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DESIGN

Las Vegas Affordable Housing Complex Fosters Community, Sustainability, and Colorful Design

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How do you . . . design an affordable and sustainable public housing subdivision that deviates in style from a traditional subsidized development to create a community-oriented complex?



Summary: The Otto Merida Desert Villas in Las Vegas, a 250,000-square-foot, 8-acre affordable housing subdivision, works hard to avoid a “public housing” image and create a community atmosphere. The design, by Las Vegas-based Lucchesi Galati Architects, for 60 detached single-family and duplex rental units, includes a vibrant color scheme, front porches oriented toward the street to form a community streetscape, rear porches facing each other, shared courtyards, and landscaped walkways and patios connecting the units. The project, which opened last year, also includes a number of sustainability strategies, including drought-tolerant landscaping.



The Otto Merida Desert Villas are a \$15 million, mixed-finance project by the Housing Authority of the City of Las Vegas (HACLV). Although federal funding was available for project development, additional funding was needed to demolish 60 existing units on the site. To get tax-credit funding, HACLV partnered with its nonprofit subsidiary, Affordable Housing Program, Inc. Conceptually, the housing authority wanted a

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[Blueprint for Greening Affordable Housing](#), by Global Green USA (Island Press, 2007)

Photos

Photos courtesy Lucchesi Galati Architects.

1. The Otto Merida Desert Villas in Las Vegas use a vibrant color scheme for 60 detached single-family and duplex rental units and form a community streetscape.
2. The houses range from one to two stories and feature front

desirable community in which each of the low-income families' dwelling units could have its own identity and still share a common space. The strategy appears to have paid off. In 2007, the project earned a merit award and a national award for excellence from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.

John Haddad, project manager, says "HACLV wanted residents to have apartments in more than the standard look that you see across the United States," he says. "They wanted residents to have a sense of pride and ownership—to feel good about who they are so they can build themselves up enough to go out on their own. That is why we designed front porches that face the street so residents can be in touch with the neighbors. They wanted each unit to have a single garage so the residents can feel that they have their own home."

Community complex departs from traditional affordable housing

Lucchesi Galati Architects designed the Otto Merida Desert Villas as a sustainable, community-oriented public housing complex consisting of 27 two bedroom, 30 three-bedroom, and 3 four-bedroom detached single-family and duplex rental units. The development includes a playground, water-spray play area, picnic and barbeque areas,



and community center. Vibrant oranges, blues, yellows, and greens brighten the exterior. Jason Jorjorian, the project designer, points out that the colors give the complex appeal and further make residents feel at home. "So much so," he notes, "that we started seeing adjacent homeowners build their homes the same colors."

Jorjorian explains that having many of the units rise to two stories maximizes open space for landscaping and interactivity. "Opening the common areas between the units plays into the social aspect for private family space. It was important to make secure open spaces to allow children to play. It was also important to integrate the complex with the surrounding neighborhood so as to not make it an island unto itself." The complex's drought-tolerant landscaping in the common areas won a 2008 merit award for water-conscious residential landscape design from the Southern Nevada Water Authority in Las Vegas.

porches for a sense of community.

3. The Villas feature back porches that face each other for community ownership, shared spaces, and landscapes walkways to connect houses.

4. Secure open spaces allow areas for children to play. In addition, there are barbeque areas, a playground, a water-spray play area, and a community center.



More spaces; colorful streetscape

Modular units with identical framing were designed for identical footprints, minimizing project construction waste on materials such as plywood and drywall. This also maximized open community spaces.

"Although we had a modular floor plan, we played up a one-story, two-story rhythm by changing rooflines on the gable roofs," says Jorjorian. "It gives

the appearance of various street forms, providing a sense of community, with the houses themselves as backdrops to the spaces interlinked throughout the community." The units include ENERGY STAR products to maximize energy efficiency.

Concludes Haddad: "Our heart was in it, and they didn't budget-cut the creative funding. Now,

the community is benefiting.”

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