

Little Berkeley

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ARCHITECT

[Kevin Daly Architects](#)

Project Details

By [Ian Volner](#)

This project won a citation in the 2019 Progressive Architecture Awards

"From the standpoint of program and site it is serious architecture, but it is also playful. It looks peaceful—which it should be, given the users—and the presentation reflects what the architecture is about." —J. Frano Violich, FAIA

Affordable housing takes a new, distinctly Californian turn with Little Berkeley, an ingenious bit of civic-minded design from inveterate Angeleno firm Kevin Daly Architects. With an eye toward the improvisatory urbanism of the region's beachfront cities, the team has created a neighborhood in miniature comprising eight units, each in a discrete volume, and all spread out on a single block wedged between a commercial corridor and a residential zone.

Staggered through the site, the buildings meet each other at odd angles, with open space weaving between; though sitting at street level, each features an elevated terrace, creating a

complex topography that is made more engaging by the shifting layout of the planters and hedges in the semi-public landscaping between them. While ensuring individual privacy and security (both identified as high priorities by prospective end users) the whole complex features a number of shared facilities, including living rooms and kitchens. These communal elements are imperative given the social objective of the brief: to provide housing for former foster children making the tough transition to living on their own.

In a city suffering a painful housing crunch, the design realized economies by using prefabricated construction and off-the-shelf materials, without becoming reductive or unaesthetic. Indeed, the garden trellises, wide windows, and village-like arrangement of the units give the complex the feeling of a gracious oceanside community with scarcely a trace of institutionalism. This is good news for both the occupants and their Santa Monica neighbors, sapping NIMBY-ish sentiment while providing a supportive atmosphere that will feel like home the instant residents arrive. Unusual for social housing, the project can even claim a high-end pedigree: Its casual cool and informal formalism recall the early work of local heavy hitters like Frank Gehry, FAIA, and Eric Owen Moss, FAIA.

Project Credits

Project: Little Berkeley, Santa Monica, Calif.

Client: Community Corporation of Santa Monica

Architect: Kevin Daly Architects, Los Angeles . Kevin Daly, FAIA (principal-in-charge); Jared Ward (project manager); Ciro Dimson, Evan Hursley, Lindsey McLaughlin, Luke Smith, AIA (project team)

Structural Engineer: Workpoint Engineering

M/E/P Engineer: Novus Design Studio

Civil Engineer: Obando and Associates

Landscape: Tina Chee Landscape Studio

Green Building: Verdical Group

Acoustics: Newson Brown Acoustics

Size: 5,000 square feet

Cost: Withheld