

AVRP designs housing that makes San Diego a better place, has developed creative solutions that make housing more affordable

by Doug Austin, Founder and CEO of AVR Studio

When I was a student at Cal Poly a professor told me one of most important things one person can do for another is to create a good place to live. That has stayed with me all these years later and really has driven the housing work we do at AVR. We're passionate about creating affordable homes for all San Diegans, and it's an issue we've been invested in for years.

As inflation and limited inventory pushes housing prices continually higher, living in California, let alone owning a home here, has become increasingly unattainable for many of our neighbors. This is a shame and the negative impacts on our community are far reaching. San Diego is at its best as a thriving, inclusive community welcoming to all, with a mix of rich and diverse cultures and housing for all.

As architects we work to make the world a little bit better place, and our firm also happens to be really good creative problem solvers. So working on solving our region's housing crisis checks a lot of boxes for us.

At [AVR Studio](#), we look beyond the typical client relationship to try and ensure everyone at our design firm is working to make San Diego a better place, a place where all are welcome. This desire led us to the affordable housing space more than two decades ago. We have been fortunate to design a number of affordable housing developments over the years, and we're looking forward to working on others.

In the last 3 years alone, AVR has designed 8 affordable housing communities across California, with several others coming online during the previous decades. Our team is passionate about and committed to housing solutions.

As Chair of Advisory Board for [YIGBY](#) (Yes in God's Backyard), an organization committed to finding innovative ways to build homes for low-income families and individuals, we seek creative solutions. We do the same thing at AVR.

AVR is known for its decades of design excellence, creativity, and planning some of the most prominent, visionary, and vibrant projects in Southern California. We are proud to be a part of the housing movement and this next generation of affordable housing – creating more opportunities for our neighbors. We believe that architecture is one of the most important art forms because of the impact it can have on the spirits and lives of those it touches, and nowhere is that truer than with housing.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to detail and highlight just a few of the affordable housing communities we designed, developments that help those who need a helping hand and create a positive impact in our community:

15th and Commercial: Modern homes and supportive housing for low-income San Diegans

AVRP Studios was proud to spearhead and execute the design of this visionary \$37 million, 126,000 square foot affordable transitional housing development for Father Joe's Villages. Our goal was to provide contemporary and more dignified housing in a building that fits within the urban context from a design and programming standpoint. The complex includes a child development facility for homeless children; 75 transitional housing units for 150 homeless single men; and 65 affordable housing units for individuals with annual incomes between 30% and 40% of San Diego Area Median Income. This building was the first in the region to incorporate these three key elements into one site.

Kettner Crossing: A visionary look into the future of mixed-use housing development



We were honored that our team was selected to design this mixed-use 30-story building with 295 market rate apartments, an 8-story building with 64 subsidized apartments for seniors, and 5,115 square feet of retail space.

Developers Holland Partner Group and Bridge HOUSING will build around an existing five-story parking garage on a 52,555 square-foot site between Beech and Cedar streets. It will include a 30-story building with 295 market-rate residential units and an 8-story building with 64 rent-controlled apartments for seniors. Both buildings are being designed to LEED Gold standards.

The market rate building will include 46 studios (averaging 509 square feet), 144 one-bedrooms (688 square feet), 76 two-bedrooms (1,041 square feet) and 29 three-bedrooms (1,301 square feet). At the senior building, there will be 31 studios (averaging 509 square feet), 30 one-bedrooms (688 square feet) and two two-bedrooms (1,301 square feet). Plans call for around 230 parking spaces and more than 7,000 square feet of common indoor space.

In keeping with the guiding principles of the Downtown Community Plan, our team is working to create a development that contributes to the area's vitality and allows residents to live close to work, transit and shops and restaurants, helping our region grow its cultural vibrancy, improve its walkability, and reach its climate action goals. AVRPs design concept, which includes elements such as aluminum, spandrel glass and vertical angled features, is inspired by the site's prominent location as a gateway from Little Italy to the City and the Bay.

Los Vientos: Maximizing historically under-utilized land

Simply put, Los Vientos replaces under-utilized industrial parcels and helps to revitalize San Diego's culturally-rich Barrio Logan. The development is located on two parcels totaling just over one acre. It consists of two buildings with 89 affordable family units of 2 to 4 bedrooms. Construction is made up of four levels of Type V wood construction over Type I concrete underground parking. The Design is Title 24 +15% energy efficiency. Amenities include a children's play area in the courtyard, outdoor barbecue area, and a 1,400 square foot community clubhouse with a computer lab. The project was partially financed with Low Income Housing Tax Credits and City of San Diego Redevelopment Agency funds.

Modular Housing

In our commitment to finding new avenues for affordable housing, AVR P has gone as far as inventing a new method for building high-rises that employs modular construction. AVR P has received a U.S. Patent for this work and we are currently working on additional patents for housing construction.

We're trying to really think creatively and it's what led us to designing modular housing and looking at ways to build it more effectively. We can't just subsidize our way out of the housing crisis. We're looking toward innovation to create more affordable housing – to build it faster and for less money.

About the Author

Doug Austin's passion for architecture and his mission to make housing available to all, led him to some of the first micro-unit housing during the 1980s in trying to make homes naturally more affordable through design as an alternative to unsustainable government subsidies. He challenged the building industry, who was faced with inclusionary housing issues, to build two projects that ranged in size from 195 square feet per unit to 295 square feet. The premise was simple: "If people can't afford more there should be a good option to buy or rent less?"

Austin serves as Chair of the Advisory Board for YIGBY (Yes in God's Backyard), which is an organization committed to finding innovative ways to build homes for low-income families and individuals. YIGBY is one of many ways that represent AVR Studio's commitment to the larger goal of housing for all. Austin served as Vice Chairman of San Diego's Redevelopment Agency and he is a former City of San Diego Planning Commissioner.

Austin received his B'ARCH from Cal Poly SLO, where he is an Honored Alum and serves on the President's Council of Advisors. Austin has furthered his post graduate education studying at the Harvard's Graduate Center for Design and participating in the exploration of workforce housing at Harvard's Joint Center for Housing.

About AVR Studios

Celebrating 46 years of creativity and achievements in 2022, the firm and its principals have earned nearly 135 design awards.

AVRP originated in 1976, when Doug Austin began a small design firm out of his home. Forty-six years later, the firm has designed billions of dollars' worth of iconic projects both domestically and internationally.

In its outside-the-box and problem-solving nature, the firm was recently awarded U.S. and International patents for a new methodology involving prefabricating modules that act as the formwork for concrete buildings up to 75 stories in height that hold the potential to save significant construction cost and time in the building process. AVR sponsors a grant each year for "Housing Innovations."

The firm's project types include urban infill, mixed-use, housing, education, corporate office, multigenerational space, health care and more. The firm is led by three principals: Douglas H. Austin, FAIA, LEED AP, MAIBC; Christopher T. Veum, AAIA, IIDA; and Randy Robbins, AIA.

Visit www.avrpstudios.com to learn more.