

Builder

RANCHO MISSION VIEJO'S ESENCIA CATERS TO ALL AGES

The first phase of the mixed-age California community will open in the fall.

By [Jennifer Goodman](#)

Slideshow



Esencia Renderings by RHA

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Construction has begun on [Esencia](#), a new ranch-centric California community that will break new ground in its approach to mixed-age living offered in a variety of densities.

Phase 1 of developer [Rancho Mission Viejo's](#) 890-acre, mixed-density, master-planned development in southern Orange County, Calif., is now under way, with a model home completion date set for September. The three-phase project will include approximately 1,825 market-rate residences and 730 age-qualified dwellings for buyers 55 and older. Project planners are betting that older buyers will prefer to be in a mixed-age community rather than a senior-only

development, says Irvine, Calif.-based architect [Robert Hidey](#).

"Whereas in the past the home builder looked to the traditional family as its market, Rancho Mission Viejo is developing this new village for a wide range of potential buyers, from the hip, younger buyer who wants a small home with easy access to transportation, nature, retail and recreational amenities, to the age-qualified, mature buyer as well as the affluent baby boomer who prefers to spend his or her retirement years in a lively, mixed-age community rather than in a senior-only community," says Hidey.

Rancho Mission Viejo's approach will provide a wide array of housing and lifestyle choices for buyers--ranging from childless singles and couples through retirement. "We believe the products we prototyped will answer the needs of a diverse group of buyers who have not yet found the lifestyle that answered their needs, be they singles or couples without children, or baby boomers who want to stay active and involved," says Hidey.

Builders working on Esencia include Shea, William Lyon, Ryland, TRI Pointe, Meritage, and Warmington Residential in styles ranging from modern ranch dwellings to farmhouse-inspired residences.

Differing Densities

To cater to the wide range of demographics at Esencia, Rancho Mission Viejo decided to vary the density of the homes, says Hidey, who based his designs on market research and market segmentation studies. His firm, Robert Hidey Architects (RHA), prototyped more than three dozen residential products for Esencia (Spanish for "essence"), from high-density attached and high-density detached housing at up to 25 dwellings per acre to conventional single-

family detached homes at 5 dwellings per acre.

RHA also established nine architectural styles for the dwellings that reflect California's rich ranch heritage, assigning them to the product types based on location, building massing, and price range, and siting them to complement the geography and create a visually rich environment. Ultimately, Rancho Mission Viejo selected 12 residential products for the 840 units of Phase 1, including eight market-rate products and four age-qualified products.

In accordance with Rancho Mission Viejo's goal of developing "a little town embraced by nature" through open-space preservation, dwellings in the Esencia Village master plan have been situated in walkable neighborhoods, adjacent to canyons, creeks, and orchards on The Ranch, with easy access to miles of hiking trails. In fact, only 6,000 acres of the total 23,000 acres of The Ranch are being developed, while the remaining 17,000 acres will be preserved as part of a larger habitat conservation area known as The Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo, with permanent open space for biking and hiking trails, recreational facilities and community farms. The working ranch, a native plant nursery, acres of existing citrus and avocado groves and cattle pastures, will also be preserved.

A Focus on the Outdoors

In addition, Esencia's common areas will include new ideas in recreational and social-gathering amenities, including:

--A series of bothies, or indoor/outdoor retreats, located around the perimeter and connected to Esencia by trails, some of which will be shaded structures with fireplaces, TVs and refrigeration, barbecues and restrooms, and others that will house swimming pool areas, outdoor chess sets, and clay

pizza ovens. (Bothy is Scottish for structures dotting the countryside that are used by shepherds as shelter from the weather).

--The Canyon House, (part of which will initially serve as a Welcome Center), will include a full-service coffee house, multiple loggias with plenty of seating, meeting and event rooms, a catering kitchen, large activity lawn, and open-air courtyard overlooking a scenic canyon with hiking trails and scenic look-outs.

--Esencia Farm, a small production farm with a variety of in-ground row crops and fruit trees, numerous raised planter beds, a harvest/prep barn, greenhouse, tool shed, composting station, chicken coop, and farming demonstration/workshop courtyard area.

--The Plunge, a community pool and children's splash park for use by all residents.

--The Hilltop Club, a 11,800-square-foot hilltop community club, now in concept design, that will occupy a 3.2-acre site on the hilltop.

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