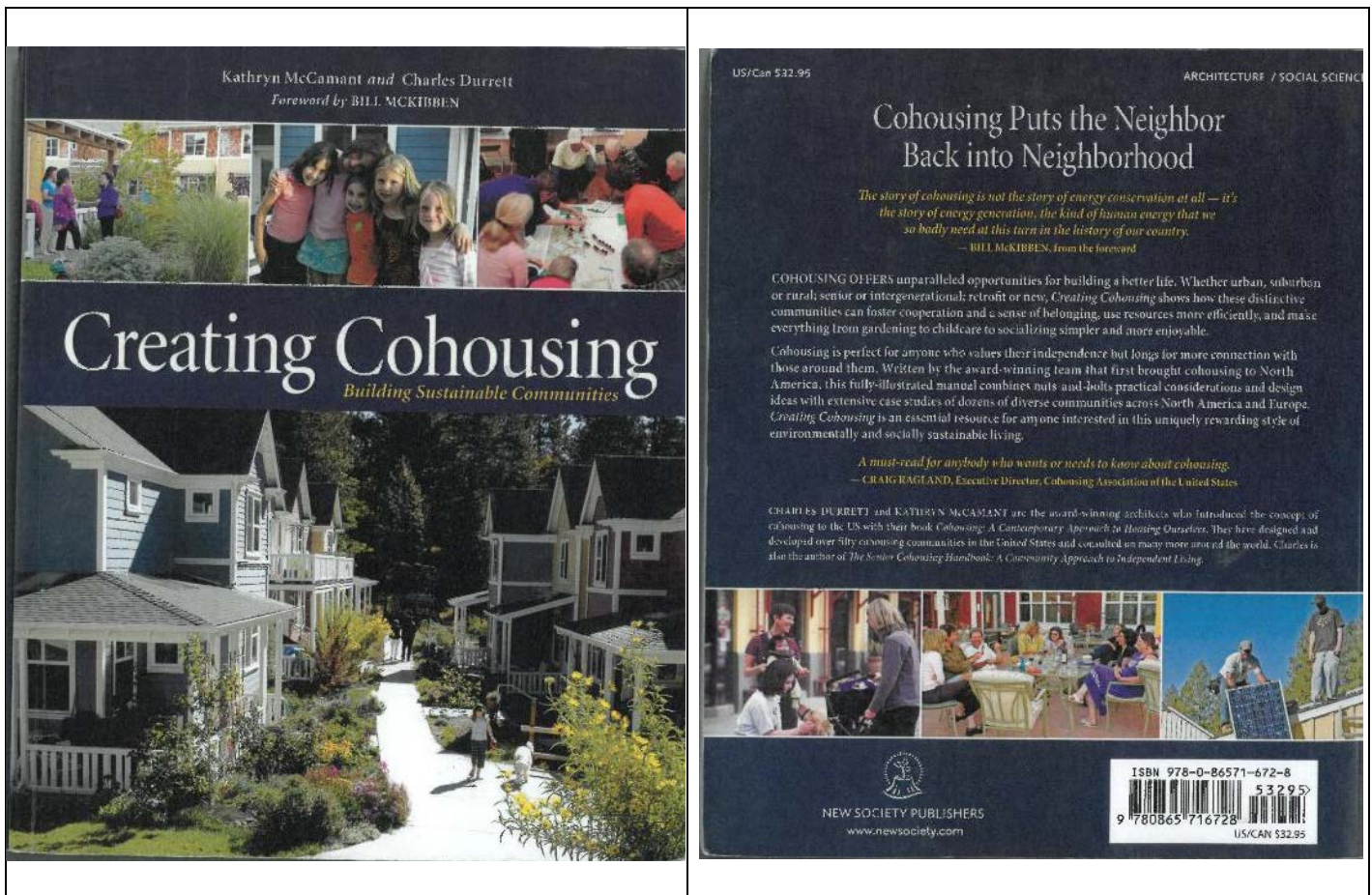


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Creating Cohousing - Building Sustainable Communities



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Note argumentaire de la contribution

Une présentation complète de cas pratiques de cohousing aux Etats-Unis et au Danemark essentiellement. Il est intéressant de voir qu'aux USA, il s'agit de véritable "city" avec une organisation pensée et respectée.

Ce choix de vie semble être né de l'évolution de notre société et de notre façon de vivre. Soit les familles sont monoparentales soit les 2 parents travaillent, ... Ils rentrent de leur journée, préparent le souper, s'occupent des enfants, et au final, cela ne laisse plus beaucoup de temps pour soi. Les raisons d'être sont tout autant la possibilité d'avoir du temps pour soi que la vie en communauté.

Une belle combinaison: individualité ET collectivité.

Cette nouvelle structure d'habitat offre une liberté aux parents et aux enfants avec une répartition habile des tâches. La solidarité prend ici son envol et déploie ses ailes. Une réussite alors qu'il s'agit de "super-structure".

Abécédaire

2011 - ADVANTAGES FOR CHILDREN - ARCHITECTURE AND IMAGE - **CANADA** - COHOUSING DESIGN - COMMUNITY SIZE - COMMUNITY TAX - **DANEMARK – ETATS-UNIS** - HOUSING - LARGER COMMUNITY - LEGACY OF CO - PARTICIPATORY PROCESS - PRIVATE OWNERSHIP - SHARED RESOURCES - SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE

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Jamaica Plain Cohousing *Another Urban Solution*

Boston, Massachusetts

30 Units

**Architects: Domenech, Hicks and
Krockmalnic Architects**

**Programming and Site Design:
Kraus Fitch Architects, Inc.**

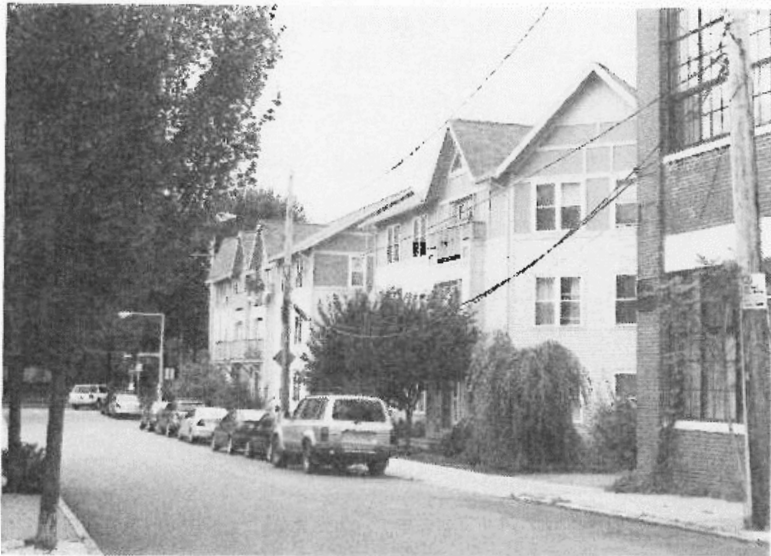
Completed: 2005

Tenure: Condominium

Common House: 6,968 sq. ft.

The open green at Jamaica Plain Cohousing is remarkably non-urban for a site with many urban characteristics. Sited on a corner one block from the train — Boston's "T" — the community's large public green space is hugged by the buildings and provides an oasis for children and adults alike; the sights and sounds of the city feel very far away.

This is not to say that Jamaica Plain Cohousing turns its back on its neighborhood. To the contrary, a 30-foot opening to the site (dictated by an easement for an underground aquifer) creates a view and entry into the common open space. At the far end, the large common house anchors the interior corner of the site. People gathering on the large public terrace in front of the common house, seated at gathering places, or walking



Street Edge.

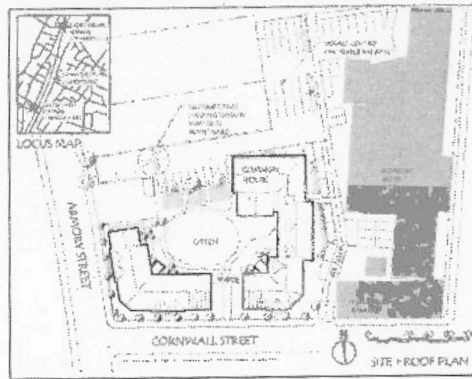
along the outdoor balconies bring constant movement and life to the community.

From Schematic Design to Move-In

The initial group of three households was specific about their interest in a site in Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood four miles southwest of downtown Boston with easy access to the train. They were also visionaries, able to see the potential of a former junkyard and take on the responsibility of cleaning up a contaminated site. (This was an expensive undertaking: Clean-up was initially priced at \$300,000, but the final cost was nearly \$900,000.) The group was also specific about drawing from the diverse population found in a city. At present the group includes members who are African-American, Chinese-American, Mexican, and European, with a total of five different native languages.

The group hired Kraus Fitch Architects for the programming and schematic design. The firm did four workshops with the group: a visioning workshop and a set of three workshops to create a site plan, a common house program, and private unit designs. The initial site design included buildings surrounding a central courtyard, a plan that was kept throughout the design process.

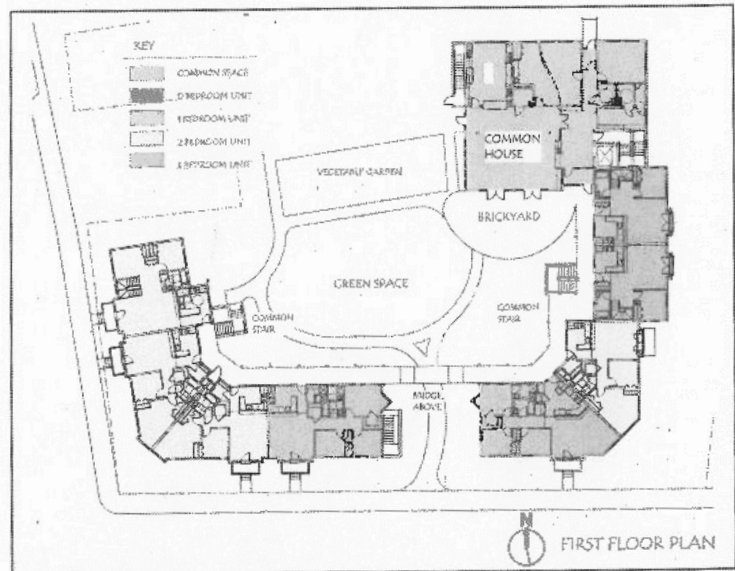
A local architecture firm was hired to complete design and construction drawings that adhered to the programming and schematic designs. During the design process, the site plan evolved to include a bridge or catwalk over the entryway, with apartment flats on both sides of the entryway. Outside balconies on each level were designed to link the homes, meeting one of the group's goals — to provide "visitability" to all units (wheel-chair accessibility to upper floors is made



DOMENECH HICKS & KROCKWALM ARCHITECTS

Top: View of the interior courtyard, terrace, and balconies, from the entry way.

Center: Site design plan.



DOMENECH HICKS & KROCKWALM ARCHITECTS

First floor house plans and site plan.

Conscious Participation

People remember the good neighborhoods they once lived in, if they ever did — towns and neighborhoods with a keen sense of place, cooperation, and participation. Cohousing, by comparison, is also firmly grounded in “place” and cooperation that evolves into relationships. Community building literally happens between the buildings and on garden pathways, grounded in the practical tasks — the “common” and individual acts of daily life. It is also grounded in the future residents “creating” the place through participation.

We need to take neighborhoods seriously, as a critical component of a well-rounded life experience. How can we espouse world peace if we can't even communicate effectively with our neighbors?

We doubt that anyone who lives in a cohousing community would deny the role that this experience plays in shaping them as a parent, a partner, a neighbor, and a citizen.

have community in our neighborhoods, if we are going to relate to each other in a healthful manner, it has to become a conscious act.”

For now it appears that the future of communitarianism in Western culture depends on conscious participation. As the sense of community wanes in America, and the recognition of its importance waxes, we expect that it will take movements like cohousing and other forms of participation to bring it back to life. To us, this would look something like the bird's-eye view of Bellingham Cohousing, which reminds us of the footprint of an ancient Chinese village or a Greek island town where people ventured out of their doors and where human interaction was the norm, not the exception. If you believe, like we do, that our first priority as a species is to build a viable society, then we need to consciously construct a world that allows for something like Bellingham Cohousing to be created — and to bring us back to the village. In fact, Danish cohousers would often say that they were simply consciously creating the kind of community and environment that used to occur naturally. Small town-like environments full of interdependent relationships, as in, “I don't want to upset Karen on Thursday if I am going to ask her to watch my kid on Friday.” With close-knit relationships like this, people go out of their way to be kind.

A Growing Concept and Reality

In 2008, Americans drove 2.9 trillion miles to playdates, soccer games, music lessons, and social events of all sorts, as well as driving to work and shop. In cohousing, of course, kids still have soccer practice and people still need to get to work, but they carpool with

For some people, cohousing is just a natural extension of their otherwise culturally creative lifestyle; for others, it is the first out-of-the-box choice they have ever really made. But even for them, it is a natural extension of a conservative lifestyle — almost reminiscent of historic neighborhoods when you could count on a neighbor. Or as Chuck was introduced in Cleveland, Ohio: “*Chuck is here to talk about putting the ‘neighbor’ back in the ‘hood.’*”

When we imagine two next-door neighbors sitting in their respective houses, watching TV and having dinner alone, versus sitting on one of their front porches and chatting about the issues of the day, we imagine so much missed opportunity. So much opportunity for mutual, practical, and even emotional support. In our increasingly globalized society it is clear that we can rely less and less on community to just happen naturally. Cohousing is just one of the various attempts to say, “Hey, if we are going to

neighbors and friends. They live in a more village-like setting where it is easy, even natural, to conserve resources — where it's not a compromise, but an enhancement to quality of life instead. We all have a community, we have to, we're social animals, but it's normally based on our auto, our telephone, and our date book. Proximity and community is the secret to easy quality of life and ease of sustainability.

While the number of cohousing communities is still relatively few, at 120 communities nationwide, the concept has already significantly impacted the American discussion on housing, community, and the meaning of neighborhood. Many hundreds of non-cohousing projects (for profit and nonprofit) are adapting to create much better-than-average housing (such as car-free streets), as described fully in Chapter 32: The Legacy of Cohousing. Cohousing is now an American housing option; no book or seminar on American housing would be complete without mention of it. For those of us living it, it's now just ordinary, everyday life.

The Common Denominator Across Cohousing Communities

As the case studies in this book illustrate, every cohousing community is different — a product of the initiative, imagination, and participation of its residents. Wherever you build your project and whoever you are as a community, you are unique. Yet after designing fifty different communities with fifty different groups, there are a few truths, a few predictable patterns:

- There are many more similarities than differences.

- ♦ Every group wants their project to meet their needs.
- ♦ Every group wants their project to be affordable to their members.
- ♦ Every group wants their project to be energy-efficient and sustainable.
- ♦ Every individual wants to be heard, and listened to.
- ♦ Everyone wants the process to be thoughtful and thorough. Everyone wants it to be fair.
- ♦ Every group wants to be proud of their home and community, and how it feels and looks.
- ♦ And no one wants it to take too long; no one wants to discuss every line item twice or three times. Therefore, everyone wants to have an efficient group process, which of course facilitates the success of the other, above, line items.

At the end of the day, each common house, for example, is about 25 percent different from another. But that 25 percent may mean the difference between 350 and 100 people hours per week — even though both common houses cost \$300,000. Zooming in on the local culture is the context of a known process — a process that involves learning how to turn over every rock, examine the possibilities, and help a group reach its potential.

How to Make Cohousing Happen

Creating a successful cohousing community requires experienced facilitation. Otherwise, a group bumbles along until they are tired, out of money, and out of time, and either just builds what they have or dissipates. We

shortcake with fresh whipped cream. There is so much that we take for granted here that is unusual in most American neighborhoods... like the people and the relationships that we care about, and the care and regard that we feel from them. It's hard to imagine anything

restate this only because we are weary of seeing groups fail under the weight of their own inexperience.

This book is full of information about how to make cohousing happen and how to get the most out of living there. We have no intention of making it sound foreboding, but like an airplane flight or a whitewater rafting trip, with proper piloting any voyage can be positive and the journey can be just as interesting and fun as the destination. But, let a bus driver take over the flight panel, and it can be all too risky. There are half a dozen "pilots" in the US now who know cohousing and can take you through the turbulence. Our biggest piece of advice for new cohousers: work with people who know what they are doing and have successfully demonstrated it.

If someone were to ask us, "If you were to be able to choose any ten architects you could to design the most sustainable towns possible, who would you choose?" We would always choose the architects who know how to organize people. Someone who knows how to bring people together will always help a group achieve their best outcome. The possibilities for what those solutions might be are readily available, if not entirely obvious, and then getting a group to agree to them is really the "only" challenge.

How Far Have We Come?

As we sit at common dinner tonight at Nevada City Cohousing, it's hard to believe that there were ever doubts that cohousing could work in the United States. For five years we've been eating dinner together several times a week, and sharing tales, advice, and comforts. We finish the meal with a tasty homemade dessert of rhubarb and strawberry

as gratifying as living in a neighborhood that you helped to co-create — a neighborhood in the image of what really makes sense to you and your future neighbors that you have come to trust.



**"Coopér'actif - habiter ensemble, autrement demain"
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