



SENIOR HOUSING  
*News*



Joe Colistra served as the Principal-in-Charge for in situ Design.



## Best of Affordable Senior Housing Design 2014: A Room With a Mountain View

January 21, 2015 by Cassandra Dowell

The first of its kind to open in the City of Boulder in 32 years, one of Colorado's newest affordable housing senior living communities reflects an appreciation for the outdoors, with environmentally-friendly features and spanning mountain views.

High Mar Senior Housing, a 59-unit multi-family apartment building designated for households with members who are 55 and over who qualify based on their income, opened its doors to residents in June 2014.

"The city of Boulder has a huge undersupply of affordable housing," says Lauren Schevets, development manager with owner/operator Boulder Housing Partners (BHPs), about the need for the project. "The city of Boulder's senior population is

expected to grow six times as fast as the population as a whole over the next decade - and faster than the national average."

Boulder Housing Partners, the housing authority for the city of Boulder, primarily focuses on providing affordable rental properties for the area's residents.

While affordability is at the core of the three-story, 61,062 square-foot building's mission, it appears as anything but with high-end views, easy access to public transportation and popular attractions, as well as modern amenities. These qualities and more positioned High Mar to be best in class for affordable housing in the 2014 Senior Housing News Design & Architecture Awards contest.



“This is not your typical, traditional affordable housing,” says Jeff Anderzhon, senior planning/design architect at Eppstein Uhen Architects, one of the judges for the 2014 SHN architecture design awards. “The sustainability approach is a great one that all designers need to pay attention to, regardless of whether it is a market-rate or affordable housing project.”

### **The Concept**

High Mar - comprised of 38 one-bedroom and 21 two-bedroom apartments - is built to the standards of Enterprise Green Communities and the City of Boulder Green Points programs.

The Enterprise Green Communities standard is required of all low-income housing tax credit projects in Colorado, and Boulder’s Green Points program is required for all new residential construction within the city. Both programs look at items related to energy efficiency, water efficiency, construction waste management, sustainable materials, air quality and site development and landscaping.

In addition to its 130Kw solar array installed on the roof and carports, High Mar features electric sub-meters allowing residents to monitor their energy consumption monthly and adjust their usage to reduce energy bills. Environmentally-friendly materials are also used throughout the building.

Aligning with the goals of BHPs, High Mar makes living in Boulder possible and affordable, regardless of income. And affordability is no easy feat for a city that attracts a growing number of residents year-round for its awe-inspiring views and charming community living.

At 5,430 feet above sea level, the city’s attractions include both a quaint cityscape with a Rocky Mountain backdrop.

But for project architects Lakewood, Colorado-based The Abo Group, the inspiration behind High Mar’s design was its immediate neighborhood.

“The Martin Acres neighborhood was established in the 1950’s, so the mid-century modern aesthetic came into play,” says Robert Kiyoshi Wilson, project



manager at The Abo Group, noting the community predominantly features single-family detached community homes.

Through echoing the common design themes of surrounding structures, High Mar has “more of a pedestrian, or human scale,” he says.

High Mar incorporates townhouse elements in its design, and its three levels can only be visible from certain angles, mirroring the curvature of the main street, Moorhead Avenue, leading to the building.

“Ninety percent of the building is a three-story building,” says Kevin Yoshida, managing principal/director of design of The Abo Group. “But as you approach from Moorhead Avenue it steps down to a two-story building - that helps tie it into the immediate context.”

The structure’s use of horizontal lines and nature-inspired color scheme caught the attention of SHS design award judge David Dillard, principal at D2 Architecture, who said those among other reasons let him to give the community high marks.

“If you were to take a hike up to the mountains you would pick up rocks that are the colors of the building’s exterior,” he says. “A lighter color orange, and medium tone browns - that collection represents the bandwidth of colors in the mountains and beyond.”

The building’s simple flat top and striking horizontal balcony rails create a “fantastic foreground to the violence and verticality of the mountains beyond.” he says. “It’s a table setting for the magic and severity of the Rockies in the distance.”

All units include private balconies, washer and dryer, 9-foot ceilings, ceiling fans, dishwashers, air conditioning and more. All residents have an additional secure interior storage space at no cost.

“Boulder has a contemporary style throughout the city,” Yoshida says. “The population is quite active.”

To help residents embrace that active lifestyle, all residents also receive a free regional bus pass. A regional bus station is just a few blocks away, making travel





through the Denver Metro extremely convenient.

And socialization is encouraged throughout the building's campus with ample community gathering spaces on all three floors, including a common kitchenette, internet cafe and community gardens.

"The undercurrent is the gathering spaces inside and outside the building," Yoshida says. "Outside each of the elevators there is a meeting space. So, no matter what level you're on you can meet your neighbors. And instead of corners, the hallways have seating areas."

Large windows also allow for natural light and panoramic views of the mountains to the west and expansive vistas to the east.

### **The Construction**

The force that High Mar embraced in its design is also the same element that caused construction delays and set the project slightly over budget: nature.

While every attempt was made to adhere to the project's \$12.2 million budget, delays

caused by weather ultimately increased construction costs, putting the project about 1% over budget, Schevets says.

The site of High Mar previously featured a swim and tennis club, which was demolished prior to construction. Construction began on High Mar in February 2013.

The project was financed with 4% low income housing tax credits and private activity bonds, as well as funds from the State of Colorado Division of Housing and the City of Boulder.

"The greatest challenges that the project faced were: significant weather delays, impacts from the flooding in fall 2013, and a tight construction labor market," Schevets says. "These all contributed to a longer construction schedule."

Construction was projected to be completed within 12 months, in February 2014, but due to delays its doors officially opened in June.

"Weather was probably the most significant factor that might have held up the construction process," Wilson says. "That led to some complexities to keeping



everything dry, from the initial stages of getting foundations poured and so forth. But the construction team did a great job of moving as expediently as they could.”

### **The Completion**

Planning ahead and strong communication between team members kept the project moving forward, Schevets says.

“The biggest thing we did to address delays was a lot of planning ahead for the lease up, so we leased all of our apartments much quicker than anticipated,” she says.

The building was fully leased in over two months after construction was completed, and is currently 100% occupied.

Upon completion, BHPs hosted a grand opening celebration that included project

architects The Abo Group and soon-to-be residents.

“It’s unusual for the architect to meet with residents who will live in the building they designed.” Yoshida says. “At the open house we got to meet a couple of the residents and they were so excited. After working two years on something, and sweating those details - to see someone come in and have this emotional reaction to their new home. It’s a great feeling.”

Ultimately, the High Mar provides an “affordable, safe, healthy, and beautiful place for the residents to live - a place that they are proud to call home,” Schevets says. “With High Mar, we are helping to assure that Boulder remains an inclusionary community, and that people who have lived in Boulder their whole lives can live their older years here too.”

### **Project Data**

Units:	59
Cost:	\$12.2 million
Owner:	Boulder Housing Partners
Owner’s Rep.:	Studio Morgan Creek
Contractor:	Deneuve Construction
Architect of Record:	in situ Design
Associate Architect:	Abo Group/B+Y Architects
Landscape Architect:	Wenk Associates