

## How America Lives: Creative Housing Options for Boomers, Veterans, Millennials and More

By Paula Spencer Scott  
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When was the last time you actually borrowed an egg from the guy next door? Do your friends show up in your social media feeds more often than in your backyard? Do you even know your neighbors' names—and would they know if you needed help?

Maybe that's why what's old is new again in housing, from tight-knit neighborhoods where residents look after one another to fresh twists on boardinghouses. The hot word is *communal*.

“Long before '60s communes, the idea of idealists coming together to create a better world goes back centuries,” says Sky Blue of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), which tracks collective living of all kinds. “But now instead of escaping the mainstream, the trend is to be *more* engaged.”

Whether the initial draw is company, saving money, greener living or physical and emotional support, communal living seems here to stay. “Words like *economical* and *ecological* share the root *eco*—which is Greek for ‘home,’” Blue says. “It's about getting your basic needs met and doing it together.”

Check out these standout examples of creative housing.

### A Village Within a City

Busy cities can be hard places to build community. So in Seattle's Capitol Hill district, architects Grace Kim, 48, and Mike Mariano, 49, designed a five-story building that would help do just that. Its nine units are small (810 to 1,300 square feet) to keep costs low and to leave more room for shared spaces, including balconies facing a central courtyard and a rooftop farm. The “secret sauce,” according to Kim, is an on-site common house with a big kitchen, a dining room that seats 30, laundry facilities and meeting spaces.

Every other day, the 28 “communitarians,” as they call themselves, eat together. The adults take turns as head chef, responsible for buying that meal's food for everyone and overseeing prep with two helpers. (It's BYOB, “but there's usually some loose wine floating about.”)

“The meal situation is such a relief. In six weeks, I'm lead cook once and help a team twice,” says Kim, who lives there with Mariano and their daughter, Ella, 10. “Sometimes you eat and run, and that's fine. More often, it's like a dinner party. For us, food is central.” The 11 kids in the building, ages 2 to 17, like to sit together.

Residents own their apartments and pay an association fee, like a condo. Communitarians appreciate that there's always a neighbor to take in your mail or babysit, as needed. Not that the adults in the group—a mix in their mid-30s to late 60s of teachers, professors, professionals and retirees—are all BFFs, Kim says. “There have been some conflicts here and there, but it's natural for people living together.” And it's good for the children in the community to watch the grown-ups interact and hash things out. “Studies show that kids who grow up in shared communities tend to have good conflict-resolution skills,” she says.

Best of all, the community is authentic. “Social media contributes to a false sense of connection,” Kim says. “But this is real.”

Elsewhere across America, entire neighborhoods are being built around the shared-spaces, shared-meals vision. There are 165 such cohousing communities now in existence, with 140 more in planning stages, says Karin Hoskin, executive director of the Cohousing Association of the U.S. For 14 years, she's lived in Wild Sage, a community of 34 attached townhomes in Boulder, Colorado with her husband and two teens. “Cohousing provides the privacy we've all become accustomed to with the community we seek,” Hoskin says.

### **Community With a Mission**

Like many single dads, Malik Scott gets his kids to and from the school bus, fixes their mac and cheese and supervises their play. A 42-year-old Navy veteran who spent 15 years in the Middle East, he also lives every day with depression and post-traumatic stress. Helpfully, so do many of his neighbors.

In Bastion, a planned community for returning warriors and their families in the Gentilly section of New Orleans, residents can meet for meditation, counseling, art therapy and programs on financial literacy or legal aid at their community wellness center. They exercise together. They help each another with babysitting, property maintenance or getting to appointments at the nearby VA Hospital.

“We all pitch in and support one another. It's like the military but not,” says Scott. “It's a little village here, like the old days.”

Bastion, which opened last year and expands this summer, was designed that way. Its 19 double family homes are set in clusters that face one another, rather than the street, encouraging “maximum collisions” between neighbors, says founder **Dylan Tête**.

Like Scott, Tête, 40, had weathered a rough transition from 18-hour combat duty and military camaraderie to civilian life. A West Point grad who served in Iraq, he warded off depression and suicidal thoughts with work, including a stint building FEMA housing post-Katrina. “I noticed if I kept myself busy I was OK,” he says.

What wasn't OK: watching countless buddies discharged from rehab for their traumatic brain injuries and PTSD with no support in place. "The nature of the injury begins to wear and tear on relationships. Families go bankrupt paying for assisted living, and skilled nursing homes are mostly for geriatrics and no place for a 27-year-old," Tête says. "I couldn't believe what I was seeing."

Thinking that social connectedness was key to building resilience, recovery and reintegration, Tête turned to the model of "purpose-filled community" pioneered by the nonprofit Generations of Hope, which now consults with Bastion. The central idea: All 73 residents (with 196 years of military service among them) commit to volunteer hours to help one another.

The \$8.5 million price tag was funded by a combination of low-income housing tax credits, city and state HUD grants, fundraising efforts and donations from private sources such as the New Orleans Saints.

"Dylan's vision is awesome," says Scott, whose kids, Khalil (6) and Laila (5), love movie nights and playing with other kids on the shared green. "Bastion is like a second family for us."

Not just for vets, Generations of Hope's model works for other groups. Its flagship program, Hope Meadows in Rantoul, Illinois, brings together families who are adopting from foster care and older adults who might need assistance. Like at Bastion, the residents support each other.

### **Golden Girls Experiments**

When she gets up, Marianne Kilkenny puts a piece of paper in her Asheville, North Carolina, bathroom window. It signals "Good morning; I'm OK" to her next-door neighbor, Maria Epes, who does the same. At night, they light battery-operated candles to say good night.

That's just a few of the small ways the 68-year-olds keep an eye on each other. They live in a "pocket neighborhood" Kilkenny is designing for adults. By spring 2019, a local developer she's working with will add a circle of 10 modular homes, all incorporating barrier-free universal design principles, to the semirural land next to her. Her goal: shared gardens, driveways, dinners and lives, so she and some peers can "age in community." "As Boomers see how their parents and friends are ending up in nursing homes, they're looking around and wondering what will happen to them. There aren't many other models to choose from, so more of us are trying these kinds of different communities," says Kilkenny, author of [\*Your Quest for Home: A Guidebook to Find the Ideal Community for Your Later Years\*](#).

### **The New Boardinghouse**

Young singles face different challenges, from high rents to jobs that keep them on the move. Enter a new kind of dorm-meets-hotel-style rental called co-living.

“It felt small when I moved in,” says tech consultant Kaitie Kirchner, 26, of the 510-square-foot one-bedroom apartment she rented last year in Pittsburgh’s Ollie at Baumhaus. “But now I don’t even notice. I’d take this size apartment again, with all its amenities, over more space.”

Amenities indeed: The rent in Ollie at Baumhaus, where studios start at \$1,564 per month (compared to \$1,200 elsewhere in the city), includes hip furnishings, wifi, cable, housekeeping, linen service, an on-site gym and a live-in “community manager” who organizes social activities, from yoga classes to ski trips. (Ollie is a play on “all inclusive.”)

Brothers Chris and Andrew Bledsoe, former financiers, founded Ollie to fill a hole they saw in housing: Urban apartments that had been designed for nuclear families were too big—or too pricey—for the growing numbers of singles, from millennials who were delaying marriage to divorced Gen Xers and widowed boomers.

In a big family, one person might wash dishes, another take out trash and a third plan activities, Chris Bledsoe says. “In today’s shifting world, increasingly all those things are falling on one individual.”

Ollie’s vision is to put many small apartments in one building (lowering costs) but adding all the extras that make life easier and raise quality of life. Building community is so important at Ollie, it hired *Wichcraft* restaurant founder Jeffrey Zurofsky of *Bravo’s Best New Restaurant* to guide it. “We want to make people feel part of a group they didn’t know existed before. That’s a very forward-thinking approach to living together in cities,” Zurofsky says.

Matthew Alexander, 28, who lives in Manhattan’s Ollie at Carmel (owned by Monadnock Development, for whom Ollie is property operator), says he seldom engaged with neighbors in his previous apartments. “But here we hang out more, watching football games in the common space or being up on the terrace with a view of the Empire State Building,” says the Maine native, who works in human resources and says that for the first time in seven years in New York City, he can afford to live without a roommate. “For now, it’s perfect.”

“We have 10 locations signed up and more than 60 in the pipeline,” says Chris Bledsoe. “It’s the future of housing.”

Co-living is so popular that there are waiting lists all over the country. In San Francisco, where affordable housing is in crisis mode, Starcity operates true dorm-style properties with no private kitchens (it’s communal), shared bathrooms down the hall and plenty of building-planned parties and activities. There’s a wait list of 8,000.

## What's Next

Like-minded Americans of every imaginable interest and need are discovering there's comfort and strength in numbers.

**For Parrot Heads:** Yep, there's even a housing community for aging fans of Jimmy Buffett. (He's 71 himself.) Want to live on Flip Flop Court? Model homes in Latitude Margaritaville, a 55-plus development in Daytona Beach, Florida, built by Minto, opened in February; a Hilton Head, South Carolina, location is under construction. And, yes, frozen concoctions will be served at a poolside bar called Changes in Attitude.

**For special-needs families:** "Intentional neighboring" projects similar to Bastion but intended to support older children and adults with developmental disability and autism are in early planning stages, says Generations of Hope director Tom Berkshire. Although neighbors don't replace direct support professionals and para-professionals, they commit to volunteer hours to look after one another and provide a social network. "That's the piece that's been missing [for these populations]," says consultant Mark Dunham.

**For older LGBTs and friends:** In 2019, the first age 55-plus homeowners will move into Village Hearth, a 15-acre community in Durham, North Carolina. Its 28 single-story cottages start at \$254,400. While most co-housing is multi-generational, senior-focused neighborhoods are the segment's hottest trend. As Village Hearth's website notes, "Many LGBTs have no children or close family, so it's up to us to support each other through the aging process."

**For single moms:** CoAbode, a web-based mom-matching service, is expanding its platform to help unpartnered women find compatible roommates with similar parenting philosophies to split housing costs and raise kids together. A Friend Circle forum connects them in specialist support groups, such as for babysitting co-ops, carpooling, and learning-disability support.

### Inspired? Check These Resources:

- *Wisdom of Communities* is a new four-volume book series from the Fellowship for Intentional Community, covering how to start, join, communicate within, and sustain housing for groups. Visit [ic.org](http://ic.org) for more information.
- 500 Communities is a yearlong training program on best practices in building cohousing for entrepreneurs. It's run by CoHousing Solutions, the consulting firm founded by Katie McCamant and Jim Leach. McCamant and her husband, Charles Durrett, are considered the founders of the modern cohousing movement. They were charmed by the bofællesskaber communities they saw in Denmark and have designed dozens of sustainable neighborhoods.