet to 1,420 square feet, and prices start at \$340 to \$571.

"The goal of everyone associated with the project was to create a desirable, secure place for people to live at a very modest cost," said Dan Withee, partner of Withee-Malcolm.

They also emphasized exterior and interior storage, such as large closets, decks and patios.

Withee sees Strathern Park as a model for future affordable housing projects. "Based upon the responses

from the tenants and the building industry, we think there are other opportunities for creating this kind of housing. As the realization grows that aesthetically pleasing housing can be a building block to creating good neighborhoods, we may well see a renaissance in well-designed architecture for the common man."

According to everyone involved with Strathern Park, the project is a symbol of victory and has renewed hope for low-income residents in the Los Angeles area.



"We seem to be a model for the good that can happen."

*--Philip Eddy
Resident Manager*

Project Team:

Developer:

Tom Safran & Associates

Architect:

Withee-Malcolm Partnership,
Architects

Contractor:

Strathern Park Builders

Landscape Architect:

Slimocosky & Associates

Structural Engineer:

Born & Associates

Specifications:

Density:

27.8 DU/acre

Construction Cost:

\$46/square foot

Roofing:

Celotex

Siding:

Shakertown

HVAC:

Carrier

Insulation:

Manville

Paint:

Dunn-Edwards Paint

Ceramic Tile:

Dal-Tile

Vinyl Flooring:

Armstrong

Exterior Doors:

Therma-Tru

Windows:

Sunair Aluminum Corp.

Locksets:

Schlage

Tubs:

HessCo

Bath Sinks:

Kilgore

Faucets:

Delta

Countertops:

Wilsonart

Kitchen Appliances:

General Electric