

ARCHITECTURE

MISSION MERIDIAN: Going for the Gold Line

By Janet Eastman, Times Staff Writer

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"A lot of people fear density because there are a lot of terrible, overly dense projects in Los Angeles," says Elizabeth Moule of Pasadena-based Moule & Polyzoides Architects and Urbanists. "Making slightly denser places around transit lines is a way to accommodate the growth to L.A. that also preserves single-family houses and yards."

When Michael Dieden of Creative Housing Associates of Los Angeles asked Moule and husband Stefanos Polyzoides to create housing and shops on a block near a Metro Gold Line stop in South Pasadena, the duo came up with a series of buildings with different heights and façades, right, to blend into the Mission Street neighborhood. "We wouldn't put a high-rise on a street like that," says Moule.

A brick-clad, three-story nearest the busy street has small shops on the ground level — a bakery, florist, spinning gym and a gift store; none is a chain store.

Above them are 14 lofts that make the most of their 845- to 1,120-square-footage with a minimum of interior walls and two-story-high windows. Two levels of parking underneath the building accommodate residents' and train riders' cars.

Next to the flat-roof brick building are four duplexes built in the Craftsman style. These green-shingled buildings with pitched roofs begin to blend — in height and façade — with the new housing with the street's original single-family houses.

Adjacent to the duplexes, at the end of the new development, are three 2,400-square-foot single-family bungalows that fit in with the 80-year-old ones across the wide street.

To encourage occupants to people-watch, architects designed porches and large windows. "People like urbanity and being with one another," says Moule, who co-founded with Polyzoides and others the Congress for the New Urbanism, a national association of architects, planners and environmentalists focused on improving suburbs and urban centers.

Three courtyards in the center of the buildings also create a sense of community, Moule says. Residents pass through courtyards to reach their front doors. One night last year, the electricity went out and neighbors took their dinner plates and candles to the courtyards and ate together.

There are no security gates to block the courtyards from the sidewalk, a decision the architects made so neighbors can have a more positive experience when strolling by.

The 67 homes were completed in June and sold during construction for \$350,000 to \$850,000. The development received a Tranny Award from the California Transportation Foundation, and it will be featured in the Urban Land Institute's annual book on outstanding housing projects.

Future project: Granada Court in Old Town Pasadena with 31 flats and town houses, private balconies, decks or patios, two internal pedestrian courts and an auto court.

-- Janet Eastman

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