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John M. Clancy Award for Socially Responsible Housing

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Rob Wellington Quigley FAIA
Casa Feliz

Ennead Architects LLP
The Schermerhorn, Common Ground
Community

Curtis + Ginsberg Architects
Castle Gardens

Awards

Honor Award Casa Feliz, San Jose, CA Rob Wellington Quigley FAIA



Jury comments

This project replaces an aging residential hotel near downtown San Jose with 60 new efficiency apartments. The units serve extremely low-income residents with developmental disabilities. The plan is very sophisticated and tightly controlled with a lovely, rich hierarchy of public and private spaces. Vegetation is well integrated into the building, with a green roof—the city's first—installed to reduce stormwater runoff and provide thermal insulation. Its presence also softens the form. The LEED Gold sustainability strategy is well thought and innovative. The owner provides all tenants with a free, annual "Eco Pass" that provides access to nearby public transportation. The materials and color palette (reminiscent of John Clancy's work) are outstanding, adding to the richness without looking cheap. The design breaks down the massing to meet the street in a very humane fashion that is rhythmic and appealing, creating four faces instead of two. It is very contextually sensitive, creating a real community feel, and very well done.

Project team

Designer
Rob Wellington Quigley FAIA

Maryanne Welton

Wendell Shackelford

Client
First Community Housing

General Contractor
Branagh Construction

VerTech Structural Engineering

Brighton Knowing

Dann Hall, Bowen Electric

Cottong & Taniguchi

Bill Leffler, Lefco

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John M. Clancy Award for Socially Responsible Housing

Jury Overview

In the fourth year of the program, we examined 22 submissions. The projects originated from either the East Coast or the West Coast. The small body of work and limited geographical representation may not be atypical at this moment in our industry, when few projects are being built.

Four project types emerged within the overall group: housing project redos, urban infill, renovation and new construction. Across these categories, some designers offered fully integrated sustainability strategies, not simply “green-bling” or “eyewash.” This was still the exception, however, and many of the submissions failed to directly articulate sustainability or accessibility solutions.

Of the public-housing redos, we were pleased to see several that followed contextual housing patterns. When this was not the case, as zoning and transportation requirements occasionally dictated, the projects clearly stuck out, reinforcing the sense of “otherness” among the other houses on the block.

We hoped for more mixed-use, better-integrated buildings that could reflect the ways that building users really live. Why not bring a medical clinic into an affordable development, for example? While recognizing that timing, expertise and funding don't always align, we wished for evidence of greater design sensitivity and foresight.

We noted that just a few architecture offices often do most of the socially responsible projects, which limits the achievable results. This is especially true given the short window of time that is often granted for the completion of work. Given enough time, most firms could be adept with creating urbanity, but it is harder to do in the face of tight schedules and tight budgets. We wished that these jobs could be portioned out to a variety of teams, as Berlin was created in the last generation, to create a greater urban feel within the context of affordability.

To future submitters to this program, we encourage the use of photography that includes people. When we can see how users relate to the building, we can better understand whether the project is successful. To future developers and designers of socially responsible housing, we recommend the careful study of this program's criteria, so that principles including design excellence, livability, sustainability, accessibility/universal design, community design, diversity and provision for those who can least afford it are at the forefront of any plan.

In the end, we honored six projects, judging each to be an outstanding example of socially responsible housing. In every instance, the work was excellently handled from plan to completion. We recognized work that represents a mix of scales and is the result of fine contemporary thinking that elevates design beyond a basic reaction to a site's past problems. These projects are evidence that affordable housing can be done well and can represent the urban form while bringing lovely, well-lit spaces to people who need it most.

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