



NEVADA CITY COHOUSING

Nevada City Cohousing proves that cooperative living has its advantages.

By Judy Gelwicks

“Cohousing”—a term coined by Charles Durrett, the Cohousing Nevada City architect and developer, is now in the Oxford dictionary having taken on a life of its own. Mr. Durrett has achieved national prominence for green design, specializing in eco-village and custom neighborhood designs. He has won several major awards including both the United Nations and the National Association of Homebuilders for his groundbreaking work. When trying to give Mr. Durrett credit for being the architect and developer of the Nevada City Cohousing project he corrected me and said that his wife, Kathryn McCamant and the Nevada City Cohousing residents are to be credited also, which is indicative of the involvement the residents have in planning their own community.

From the onset, all of the 50 cohousing projects Chuck (which he prefers) Durrett has been involved in have had the environment in mind. He encompasses energy efficiency in the design, incorporating photovoltaic solar systems, passive solar orientation, solar water heating, energy efficient building techniques, and climatic influences into the design. Swimming pools, playgrounds, community garden space are all elements of the community design. He argues that the friendlier and more fun a neighborhood is, the greener the lifestyle and the smaller the footprint. Environmental features such as gravel parking lots to slow water run off, no auto garages attached to a house to cut down on indoor air pollution, minimum grading and tree removal are all considerations in every development.

Walking into the 11 acre Cohousing development just outside of Old Town Nevada City, you immediately notice the friendly feel of the neighborhood. Cars are parked on the perimeter of the premises, with a walkway down the middle of the landscaped residences.

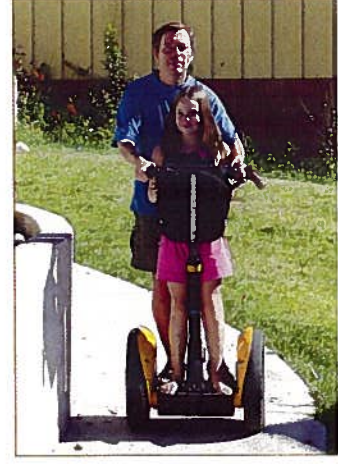
Of the 11 acres, 5 are committed to the residential structures, and 6 to open space. The residential plan encompasses different sizes of residences (860-1680 sq. ft.) most connected to one another in groups of 3 or 4 or 6, clustered around a “Common House”, all incorporating Mother Lode architecture. Because of the adjoining walls, 6 inch thick exterior walls filled with blown cellulose insulation, wall studs on 24” centers, 5/8 sheetrock, and strategic placement of windows energy costs are kept to a minimum. And the cost of construction was kept below standard con-

struction costs because of the continuous siding and roofing, common decisions on interior design features and building the whole project at the same time for the 34 residences. The cost per square foot in The Nevada City Project was \$95.

Health of the environment and the residents is always first on Durrett’s mind when purchasing products to use in any of his developments. All wood is from sustainable pine forest FSC certified. Bamboo for flooring is a sustainable resource. Marmoleum flooring is 100% biodegradable. Carpets are 100% wool. Trex decking is made from recycled plastics and saves wood from being harvested. The exterior paint was recycled military surplus then recolored. Interiors use low-VOC or non-toxic materials.



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When talking with Durrett he asked about my monthly electric bill. I felt good about sighting an average of about \$75/month since I have “Energy Star” appliances, religiously close my shades at night, have installed CFL light bulbs and turn off my lights when I leave the room. He chuckled and showed me his energy bill for 2008 which was minus \$62.24 for the entire year.

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How does this all work? That's where the "participation" part of the contract comes in. There are scheduled community meetings, and various interest groups which take care of the projects and problems which arise. For instance, the original plans for the Nevada City development did not include a workshop. But because members of the community decided that they needed one, it was agreed to use one of the garages as a workshop and some of their Homeowner's dues were spent to help supply the workshop, and other workshop needs were met by donations from residents. Another project was the chicken coop. They now produce fresh eggs for the community.

Carlyle, a current Nevada City Cohousing resident who has been involved since the beginning in 2002, says "living here is fabulous". She and her husband have a little 2 year old and says that she is very happy with the closeness of the neighborhood and the help she gets from both adults and older children in helping with her child. The many meals they share with the neighbors create a community atmosphere, and actually frees up time.

Charles Durrett, was born and partially raised in the Donnieville, CA area, one of 6 children of hard working parents. He grew up working in the gold mines and the lumber industry and never thought of going to college until he had a back injury at age 20 and couldn't continue strenuous labor. He credits Sierra Community College with changing his life entirely and getting him excited about building and design. He was exposed to ideas he had never contemplated before and went on to California State University San Louis Obispo (Cal Poly), graduating with a double major in engineering and architecture. As part of the Cal Poly program they encourage students to study for a year abroad. Chuck decided on Denmark. It was his year studying in Denmark that really set him on his course to designing cohousing projects. He credits Denmark as having a real respect for architecture and designing for real living. Over the past 20 years Chuck has been busy designing 50 cohousing projects all over the world, Japan and Canada just to name a couple. His most recent is the Wolf Creek Cohousing Development in Grass Valley. If you would like more information go to: www.cohousingpartners.com or call (530)478-1970.