

Apartment Living

Environmental Harmony Extends Beyond Design

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Even if you're not into green living, Elevation 314 has a lot going for it. But if concern about the environment is a priority for you, then the D.C. apartment building is likely to catch your attention.

Elevation 314's 52 units, developed and designed by architect Russell Katz, opened to residents in July. The building -- named for its street address and the fact that some point of its structure hits the 314-feet-above-sea-level mark -- sits just inside the District, directly across the street from the Takoma Metro station. It's made from a veritable catalogue of environmentally sensitive materials: geothermal heating and EcoDisc elevators, energy efficient lights and ceiling fans, fiberglass-framed windows, Hardiplank cementitious fiberboard siding, concrete made of 20 percent recycled material, paint with minimal volatile organic compounds and wood harvested from certified managed forests, a form of sustainable growth.

The most noticeable green aspect of the building is the central courtyard and the adjacent landscaped area over the covered parking garage; they filter rainwater for pollutants that would otherwise wash straight into the city's water system. Katz said this is the only apartment building in the city that he knows of that uses this water filtration technique, called a "green roof," over a parking garage.

The complex also has more parking spots for bicycles than cars -- 47 free indoor rack spots for bikes, compared with 38 garage spaces, at \$70 per month, and surface parking places, at \$50 per month. However, its location encourages residents to use public transportation -- it's close to Metro, major bus routes and the pedestrian-friendly retail and service establishments of the District's Takoma neighborhood and of Takoma Park, just over the Maryland line.

Katz, who believes fervently in the possibility of creating a model for other area apartment construction, speaks passionately about his first environmentally responsible construction. From the landscape architect to the interior products consultants, all products were chosen with an eye toward the environment. "We didn't compromise on anything," he said.

Kurt Ankeny-Beauchamp and Jenny Beauchamp-Ankeny were the first residents in July. They chose one of the two odd-shaped units across the shortest side of the building, facing Vine Street. "We have a funky shaped apartment -- I love it," said Beauchamp-Ankeny.

They say the green aspect of the building attracted them because they were most recently California residents and were used to environmental consciousness.

"We came and looked at it and fell in love with it right away. We thought it was just perfect," Beauchamp-Ankeny said. The couple looked forward to geothermal heating and energy efficient cooling to save money on electric bills -- the only utility for which residents are responsible. So far electricity bills for the couple's unit have ranged from \$40 in July to \$18 in October.

Ankeny-Beauchamp's commute to George Mason University in Fairfax County takes an hour and a half on a good day. He takes the Metro and a bus, which gives him time to work on his sketching. He draws caricatures of his fellow riders before transforming into an information technology coordinator at work.

Beauchamp-Ankeny's commute to Foggy Bottom takes "30 minutes at most," she said.

The couple looked at another of Katz's properties nearby, Elm Gardens, at 7050 Eastern Ave. NW, which is older and was less expensive, but decided to rent at Elevation 314 instead. "We liked the hardwood floors and high ceilings. Plus the environmental aspect -- it's good to be supportive of that," Beauchamp-Ankeny said.

The building is also pet friendly for both dog and cat owners, such as Pam Dooley and Kimberly Harrington.

Dooley owns a large dog that has direct access to the outdoors from Dooley's first-floor patio. Dogs have plenty of places for walks, such as the large park directly across Carroll Street.

Harrington has two cats. "I walk them on a leash in the courtyard," she said. The management also allowed her to put up a protective fence on her second-floor balcony to keep Sisyphus and Maggie from accidentally jumping off.

The building encourages pet ownership by not charging a monthly pet rental fee. Residents pay a one-time fee of \$600 per dog and \$300 per cat, however. No more than one dog or two cats are allowed in a unit.

Though the closeness to Metro is cited by residents as one of the biggest draws of the building, some might consider the roar of passing trains on the CSX railroad tracks that parallel the Metro line as a drawback. No residents interviewed complained about this noise, in part because they have chosen to live next to train tracks and in part because Katz designed the building with hallways along the noisiest exterior sides. As for internal noise, residents are required to cover a certain percentage of their environmentally sensitive bamboo hardwood floors.

The overall look is light and minimalist, with large windows and 10-foot-high ceilings. Kitchens have laminate countertops and white appliances. "My goal was to create a cutting-edge green building, but at a level normal professionals could afford," said Katz.

There is a coffee house, Savory, on the first floor of the building, featuring coffee, espresso drinks, pastries and a casual environment. Savory's D.C. location is a more mainstream-looking version of its original Takoma Park location nearby, which bills itself as "eclectic, funky and very green."

Its "greenness" suits Elevation 314 just fine.