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Designer Jennifer Siegal
and her daughter, Sydney,
inside the modular
addition to their Venice,
California, home.

It Takes a Village

On Washington's lush Bainbridge Island, one community strives for quality of life as a sustainable initiative.

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PROJECT
The Village, Grow Community
ARCHITECT
Davis Studio Architecture + Design
LOCATION
Bainbridge Island, Washington

With 142 residences on just eight acres, the Grow Community development brings new density to Bainbridge Island, near Seattle. Architect Jonathan Davis, in the garden with his daughter, Dashwood, designed the project's first phase, The Village. Inspired by One Planet Living sustainability principles, it was imagined as an assemblage of net-zero homes.





Who said making a better world would be easy? Just ask the cast of characters involved in Grow Community, a development on Washington's Bainbridge Island that was designed with the ambitious goal of encouraging social interaction while achieving net-zero energy status. Building for the future, they've learned, is a constant work in progress.

A three-stage project on the former site of Navy housing, Grow was initially conceived by a small group as a way to responsibly increase density while utilizing prefabricated construction. In the years since its inception, Grow has weathered a number of controversies, including a revolving door of architects, construction delays, and a scaling back of its prefabricated plan—all on an island known for a staunch resistance to development. Still, the initial passion that drove the project resonates within the community, despite the many challenges.

At the end of a typical day at The Village, Grow's first phase, neighbors greet one another as they wend their



The Davis family—Everett, Jonathan, Mary Jo, and Dashwood—enjoy a meal around a Room & Board Montego dining table at their home in The Village (top left). Their residence is the "Aria" style, one of four house types

available in The Village. At 1,549 square feet, Aria houses feature two bedrooms. Clad in a mix of stained cedar, Metal Sales corrugated siding, and James Hardie cement board, houses in The Village are arranged along winding paths

intended to provide opportunities for neighbors to interact (top right). The Davises' living room is filled with modern designs, including two lounge chairs by Jens Risom for Knoll and a BoConcept sofa (above). Mary Jo created the artwork.

way through shared garden paths, and children pedal bicycles through a series of “micro-hoods” made up of detached houses and town homes.

“This project looks to community as something we’ve lost,” says Jonathan Davis, architect of The Village. “It tries to create that in a modern way, with sustainability incorporated.” Though replaced as architect for the next two phases, Davis lives at Grow, in a two-bedroom house of his own design.

A decade ago, the site held a few ramshackle houses. A small group of investors acquired the parcel and worked with local developer Asani to turn it into a model energy-efficient neighborhood, with density zoning 1.5 times that previously allowed, thanks to a pilot development program on the island. The project’s second and third phases, The Grove and The Park, are now under construction. These take a different approach, with >



Houses in The Village feature Marvin windows and doors, energy-efficient GE and Frigidaire appliances, Mitsubishi heat pumps, and Zehnder HRV systems. Each buyer was able to customize the interior finish package of

their house from options that met the community’s sustainability guidelines. One area in which residents’ tastes differed was flooring; the Davis family chose cork. In place of closets, the houses have built-in storage made of Douglas fir

plywood (above left). Davis used the same material to build furniture, including beds for his master bedroom (above right) and his children’s room (below). He also crafted the red MDF bookshelf and hemp board storage unit.



“We knew we wanted to have a community, but would people play along? It turns out they chose to live here because of this goal—and it’s happened.” —Jonathan Davis, architect

The Village features gardens and orchards created by Tim Goss, Kia Micaud, and HomeGrown Organics. No roads run within the community, so it's completely car-free (a parking lot sits at the far end of the site). An abundance

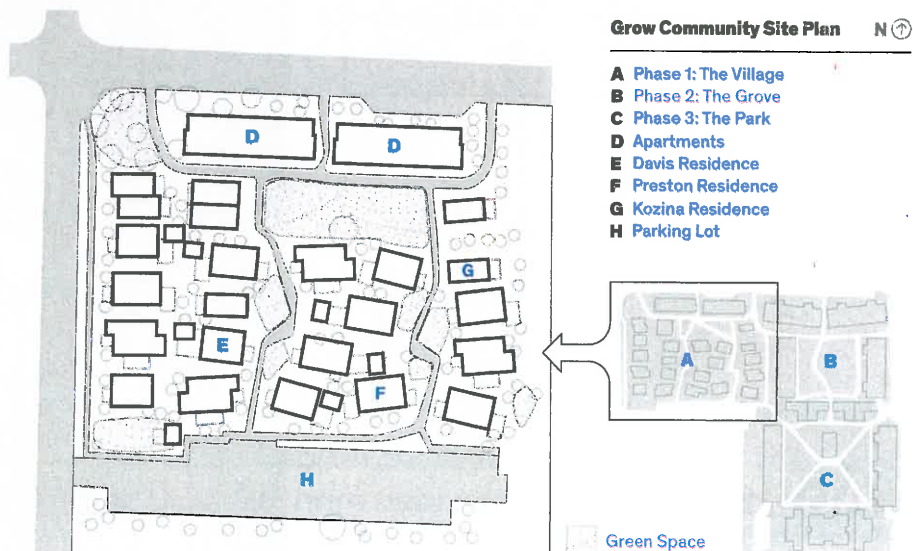
of bicycles has meant a shortage of bike parking, an element of the plan the Grow team acknowledges they could have done differently. Phase one consists of 23 houses and two apartment buildings with 10 units each

(below right). The next two phases, The Grove and The Park, will offer a mix of town houses and condominium apartments. Some critics see these more conventional schemes as diluted versions of the original concept.



condominiums and town houses neatly arranged around two central squares—unlike Davis's plan, which features a variety of housing types scattered in close proximity. Cutler Anderson Architects consulted on the master plans for phases two and three, and a third firm, Hartman Architecture + Design, contributed designs for a community center and an apartment building. The entire development is projected to be completed by late 2017.

Many involved in Grow give credit for its core values to Marja Preston, who led the development team and spurred the founding philosophy by posing questions as elemental as: "What would make this a place where you'd want to raise your family?" Preston lives in >





The Village, though she, too, is no longer affiliated with the development team. As she recalls, all involved knew they were facing great hurdles from day one. “We thought it would be really cool if we could design a net-zero house,” she says. “But we didn’t think we could at this market price. We didn’t want to build \$900,000 homes.”

Early public meetings confirmed that although people wanted to buy green, the prospect sounded expensive. It was up to the developer, Asani, to prove otherwise. “We convinced people that you can have a happier, healthier lifestyle in this community for less than if you buy a house up the street,” Preston says. The concept of a net-zero neighborhood struck a chord, and phase one houses sold out well before completion.

Davis, who created the pieceHomes modular concept in 2007, was brought on to realize the plan for The Village

using the One Planet Living initiative—an international framework with 10 core principles, including efficient use of water, energy, and sustainable materials; reduction of waste; protection of wildlife; and support for local economies. A total of 43 units were built in the first phase: 23 single-family homes and two apartment buildings with 10 small rentals apiece. Sale prices ranged from about \$300,000 to \$500,000, with the added bonus of deep discounts on utilities as a result of tax rebates and solar energy savings. >

“The site plan is a crazy jigsaw of houses at all sorts of wacky angles to each other. Everything is slightly off-kilter.” —Jonathan Davis

Rooftop Itek solar panels power the community—and are eligible for increased production incentives because they’re made locally. Although the panels were optional, every Village resident chose to install them (above).

Each “micro-hood” consists of six to eight houses around common outdoor spaces (opposite). Davis was careful to design for privacy: Large windows face south and small ones point north to avoid big expanses of facing glass.



Chris and Wendy Kozina live with their son, Ben, in a "Tallis" style town house (below). They selected bamboo floors for the 1,155-square-foot, two-bedroom interior. The family strives to cap their possessions at 500 items—Legos not

included. In the living room, an Innes media cabinet from Room & Board is paired with a Gus Modern sectional. On the upstairs landing, Chris and Ben pause by an IC Railings system from Issaquah Cedar and Lumber (below right).



Davis's initial concept called for modular houses but, as is often the case, things didn't work out quite as planned. Asani intervened, believing that it could build quicker and less expensively onsite using its own contractor, PHC. In the end, panelized walls and roof trusses fabricated off-site by Kingston Lumber were used in conjunction with conventional onsite techniques.

One area in which the development's original plan prevailed is the integration of sustainable energy systems. Every house in The Village is topped with photovoltaic panels (supplied by Washington-based Itek Energy, a company owned by a Grow investor), which are financed through a local credit union at zero percent down, with state and federal incentives paying the loan fees. "Everything about the houses is designed so we use only as much energy as we can produce," Preston says.

In fact, houses in The Village have proven even more efficient than imagined. "We're net-positive," Davis says >



"Each house is different and has its own personality. While I never would have put some things into them that other people chose, they work—the houses are universal that way." —Jonathan Davis

of his family's home. "We didn't pay an energy bill from May 2013 through January 2016. The meters run backward, so you can bank your excess."

This careful use of energy and incentives, along with the modest scale of the houses, was part of an effort to keep housing and utility costs affordable in order to attract a diverse group of residents to an area so tightly knit a Grow resident jokingly called it "incestuous."

Despite the difficulties along the way, residents interviewed for this story continue to embrace Grow's original intent. "I haven't found a single person who went through what we called the 'Grow shuffle' who regrets sticking it out and staying," one homeowner says.

The Village's design team also stands behind Grow's grounding philosophy—especially after seeing it in action. "It's not just about making a green building, it's about trying to make a sustainable community that has a great impact on the island," Davis says. "People really have bought into that." □



Marja Preston's family lives in one of Grow's "Everett" houses, with three bedrooms in 1,846 square feet. In their kitchen (top), West Elm pendants hang over a counter of myrtle butcher block sourced from Green Home Solutions.

The dining table (above) is custom. Mary Jo Davis, Marja Preston, Jonathan Davis, and Tia Preston gather on the deck (above left). "The community is the biggest selling point," Preston says. "The icing on the cake is sustainability."