

# Los Angeles Times

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DAILY 36c  
DESIGNATED AREA HIGH-RATE

## REAL ESTATE

### DESIGN

**Continued from K1**  
Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency to achieve a complex that could set a high standard for future projects of this kind.

MOCA's contribution was to sponsor a competition for the project among three leading avant-garde architectural firms. The CRA provided the Hollywood site and a low-interest development loan. Then City Councilman Mike Woo, who represented the area, added his influence to help the project along.

The project was initiated in 1987, when MOCA began planning an exhibition titled "Blueprints for Modern Living: History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses."

The exhibition, which opened in 1989, celebrated the landmark Los Angeles Case Study House program that ran from 1945 to 1962. During that period 36 experimental modern houses were designed by local architects under the sponsorship of Arts & Architecture magazine. The Case Study Houses, 24 of which were built, made a major impact on domestic architecture in the United States and around the world and are still much admired.

In tandem with the exhibition, MOCA sponsored the La Brea Franklin competition. However, where the original Case Study House program focused on single-family residences, the competition was concerned with a type of home far more relevant to today's needs: affordable multifamily housing.

"The shortage of affordable housing in the city, estimated at around 300,000 units, is a desperate situation," MOCA Director Richard Koshalek said recently. "In this competition we wanted to bring the best design talent to bear upon this problem. To develop new social and aesthetic solutions for a type of housing that is all too often totally unimaginative in its architecture."

The 1988 competition involved three architectural firms: San Diego-based Adele Santos and Los Angeles designers Eric Owen Moss and Hodgekiss + Fung Design Associates.

Santos' scheme won the competition because the design jury liked its organization of the layout into a kind of small village grouped around a series of courtyards. The jury felt that this plan would help create a sense of community among 120 residents of diverse ages and ethnic backgrounds.

The La Brea Franklin Family Housing complex is a superbly designed complex far superior to any of the boringly designed, cheaply built blocks that surround it.

"We wanted to get away from the standard multiunit housing type common in L.A., with its two or three floors of apartments served by double-loaded corridors above an underground garage," Santos said. "At the same time, though innovation was the goal, the housing had to be built within existing regulatory and economic restraints."

The eight-year process was difficult for all concerned. The architects had to deal with a host of conflicting instructions issued by the CRA and the project lost two earlier developers. The current developers in their turn had to sweat out a redesign of the apartments to simplify the construction and reduce the cost. "The process was, quite frankly, hellish," Santos said.

The La Brea Franklin apartments range in size from single-room studios to four-bedroom units. The units are arranged in four blocks, and each block flanks a brick-paved courtyard.

Every apartment has its own front door leading off a small private patio. They also share a series of communal covered porches that overlook Franklin Avenue. A labyrinth of steps and walkways snaking through archways connect the courtyards, adding to the feeling of being in a Mediterranean village.

The two-, three- and four-bedroom units have split-level plans with the dining-kitchen area seven steps up from the high-ceilinged living room. The bedrooms in the two- and three-bedroom units are up another flight of stairs. In the four-bedroom apartments, a bedroom and bathroom are located on the level below the living room to create a separate living unit for a teen-ager or a grandparent.

All units have balconies on the upper, bedroom level overlooking the courtyards. They have natural cross-ventilation, supplemented by air-conditioning. There is a communal laundry and a community room for meetings and parties. Parking for 41 cars is provided in a garage entered off the back alley.

The complex is built up the 26-foot slope of the site from south to north, to a high point at the northwest corner. This keeps the mass of the building low along the street frontage and allows the upper units to share the view and the sunny orientation to the south. A child's playground and community picnic area occupy a landscaped strip along the southern edge of the property.

The buildings are finished in cream stucco with ochre exterior stair railings and orange front doors. The roofs are rounded metal barrel vaults, and this curved silhouette is repeated in the shape of the canopies over the communal porches.

The developer for the project is the La Brea Franklin Limited Partnership, which includes Thomas Salfen & Associates, acting as co-developer, contractor and manager, and the Hollywood Community Housing Corp., a local non-profit affordable housing group.

Rents range from \$420 a month for the studios to \$735 for the four-bedroom apartments. The 40 tenants, whose family incomes range between \$15,000 and \$30,000, were selected from a list of more than 2,000 applicants.

"Most of the people living here, who come from places as far apart as Moscow and Managua, feel they've died and gone to heaven," said resident manager Dan Chace. "They feel safe and happy, compared to any of the other places they've had to occupy. I think that has a lot to do with the way the place is designed and planned to create the feeling of being in a real community."



A child's playground and community picnic area occupy a landscaped strip along the southern edge of La Brea Franklin housing complex in Hollywood.

## A Feeling of Community, by Design

### 40-Unit Hollywood Complex Breaks Away From Standard Affordable Projects

By LEON WHITESON  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

In architecture, as elsewhere, it is rare that a grand idea is ever actually realized. All too often, great notions fall into the abysmal separating ambience of reality.

So the infrequent occasions when an idealistic architectural concept makes it over all the hurdles and becomes a real building are especially heartening.

The recently completed 40-unit La Brea Franklin Family Housing complex in Hollywood is one of those rare triumphs.

La Brea Franklin is a fine act of architecture that presents an innovative model for affordable, multifamily housing. Its design is harmonious yet lively, and this small complex is remarkable for the way it creates a sense of community within its tight and difficult hillside site.

The grand idea powering La Brea Franklin was the notion that the prestige of the Museum of Contemporary Art could be combined with the resources of the Los

Please see DESIGN, K3



Curved shape of roof is repeated in the porch canopies.



Apartments are grouped around a series of courtyards.



Children romp on the walkway of apartment complex.