

Tropic

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Democratic Design: Affordable Modernity at Kennedy Homes

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HOUSING DESIGNED FOR LOW income occupants got a bad rap during the second half of the 20th century. Produced with some of the best intentions but resulting in some of the worst “projects” that communities loved to hate, affordable housing has been difficult for decades. Nonetheless, there is a real need for residences priced below market rates; that’s the reality of our economy.

Therefore, it makes sense for communities to take seriously how best to build such units, either as large-scale complexes or as smaller, infill projects. This can be seen as a burden or an interesting opportunity for communities to engage in architecture and urban design. Sadly, few locales step up to that role with success.

Considering this, Fort Lauderdale should be applauded for its support of the new Kennedy Homes, just being completed on West Broward Boulevard. Designed with care and innovation by Glavovic Studio and developed by the Carlisle Development Group for the Housing Authority of the City of Fort Lauderdale, this redevelopment of a former 1940s public housing site is a terrific reminder that such projects can actually result in high-quality (but not high-priced) architecture and urbanism.

What has been accomplished here harkens back to some of the farsighted thinking of early modernism, when some of the best minds in Europe focused on the challenge of building housing for the masses — in exciting, novel ways. Think back to the innovations of the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart during the 1920s when the masters of German modernism tackled the challenge of low-cost, high-concept housing. Admittedly, the goal then was not to provide housing for the least resourced members of society, but for the average user. Kennedy Homes and its kind has a tougher program.

Located by the long established neighborhood of Sailboat Bend, Kennedy Homes stands out as something new. But that doesn’t mean it is out of context with the existing low-rise homes nearby.





CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: A covered entry with V-shaped supports. Individual terrace with deep reveal painted warm yellow. Scored stringcourses and mesh railings add texture. Shadowbox window frames allow for the play of light on the exteriors.



Driving along the busy thoroughfare that connects I-95 to the heart of downtown Fort Lauderdale, Kennedy Homes' 8 1/2 acres stands out handsomely, which should build civic pride. The eight new buildings are clean and bright with white walls accented by soft colors. More than half the property is devoted to green space, planted to create a landscaped environment that should impress both users and neighbors. Nothing about the project reads as cheap or bare-bones. Yet Margi Nothard and her team at Glavovic have somehow executed the project at a mere \$92 per square foot. Nothard wisely integrated awnings, single-loaded corridors and overhangs to create both visual interest and natural cooling. Ample balconies and porches are part of the overall plan. This is no warehouse for residents – it's a well thought out series of homes.

The play of light and shadow on the buildings is striking. That so much of this detail captures breezes that can aid in reducing the use of air conditioning is all the more remarkable. The effort towards reduced energy use is supplemented by other green features. From water-conserving plumbing fixtures to recycled content materials, Glavovic has treated the project as a shining example of sustainability. The green space is created through the use of native plants and the addition of many trees. LEED certification is pending for both the low-rise and mid-rise structures on the site.

One of the more extraordinary accomplishments at Kennedy Homes is the inclusion of art throughout the project. Nothard has done multiple projects for the Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale and is the architect of The Girls' Club, an exquisite exhibition and activities space in Fort Lauderdale. She is no stranger to sophisticated environments devoted to the visual arts. For her work at Kennedy Homes, she tapped into her extensive network to produce the Kennedy Homes Collection, an assembly of work by local and national artists supported by local philanthropy. No small feat for affordable housing and impressive even by the standards of much more expensive developments.

It cannot be stressed enough how much of what has been accomplished here has stemmed from the efforts of Glavovic Studio itself. There is a long history of visionary architects contributing not only their design talents but also part of their fee in order to improve a project's standards. That may not be fair but it shows how strong the commitment can be by designers

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ABOVE: Although completed at an unbelievable \$96 per square foot, Glavovic Studio took every opportunity for visual interest. Here, security mesh throws an elegant shadow across an exterior staircase.

who care deeply about their projects. Glavovic is a real hero in this story. Of course, the Housing Authority and the city also deserve kudos for making the project a reality.

Located by the established neighborhood of Sailboat Bend, Kennedy Homes stands out as something new. But that doesn't mean it is out of context with the existing low-rise homes nearby. The designers acknowledged the local urbanism in their mix of two-story, three-story and five-story buildings. Kennedy Homes is oriented both towards its many internal courtyards, formed in part by the pinwheeling nature of the buildings' plans, but also out to Broward Boulevard, a high-trafficked zone. Considering that many of the occupants will be seniors who have limited mobility, Glavovic made sure that communal space for seniors opens up to Broward Boulevard's animated environment. Forty out of 132 units will be devoted to senior residents.

Despite the tiny budget, the designers have accommodated community space for families, outdoor play space and even a gym. The senior residents do not have to venture far to buses that will transport them off-site. The roster of amenities includes thoughtful design elements such as a special artist-designed elevator laminate by Francie Bishop Good and furniture from notable designers. Even the wall hooks received attention; Glavovic used ones designed by Miami-based LMNOQ.

Can this approach be replicated or is Kennedy Homes an outlier? Surely, it is a fortunate coming together of community spirit paired with the right team of designers, developers and municipal leaders. We are hopeful that it represents one of many smart community efforts that benefits not only tenants, but the community at large. ■