

EXCLUSIVE

Designing Communities for Different Ages

By [Carrie Rossenfeld](#) | Orange County



Liu: "At Esencia, the communities are crafted for each of the life stages."

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, CA— Designing and marketing a master-planned community's **residential development** to appeal to the needs of varied demographic groups is unusual, but **Esencia at Rancho Mission Viejo** is attempting to do just that. Homebuilders have begun construction on Phase 1 of Esencia, an 890-acre, mixed-density, master-planned development in South Orange County, being developed

by **Rancho Mission Viejo LLC**, with 12 residential products set to open for sale this fall. When completed, the three-phase project will include approximately 1,825 market-rate residences and approximately 730 age-qualified dwellings for buyers 55 and older that address demographics previously unserved by the merchant homebuilders. We spoke exclusively with **Colin Liu**, studio director for **Robert Hidey Architects**, designer of the project, about designing a project for such a diverse group of residents. Stay tuned for an exclusive interview with Rancho Mission Viejo LLC on this project and creating a "culture of care" in residential communities.

GlobeSt.com: Why is it unusual to design and market a residential project for varied demographic groups?

Liu: Most of us live in older, established towns whose neighborhoods

are not created for our particular lifestyle. Instead, we are adapting to what the community has to offer. Here at Esencia, the communities are crafted for each of the life stages, and they are arranged so that it becomes one village that encompasses all of the demographics. Esencia welcomes all age groups, and they will be arranged in clusters of detached homes and **apartments** along walkable streets and pedestrian paseos. It is designed as small fabrics of neighborhoods and integrates a variety of product types to create a diverse, yet inclusive, living environment. It's a unique community for ageless living that does not rely on walls or gates. Most master-planned communities arrange residential areas for retirees behind a gate or walls, but they don't combine these areas with the rest of the community; that's what's unique about Esencia.

GlobeSt.com: Is it becoming more common for developers to broaden their focus within one project?

Liu: It really makes sense. Rancho Mission Viejo is based on extensive market research of mature as well as family buyers. Mature buyers and **Baby Boomers** don't want to be categorized as seniors, but there's a way to design these master plans so that they still have their privacy, but when they feel they want to intermix with the community, they can do so because they are still within a large community. There are street patterns at Esencia for all the age-qualified neighborhoods with a single point of access without any through streets. There is no need for others in the community to drive through these age-qualified neighborhoods. There are also special amenities designed just for age-qualified buyers who pay slightly higher HOA fees and so have exclusive rights to use them. For example, there will be a small recreation building with a swimming pool and covered outdoor space with a seating area and outdoor barbecues that age-qualified residents will be able to use but is not accessible to market-rate families.



The residences designed by RHA for Ryland Homes blend indoor and outdoor living.

GlobeSt.com: What do you find most unique about what Esencia has to offer?

Liu: The area is a working cattle ranch with 130 years or more of history. There are pastures with grazing cattle, lemon and avocado groves and a large habitat-preserved area. Also, Esencia is located on a hillside, and it has all the amenities built in: a comprehensive system of trails, parks, paseos and greenbelts in addition to large community clubhouses. There are also bothies located throughout the property, which are nothing more than stone shelters for shepherds who were caught out in the fields in the middle of a thunderstorm. These were established hundreds of years ago, and they're not being used as shepherd shelters anymore, but have been converted to rental units for when residents are hiking or camping—kind of a permanent campsite. RMV adapted this type of system and established several bothies along the perimeters of Esencia connected by trails so residents will be able to walk down to these facilities. They are amenitized shelters for recreation and are about the size of a three-car garage with no walls. This amplifies the indoor/outdoor lifestyle. The design inspiration for these bothies came from Napa and Sonoma counties, where the indoor/outdoor lifestyle is commingled. This is a fresh alternative to the typical Mediterranean style that defines much of Orange County.

GlobeSt.com: What else should our readers know about this project?

Liu: The setting is just so spectacular, with canyons and hillsides surrounding this village. There's a comprehensive visual system that connects residents to this natural resource: oak groves, cattle pastures and working citrus orchards. There's an oak canyon that

centers a network of trails that connects neighborhoods including a K-8 school, ballfields, parks and community centers, all strung along with pedestrian trail systems. Our office is very excited about this upcoming community in South Orange County, and we feel privileged to be part of the design team. We thank the Rancho Mission Viejo LLC for the opportunity to build their vision to reality.

Link:

http://www.globest.com/news/12_1130/orangecounty/multifamily/Designing-Communities-for-Different-Ages-358798-1.html