



Design & Development

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Design

Emerging Trends in Multifamily Living

With infill product growing in popularity, apartments and condominiums are adapting, bringing creative, single-family-compatible designs with them.

By [Robert Hidey](#)



Chris Mayer

Avanti, in Calabasas, Calif., caters to downsizing boomers unwilling to part with the luxury or security of their former, single-family residences.

My firm, Robert Hidey Architects (RHA), is often called upon by residential builders to devise development plans for infill properties. In fact, after having spent 25 years designing luxury single-family houses along the Pacific Coast and throughout California, we now do roughly half our work for multifamily projects, largely on infill parcels. With affluent empty-nesters looking to downsize without sacrificing amenities and younger people seeking affordable options, millennials and boomers have embraced the idea of living in a variety of walkable settings where density provides for more services.

In Southern California, especially, we've observed a dramatic increase in infill development amid a scarcity of vacant land and a rising demand for housing. And with that demand have come some noteworthy multifamily design trends, including single-floor condos with gourmet kitchens and semi-private elevators; stacked flats mixed with townhomes, for a single-family appearance; and varied duplex elevations. Three apartment projects we designed, in particular, reflect the growing appeal of these features.



Chris Mayer

Avanti's single-floor condos feature gourmet kitchens, wide-open floor plans, and high-end finishes.

Lock-and-Leave Luxury

Located in Calabasas, an affluent Southern California community popular with equestrians and celebrities, the 72-unit Avanti is geared toward downsizing boomers unwilling to part with luxury or security. The project's single-floor condos, in six- and 12-unit buildings, offer a convenient lock-and-leave lifestyle, with three stories of residences stacked atop secure lobbies and garage podiums. The units range from 2,625 to 2,770 square feet, and the 5-acre development has a density of 14 units per acre.

Each of the luxury flats is accessible by elevator with coded key cards, with occupants gaining entry through private vestibules. RHA worked with developer The New Home Company to incorporate private covered decks, resortlike master suites, and gourmet kitchens into wide-open floor plans with high-end finishes. The units are priced in the mid-\$1 millions.

There's an inherent benefit in small podium projects like Avanti: The smaller the project, the less the financial risk.



Courtesy Robert Hidey Architects

Mission Beach Residences will be located in a 100-year-old neighborhood in San Diego when it breaks ground later this year. Its varied two-, three-, and four-unit configurations are intended to blend in with the surrounding eclectic mix of architectural styles.

Affordable Beach Living

San Diego's Mission Beach neighborhood, located on a strip of land between Mission Bay and the Pacific Ocean, is a 100-year-old enclave filled with an eclectic mix of beach cottages, larger homes that have been subdivided into multiple units, and small condo and apartment complexes. For McKellar McGowan's 63-unit Mission Beach Residences condominium project, located on the site of an elementary school that had been shuttered for decades, our challenge was to fit the development in with the neighborhood's varied architectural styles and avoid a cookie-cutter look.

We wanted to borrow context from the surrounding site while still designing floor plans that respond to modern lifestyles, so we configured the units as duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes—six building types with multiple elevations—that look and live like their neighbors. Private entries are situated along pedestrian paseos that are part of Mission Beach's system of pathways leading from beach to bay, and parking is accessed by vehicular alleyway.

The development, which blends seamlessly with the newer projects as well as the older wood-sided and stucco beach architecture around it, is situated on a 2.23-acre infill site and includes an attractive streetside park. Designed for buyers seeking active beach lifestyles, as well as seasonal vacation homes, Mission Beach Residences has an overall density of 28 units per acre. McKellar McGowan expects to break ground this year on the development.



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The design of Portola Court in Irvine, Calif., accommodates zoning restrictions stipulating that the project's two-story buildings surround its three-story buildings to mitigate the multifamily development's impact.

Buffer Zone

When zoning conditions in Irvine, Calif., limited density parameters, Irvine Co. commissioned us to design 12 duplexes to buffer the density of its 438-unit Portola Court apartment community. The regulations stipulated that lower-density, two-story buildings surround the development's three-story multifamily buildings, to mitigate the impact of the development and because the duplexes would create a streetscape more compatible with those of the surrounding neighborhoods. RHA has executed this strategy for Irvine Co. on several occasions, particularly when adjoining single-family neighborhoods. The density of the entire Portola community is 26.4 units per acre; the duplexes account for 18.5 units per acre.

Reflecting Spanish Colonial, Monterey, and Santa Barbara styles of architecture, the duplexes share the aesthetic diversity of the surrounding single-family areas. The units, ranging from 1,060 to 1,388 square feet, are ideal for young professionals and small families seeking the space and privacy not offered by typical apartments. The floor plans are inspired by single-family lifestyles, with front entries; two-car, attached garages; and private patios. The duplexes feel like for-sale product, with plenty of light and privacy.

The residents of the duplex units, which opened last summer, enjoy all the privileges of the Portola Court community: fitness and yoga rooms, computer-friendly game rooms, and a pool and spa, lending a resort-like feel to the development.

About the Author



[Robert Hidey](#)

Robert Hidey, founder and principal of Irvine, Calif.-based Robert Hidey Architects (RHA), is known for pioneering housing trends that have enriched the residential environments of numerous communities throughout North America and the world.