

Drs. Julian and Raye Richardson Apartments San Francisco, California, U.S.A.

The Drs. Julian and Raye Richardson Apartments is a dignified home for chronically homeless individuals. There are 120 fully-equipped studios and supportive services, including counseling, medical care, and job training. The building, which is in the Mid-market part of San Francisco, includes approximately 3,000 square feet of commercial space and approximately 7,500 square feet of common areas, including a courtyard and rooftop garden. Richardson Apartments first opened its doors to tenants in September 2011.

Run by the non-profit Community Housing Partnership, the five-story building is found on a former parking lot. The housing complex is located near bus and subway lines, and there are services within walking distance – all of which are important to its low-income residents.

The landscape design is composed of a streetscape, a central courtyard, and a roof deck – all fully-handicap accessible. A shady central courtyard in the core of the building is a restorative space. Giant chain ferns, Japanese painted ferns, western sword fern, and wood sorrel in the courtyard create the atmosphere of a peaceful oasis in the city. These plants were also used for their environmental benefits – they are low-maintenance and adaptable to the solar conditions of full sun and deep shade, which are experienced in the courtyard. A large patio with custom tables, benches, and a barbeque is used for communal gatherings, while more private areas provide seating for smaller groups or individuals.

The architecture allows residents to experience the outdoors on a daily basis. Windows connect indoor spaces, including a large community room, to the central courtyard, allowing residents to still feel like they are in a tranquil, healing space during meals

and classes indoors. The community room also opens directly onto the patio space with two large sliding walls. In counseling rooms, translucent scrims were designed so that residents can see out onto the courtyard during counseling sessions, while still maintaining privacy.

A system was developed to maximize the infiltration of rainwater into the underlying landscape's sandy soils. This was critical to relieving pressure on San Francisco's combined sewer and stormwater system. An innovative streetscape includes permeable pavers and rain gardens, which improve the aesthetics of the public space while reducing site runoff and enabling groundwater recharge. Existing and newly-planted trees along the building's Gough Street exterior have benefited from additional water draining off the site. The newly-planted trees are protected by custom tree guards, designed to protect them from vandalism and car damage.

The need to manage stormwater guided the design of the courtyard and the building's green roof. Within the courtyard, permeable spacers were installed between unit pavers to allow stormwater to infiltrate into a gravel retention basin constructed below. Other paved areas slope into rain gardens, which are planted with palm trees and ferns. A drain around the perimeter of the building routes water away from the building and into the gravel retention basin. On the roof, planters, both ornamental and edible, help to capture water that would otherwise enter the city storm system.

Custom site furnishings, which include tables, a built-in barbeque with counter, benches and woodblock seats, were designed with the building's population in mind. About one-third of the building's residents are in

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wheelchairs, so incorporating full accessibility into the design was important.

Materials were locally sourced. Monterey cypress logs used to craft these benches and block seats were reclaimed from urban forests throughout San Francisco. Locally-sourced black basalt gravel was also used in drainage areas located under benches in the courtyard, at the perimeter of the building, and between the joints of the courtyard pavers.

Despite the project's limited budget, Andrea Cochran Landscape Architecture remained committed to high-quality details and craftsmanship throughout the process. Innovative yet low-cost details help new residents feel at home in their new apartment complex.

Project Resources

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Andrea Cochran Landscape Architecture, Inc.

ARCHITECT

The Planning Partnership and Mercy Housing

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT

Baker Baker Architects

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR

The Hilltop: Aaron Forrester

CIVIL ENGINEER

Sandis

CLIENT

Community Housing Partnership