



SHARED VALUES

A cohousing community pools resources and learns to live lightly on the land

The vision for Pleasant Hill Cohousing began in 1997 when a handful of people got together to plan a new housing development. Working with architects Katie McCamant and Chuck Durrett of The Cohousing Company, this group envisioned a new kind of community where residents would own their own homes yet share many resources. The homes would be built on a tight budget yet be very energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

“The residents’ involvement in the design process gives us a lot of direct input on what is really important to them, what risks they are willing to take, and what they are willing to pay for,” says Katie McCamant. “Even more importantly, the community keeps the conversation going after construction is completed so that they continue to look for ways that they can use fewer resources. Community is the secret ingredient of sustainability.”

Today, the 2.2-acre Pleasant Hill Cohousing community consists of 32 private condominiums ranging from 680 to 1,700 square feet. A 4,400-square-foot common house provides space for play, study, crafts, laundry, and cooking and dining (residents have private kitchens but often choose to cook and eat together in the common house). There are also guest accommodations and a hot tub and pool.

Pleasant Hill Cohousing is the first cohousing community in Contra Costa County. The common house and three homes will be open for the Green Home Tour.

“My whole house fan completely cools the entire house in the summer evenings, usually within 30 minutes.”

—Tammie Pulley, homeowner

COMMUNITY & SITE

Community and resource sharing. Compared to conventional suburban developments, the homes at Pleasant Hill Cohousing are smaller, requiring fewer resources to build and less energy to operate. The community offers many opportunities for sharing information, support and resources — for example, there’s just one lawn mower for 32 households.

Site planning. An adjacent bike trail and proximity to BART reduce sprawl and auto dependency. Cars are parked at the site’s periphery, creating space for gardens, play areas and community activities.

GREEN at a GLANCE

ENERGY & SYSTEMS

- 8.8-kW solar electric system (Light Energy Systems)
- Passive cooling design
- Cellulose insulation in walls and ceiling (Greenstone Industries)
- Perimeter insulation for foundation
- Radiant barrier under roofs
- Thicker gypsum board for thermal mass
- Three-foot roof overhangs
- Low-e2 windows
- Extensive daylighting
- Whole house fans
- Ceiling fans (Casablanca)
- Energy Star® appliances

MATERIALS & PRODUCTS

- 15% flyash in concrete
- Advanced framing techniques
- FSC-certified framing lumber and floors
- Wood I-Joists and engineered wood beams
- Exposed concrete and bamboo flooring (common house)
- Recycled-content decking (Trex)
- Natural linoleum flooring (Forbo Marmoleum)
- Low-VOC interior paints (Kelly-Moore Enviro-Cote)
- Fiber-cement siding (James Hardie)

OTHER GREEN FEATURES

- Cohousing community designed for resource sharing
- Infill site adjacent to bike trail, near public transit

COOLING STRATEGIES

Insulation, thermal mass, fans and shading. Concrete floors in most units and thicker than average drywall add thermal mass to moderate interior temperature swings. Walls and ceilings are insulated with damp-blown cellulose made from recycled paper, with recycled cotton batt insulation used in hard-to-reach areas. Foundations were also insulated. Most units have ceiling fans, as well as whole house fans that provide nighttime cooling. Three-foot roof overhangs and trellises with deciduous vines shade the homes.

Cooling tower. Although an air conditioner was installed in the common house, the building's passive cooling design works so well that the AC is seldom turned on. A cooling tower provides a path for hot air to escape. "We are very pleased with the design," says resident Terri Hupfer. "The tower fans are turned on and windows opened at night during hot weather so warm air is pulled up and out. Fans are turned off and windows closed early the next morning."

BUILT: 2001

SIZE:
40,000 SF

ARCHITECT:
McCAMANT & DURRETT ARCHITECTS

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:
S.D. DEACON

*"We are impressed by how much power
the solar cells installed on the
carport roofs are providing."*

—Terri Hupfer, homeowner

