

TURNING LIVES AROUND

A multifamily housing development in West Berkeley provides a safe, healthy setting for families who are building skills for independent living



Linda Swendsen

Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS) is an Alameda County-based nonprofit organization that helps homeless, poor and disabled people achieve health and self-sufficiency.

Sankofa House is Phase II in BOSS's creation of Ursula Sherman Village, a development in West Berkeley that provides a beautiful, safe setting where homeless families can build skills that are essential to escaping homelessness and living independently in the community.

An attractive two-story complex built around a small courtyard, Sankofa House provides shared housing in four separate apartments for 10 formerly homeless families. Each family has its own bedroom or suite of bedrooms, and shares a kitchen, living room, dining room, and bathrooms with the other family or families in their apartment. The Village includes facilities for BOSS's support activities and outdoor areas where children can play and adults can socialize.

“The Ursula Sherman Village embraces the quality of the physical environment as an essential part of the people’s wellness. Recycling and creating a healthy environment is a core principal in our program. We hope this will extend to healthy living now and in the future for the families.”

—Daniel Barth, developer

Green Building in Alameda County supported BOSS's green building efforts by providing a grant, technical resources and access to professional green building consultants. Architect Babette Jee and Fine Line Construction designed and built Sankofa House in accordance with the Alameda County *Green Building Guidelines for New Home Construction*. The project demonstrates that green building design strategies are achievable even with a very low construction budget, and that these strategies can help reduce a multifamily facility's long-term maintenance and operating costs.

GREEN at a GLANCE

ENERGY & SYSTEMS

- Designed to be 22% more energy-efficient than Title 24
- On-demand hot water circulation pump
- Recycled-content, formaldehyde-free fiberglass insulation
- Advanced infiltration reduction practices
- HEPA filter on heating system
- Low-e, triple-pane windows for energy efficiency and noise reduction (Milgard)
- Duct mastic on all duct joints
- All ducts cleaned before occupancy
- Range hoods vented to outside
- Energy-efficient refrigerators
- Fluorescent lighting (Shaper Light Fixtures)

MATERIALS & PRODUCTS

- 50% recycled flyash in concrete
- Wood I-joists for floors and ceilings (Trus Joist)
- Engineered trusses (Piedmont Lumber)
- OSB sheathing
- Recycled-content exterior stair treads (Trex)
- Durable, low-maintenance fiber-cement exterior siding (Hardiplank)
- Low-emissions cabinets (Ikea)
- No-VOC interior paint (Benjamin Moore Pristine Eco Spec)
- Solvent-free adhesives

OTHER GREEN FEATURES

- 75% recycling of construction waste
- Low-flow faucets and showerheads

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

Air filtration system. Children are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of air pollution; with Sankofa House located close to railroad tracks and a waste transfer station, concerns about air quality drove many of the design decisions. The building's heating and ventilation system is equipped with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters. This ensures delivery of filtered air to the home's interiors (residents are asked to keep windows closed during the day, when air pollution levels are higher). Range hoods vent to the outside to draw moisture and indoor air contaminants out of the homes. Ducts are well sealed and the building is tightly constructed to prevent infiltration of polluted outside air.

Low-emissions materials. Many conventional building products offgas chemicals that are potentially harmful to the health of residents. To further protect indoor air quality at Sankofa House, the development team took care to select interior finishes and products that have low levels of chemical emissions. Kitchen cabinets and interior trim are either made from materials with no added formaldehyde or are sealed to prevent chemical offgassing. The builders used zero-VOC interior paints and solvent-free construction adhesives.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Lower utility bills free up money for social services. The project's energy consultants estimate that Sankofa House will be 22% more energy efficient than required by Title 24, California's stringent energy code. The design and construction team employed a combination of cost-effective measures, including tight envelope construction, good insulation, high performance windows, well-sealed ducts, energy-efficient appliances, and fluorescent lighting. Energy efficiency provides immediate, tangible benefits to current and future residents: "Lower energy bills allow us to put more money into social services for our clients, families who were formerly homeless," says BOSS program director Nancy Jordan.

"I discovered that there was much overlap between creating a green building and creating a healthy environment for children."

—Babette Jee, architect

BUILT: 2005

SIZE:
5,600 SF

DEVELOPER:
BOSS

ARCHITECT:
BABETTE JEE

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:
FINE LINE CONSTRUCTION



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