

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN CATEGORY

Crest Apartments Sherman Way, Van Nuys, CA 91405

PURPOSE OF PROJECT: The Crest Apartments project transforms a vacant site in suburban Los Angeles to further the client's mission by providing 64 units of permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans which includes on-site social services and communal spaces that have been made more generous and diversified than ever before through the landscape. These amenities effectively support the highly vulnerable residents in an effort to reintroduce them into society and help reduce chronic homelessness.

The landscape and architecture form a symbiotic relationship that establishes a restorative parallel between the regeneration of the site and the residents through a dynamic, informal expansive open green space. The building's form spans the entire length of the site and is primarily lifted off the ground. This allows the landscape to be the dominant feature connecting the various amenities throughout the site, actively engaging the residents. Surrounded by the tough context of asphalt roofs, parking lots and the heat of the San Fernando Valley, the project is a true oasis that counteracts this inhospitable environment through its generous amount of shade, a layout that takes advantage of the naturally occurring southerly winds, the lush quality of the drought-tolerant primarily native vegetation that restores plant and wildlife, and its expansiveness through the surrounding borrowed landscape. Vegetation, gravel, decomposed granite, and concrete pavers combine to transform the entire site into a universally accessible, usable open space that adheres to the strict code demands of parking and fire truck access without surrendering a single square foot to these requirements alone. There are no curbs or steps, only gentle slopes. A significant ratio of open space per person is achieved by treating most of the fire lane and car drive, and the parking spaces as usable vegetated and gravel areas. This soft treatment of the ground surface also maximizes the site's potential as a storm water sponge as the area open to the sky is over 90% pervious. Roof rain water is also captured and filtered in two bioswales. Through the extensive use of drought-tolerant and low water plantings, the projected irrigation demand is 37% lower than the 2014 state MAWA.

ROLE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: The landscape architect served as the lead designer from concept through construction transforming the qualitative and functional nature of the ground surface to make the landscape an integral part in fulfilling the client's mission. Working closely with the client and the architect, a compelling concept and site narrative was crafted and supported through performance metrics regarding water conservation and open space. Coordination with the civil engineer and irrigation consultant as well as being hands-on with the contractors on site help deliver a project that exceeds all expectations. It is on target to achieve LEED Platinum. By reinterpreting building codes, the landscape architect transformed typical single-use and impervious areas such as firelanes and parking into multi-functional and pervious open spaces to be enjoyed as active and passive recreational areas to help restore the health and well-being of the homeless veterans.

SIGNIFICANCE: This is the client's first building outside of Skid Row where, now with a larger site, the landscape can become an integral part of the project and mission goals. Given that the nearest park is 1.5 miles away and the residents may be disabled, the site would be their main access to open green space. This project also demonstrates the importance of the landscape as equal to the building, as the two work seamlessly together to provide a restorative environment where the contributions of one without the other would have a substantially lesser impact. Due to a strong narrative aligned with the client's mission and a highly performative dimension, the integrity of the landscape design was maintained through each phase of the project and sustained needed cost reductions. The project is already influencing the public to think of landscape as highly performative and necessary to manage our land and water resources in an effective and humane way.

SPECIAL FACTORS: The funding for supportive housing projects comes from special tax credit financing and public funding sources which results in a fixed construction budget. Extreme attention was paid to cost management for which a general contractor was brought in early on. The client's belief in the importance and relevance of the landscape design ensured that there were sufficient funds to realize a high quality and ground-breaking landscape.