

— INFILL STUDIES

Model Citizens Appropriate for the area and handsome, too, Shingle-style infill condos in Mill Valley, Calif., are proving themselves to be friendly neighbors.



FILLING WELL

Transit-oriented developments, traditional neighborhood projects, and the cost of land have increased demand for infill. By Barbara Ballinger



Walkability and connectivity are taking on greater urgency as America's health crisis worsens and land prices escalate. Enter a resurgence of infill. But building well isn't just about filling in with single-family houses or condominiums. It's about fitting in with what's already there. It's about a building's height and scale. Then, it's style, materials, landscaping, sustainability, and respect for historic preservation.

Infill doesn't need to replicate the surroundings, but it should reflect some commonalities. "You can have a more modern building in an older urban setting if the building behaves in a responsible way with its mass and how it relates to the street," says Galina Tachieva, partner with Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. (DPZ) in Miami.

Increasingly, communities are helping by adopting form-based codes that require a sensitive development framework. The Miami 21 initiative on which DPZ consulted, for example, ensures that the city will learn from past mistakes when high-rises overshadowed homes and blocked water views.

Listening to the neighbors also is paramount. "Builders are smart to engage in a community dialogue before they finalize plans," says Mark Stapp, a real estate professor at the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University. "Too many builders fly in like pigeons, impact surroundings, then leave."

The following four projects are solid examples of infill done right.

PROJECT Old Mill Cottages, Mill Valley, Calif.

WHAT IT IS Four detached condos

BUILDER/DEVELOPER Englander Building Co., Mill Valley

ARCHITECT Francis Gough Architect, Mill Valley

Although it measured only 50 feet by 130 feet, the corner lot in the center of Mill Valley, a community of 13,000 located 15 minutes from the Golden Gate Bridge, had been zoned for four residences. Developer Peter Englander felt the neighborhood—which he lives in—was ripe for small detached condos on small lots that would cost less and require less maintenance than the area’s Shingle-style homes. England-

er purchased the site in 2008 for \$750,000, which caused a community uproar. “Many felt the site would be too dense, and that it was too close to two schools, a church, and park,” says architect Francis Gough.

To allay concerns, the duo conformed to the zoning code, put more space between one of the units and a nearby preschool, built a fence, and designed all units in the local Shingle-style vernacular, with low-sloped, sweep-

ing rooflines, extended eaves, and large brackets. The changes appeased those who initially did not support the project.

There are three 1,500-square-foot, three-bedroom condos that are market rate; the fourth is a 500-square-foot, one-bedroom affordable unit, per city quota. The plan placed parking spaces at the rear, and gave each condo its own garden. Englander says, “We wanted to put our names on something we’d be proud of.”



Parking Validation Gates lead into a car court that's deliberately concealed from the streetscape. Each condo also has a small outdoor space.

