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The Shared Backyard

By ANN MARIE CHAKER Excerpt from The Wall Street Journal June 13, 2012 Photos by Holly Lepere

Three couples in Santa Barbara, Calif., created a communal residential property that will serve them into retirement. They designed and built the multidwelling compound with space for four families on a third of an acre in the historic El Pueblo district. It took \$7 million and five years of monthly decision-making meetings, plus three zoning variances and more than a dozen meetings with the city's historical planning commission, to realize their vision.

"Our lives are intertwined," says Dennis Allen, founder and chairman of a Santa Barbara construction company, Allen Associates.

The project began in 2006 when Mr. Allen and his wife, Jennie, were contemplating retirement. They approached two couples they had worked with professionally—business owner Devon Hartman and his wife, Mary; and Mr. Allen's business lawyer, Joe Bush and his wife, Kathy—with the idea to buy property and build.

The couples agreed it should be a "green living compound," Mr. Allen says, within walking distance of town and with minimal use of energy and resources. They bought and refurbished a Victorian home and got zoning approval to build a second structure, a Mediterranean-style building with three residential units.



Photo credit: Meghan Bob Photographs

Three couples, from left, Joe Bush, Kathy Bush, Dennis Allen, Jennie Cushnie, Mary Beierle, Devon Hartman, created Victoria Garden Mews.

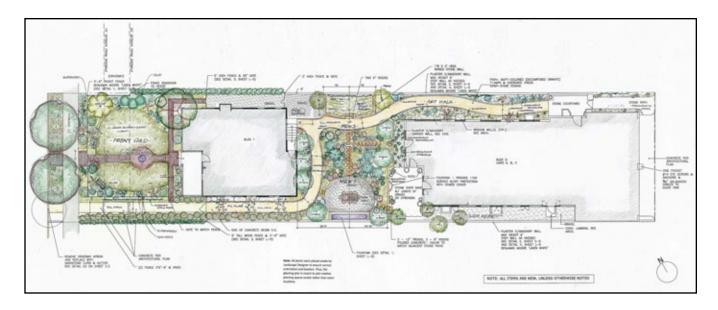
They formed a condominium association—a legal agreement signed by all six individuals governing maintenance and upkeep costs for common areas, which include 30 fruit trees, a vegetable garden, an art walk, a casual seating area and a dining table with seating for 12. All six members voted against an outdoor grill. "It's not very green," Mr. Bush says.



Garden at Victoria Garden Mews, designed by Grace Design Associates, Santa Barbara, Calif.



The three couples who live there now formed a condominium association -- a legal agreement signed by all six individuals governing maintenance and upkeep costs for common areas.



Their plan, for the multifamily compound in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Slide show images from the online article



A surprising number of homeowners are taking down the fences between neighboring properties in favor of bigger gardens and more space to entertain. Shown, three couples created a communal residential property in Santa Barbara, CA that will serve them into retirement.



The shared space at the compound includes 30 fruit trees, a vegetable garden, an intimate seating area, a dining table with seating for 12 and an art walk, shown here, comprised of a path that connects the homes and winds its way through sculptural plantings and art installations.



The Santa Barbara compound is built on one-third of an acre in the downtown historic El Pueblo district, with space for four families.

"Shared Backyard", an article in the Wall Street Journal June 13, 2012, showcases our LEED for Homes Platinum Project, Victoria Garden Mews, as a model, multifamily, sustainable compound where garden space and socializing are shared amenities.

In the article, Dennis Allen - Allen Associates' founder, project visionary and builder, as well as one of the owners - describes how he invited two sets of close friends to be partners in the project. A lovely photo showing the partners - Dennis Allen, Jennie Cushnie, Joe & Kathy Bush, Devon Hartman & Mary Beierle - enjoying a glass of wine in the interior courtyard is the opening to the article.

We are extremely proud that this award winning project caught the attention of the Wall Street Journal. Thank you to the project's architect Thompson Naylor Architects and landscape designer Grace Design Associates for their beautiful designs.

Congratulations Victoria Garden Mews! Well deserved.

You can read the entire article on line at the Wall Street Journal.

To read more about the sustainable features of Victoria Garden Mews, visit our website.