

YES! Magazine

Still Neighbors After All These Years!

By Neshama Abraham Paiss

About 10 years ago I met Zev Paiss, an early pioneer in the cohousing movement and co-founder of what is now the Cohousing Association of the U.S. (www.cohousing.org). He spoke passionately about the importance of creating an environmentally-sustainable communities and introduced me to cohousing's signature design that combines private homes with communal land and a Common House for shared meals and social activities. At that time only a dozen cohousing neighborhoods were sprinkled across the United States. Now thousands of single parents, families, couples, and empty nesters/retirees enjoy this lifestyle in neighborhoods that range from urban, suburban to rural locations.

One of the learnings over the past 10 years is that the more cohesive the social fabric of the community, the better stewards of the environment community members become. Residents live in clusters of smaller homes with energy-saving shared walls, cars on the perimeter, preservation of green space and a human-friendly environment. Resources are shared (tools, garden equipment, autos, toys, etc.) cutting down on material consumption and a focus on bikes and the use public transportation.

There are over 100 more cohousing communities in the planning or building stages at this moment, so I predict that over the next 10 years we will see a tripling of cohousing communities across the nation. Green Building, Healthy Homes and Sustainable Community will continue to be core values for cohousing. The desire to

include mixed-income cohousing projects will be supported by increased awareness among state and federal entities and enlightened foundations.

Another trend will be the continued social/political action arising from within cohousing neighborhoods. Residents of Tierra Nueva, a cohousing community in Oceano, CA took action against the rising rates of cancer in their town and its connection to pesticide use. The members were instrumental in having the strawberry field next to their property convert from using pesticides to a “farm without harm.”

A third significant trend to look for over the next 10 years are the growth of Elder or Senior Cohousing neighborhoods. This new housing option is based on many of the same characteristics of the multi-generational neighborhood but adapted for 55 and above to be able to “age consciously in community.” According to Chuck Durrett, author of the newly released book *Senior Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living* (Ten Speed Press, 2005), this model has been very successful in Denmark where the last 20 out of 25 completed cohousing neighborhoods have been age-targeted.

I salute the cohousing residents of the past 10 years who had the courage to try something new and found their life greatly enriched by it. Perhaps in the next 10 years we will see my husband Zev’s vision come to pass - that you can walk across the country and be able to stay each night in a cohousing Common House!

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Attachment: photo of Glacier Circle in Davis, CA.