



## Design & Development

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# Indoor–Outdoor Lifestyle Goes High-Density

**How rec-center amenities can express the social spirit of your apartment community.**

By [Robert Hidey](#)



Courtesy Robert Hidey Architects The 5,168-square-foot Leasing Office is situated in the primary recreational area at Avella Apartment Homes. The Italianate structure is one of three amenity buildings at the 485-unit, Orange County, Calif., property. The team chose three facilities to contribute to the development's sense of community and provide outdoor spaces to socialize in lieu of backyards.

With developers struggling to meet demand from downsizing baby boomers and millennials seeking more-urban environments, multifamily projects now account for approximately half of my firm's work.

The signature of our company, Robert Hidey Architects (RHA), entails creating an indoor–outdoor resort lifestyle, which applies just as much to high-density communities as it does to multimillion-dollar single-family estates. As a practitioner of community design as well as architecture, RHA is frequently charged with master-planning residential environments anchored by elaborate recreation centers, buildings that have proven to be powerful tools in communicating the spirit of a new community.

### **Upping the Ante**

With land prices soaring and lots getting smaller, the importance of recreation centers, or “amenity buildings,” increases, and as soon as one developer ups the ante on the feature, competitors naturally follow. In high-density environments, you have to supplement what you can do at a single-family home, so rec centers can be important marketing tools.

Upscale communities can offer concierge services out of their rec centers, while family-oriented projects sometimes feature arcade games for kids. To decide what features your community's rec center needs, look at the demographic and design accordingly. The quality of these facilities is particularly important to mature buyers, such as empty-nesters looking for social interaction.

Another driving force in the development of rec centers is an increasing societal consciousness of health and wellness, which often translates to the kind of communal activities (for example, yoga, tai chi, and bocce ball) found at resorts.



Robert Hidey ArchitectsAvanti addresses the demographic it was designed for with a community center that enhances social interaction through fitness facilities and a pool. The Los Angeles development, comprising 72 first-floor condos, is particularly attractive to downsizing baby boomers whose priorities are luxury and security.

### **European Village**

In the affluent Los Angeles suburb of Calabasas, the 72-unit Avanti is particularly attractive to downsizing baby boomers whose priorities are luxury and security. Developed by The New Home Co., Avanti’s single-floor condos offer a convenient “lock-and-leave” lifestyle, and units ranging from 2,314 to 2,700 square feet are priced in the mid-\$1,000,000s.

Avanti addresses the demographic it was designed for with a community center that enhances social interaction through fitness facilities and swimming. Called The Club House, the structure reflects the 5-acre development’s Italianate design and features high-end finishes and a secluded pool with cabanas. Upstairs is an equipped gym and downstairs a yoga and Pilates studio designed to perpetuate the resort feel. The amenities center contributes to a European village concept further enhanced through an easy stroll to The Commons, an upscale neighboring shopping center, as well as units that feel private despite the project’s 14-unit-per-acre density.

## **Triple Threat**

The Irvine Co., a dominant Orange County, Calif., developer fully appreciates the marketing impact amenity centers can have on a multifamily property. At the upmarket, 485-unit Avella Apartment Homes project in Irvine, three distinct amenity buildings contribute to a genuine sense of community.

The 5,168-square-foot Leasing Office, an Italianate structure with soaring Palladian windows, is situated in the primary recreational area of Avella, beside a formidable, 50-foot-by-90-foot pool with cabanas and a two-sided fireplace. In addition to the leasing function, the building offers a kitchen and storage area that includes convenient parcel lockers for residents. A technology-friendly lounge features TVs, community computers, and a high-end coffee station. An adjoining, 3,007-square-foot fitness center provides state-of-the-art exercise equipment, and outside its doors are a landscaped park with tot lot, fire pits, and barbecue grills.

The 3,092-square-foot Clubroom Building represents yet a third amenity building at Avella, featuring a stylish lounge with an outdoor terrace overlooking another swimming pool.

Avella's comprehensive package of indoor-outdoor amenity spaces, designed to serve as an extension of the tenants' own living areas, encourages social interaction between the residents. The sophisticated architectural design we hoped to impart in the three recreation centers is meant to be consistent with the luxury apartments themselves.

Avella represents a good example of how the amenity center has evolved over the past decade: Because apartment residents don't have yards, they need facilities that offer a place to socialize. Meanwhile, increased density continues to push the scale of these centers.





Robert Hidey Architects Highpark's primary community center is positioned as the heart and soul of the 700-unit Los Angeles development. The 8,357-square-foot, California Modern structure features a clubroom and kitchen, community offices, and a fitness room.

### **Two for One**

RHA authored the conceptual master plan and “Specific Plan Design Guidelines” for the 700-unit Highpark community in San Pedro, a harbor community in Los Angeles’s desirable South Bay area. With a combination of single-family and multifamily units, the project—construction on the 61.5-acre site began last year—is proving popular with first-time home buyers and locals seeking security and upscale features. New York-based iStar understands that amenity-rich rec centers, the first impression prospective buyers get of the community, are potent selling points for singles, couples, and families alike. As a result, the developer has provided not one but two centers at Highpark.

The primary community center, the heart and soul of the development, is an 8,357-square-foot, California Modern structure featuring a clubroom and kitchen for meetings or social events, community offices, and a fitness room. A large, family-oriented pool is also located here, along with outdoor grills and tables. A secondary, 2,253-square-foot center is situated on a large, landscaped lot that provides the illusion of being away from home. It includes a more tranquil, out-of-the-way pool for adults.



Courtesy Robert Hidey Architects The Hilltop Club serves 4,200 residential units from two Rancho Mission Viejo, Calif., developments. The facility, which comprises two, 7,500-square-foot, Farmhouse Interpretive–style buildings, is meant for residents of all ages to enjoy while connecting with one another. Besides the resort-style pool, the club features a bocce ball court, fire pits, and a large special-event spot.

### **Lifestyle on the Ranch**

Orange County’s Rancho Mission Viejo has become one of California’s most desirable master-planned communities. Unlike many developments designed solely for a specific demographic, “The Ranch” accommodates a diverse range of ages and lifestyles, blending neighborhoods for families with those exclusive to the 55-plus crowd.

Serving as the recreational center and social heart of The Ranch’s second village of Esencia is the recently opened Hilltop Club, which accommodates families from approximately 4,200 residential units from two major Rancho Mission Viejo developments. The elaborate Hilltop Club services Esencia’s more than 2,500 households, including young and growing families and the 55-plus demographic through unique social and recreational programming that unites people based on their interests and abilities.



The Hilltop Club consists of two 7,500-square-foot Farmhouse Interpretive–style buildings as well as a resort-style pool and spa, fire pits, indoor–outdoor fitness areas, a bocce ball court, and a large special-event space. By creating a central place for all ages, we wanted The Hilltop Club to enable residents to connect with each other, no matter their age or life stage, while enjoying true resortlike living.



Courtesy Robert Hidey Architects Once planned to house a golf-oriented community, Miralon, in Palm Springs, Calif., was reimagined with its golf course transformed into a 7,000-tree olive orchard with golf-cart paths converted to walking trails. The property's nearly 100 acres of open space include community gardens, dog parks, and fitness stations intended for residents of all ages.

### **Golf Alternative**

In 2016, Boston-based Freehold Communities took over a 310-acre site in Palm Springs, Calif., originally planned for a golf-oriented community. The original project, called Avalon, was entitled for 1,150 residential units before being abandoned during the recession. Freehold rechristened the property Miralon and brought in RHA to reimagine the concept, transforming the golf course into a 7,000-tree olive orchard and converting golf cart paths into walking trails that stitch together an eco-friendly community.

Nearly 100 acres of open space are enhanced with covered social spaces, community gardens, dog parks, and fitness stations targeting residents of all ages, many of whom will be empty-nesters, second-home owners, retirees, and pre-retirees.

This departure from Palm Springs' ubiquitous golf-course communities offers both multifamily and single-family units. Miralon appeals to value-based buyers conscious of their impact on the environment—reinforced by drought-resistant landscaping and solar panel-clad roofs—but who have sophisticated culinary and aesthetic sensibilities.

The architecture at Miralon pays homage to the Desert Modernism that's become Palm Springs' signature, a style both refined and approachable, with natural local materials integrated into the design. A 7-acre community site amenity features a cardio room and group activity space, while a sales staff-managed café anchors The Hub, where potential home buyers mingle with current residents.

The Club Room provides food and beverage services, and a demonstration kitchen showcases local celebrity chefs preparing farm-to-table cuisine using pressed olive oil, herbs, and vegetables from Miralon's own harvest. Pavilionlike spaces connected by covered pedestrian walkways foster health and wellness. Also available are a fitness court and an event lawn. Miralon is slated to open in late 2017.

### **About the Author**



#### [Robert Hidey](#)

*Robert Hidey, founder and principal of Irvine, Calif.–based Robert Hidey Architects (RHA), is known for pioneering housing trends that have enriched the residential environments of numerous communities throughout North America and the world.*