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ADR 2010: LIVE: AWARD

Brays Crossing

Houston

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NEW HOPE HOUSING AT BRAYS CROSSING

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Glassman Shoemake Maldonado Architects • Houston firm Glassman Shoemake Maldonado Architects (GSM) succeeded at making affordable housing not just functional, but downright appealing: New Hope Housing at Brays Crossing in Houston is well-made, chock-full of green features, and pleasing to behold. The most impressive part of the project, however, may be that it started with a 43,500-square-foot motel. The Houtex Inn near Brays Bayou was an apartment complex built in 1963 to house NASA contractors. It had a stint as a seedy motel in the '80s and was then bought by a nonprofit development corporation and handed over to GSM last year. Out of these less-than-ideal beginnings, GSM delivered the required program of 149 units of single-room-occupancy housing, common living areas, offices, a lobby, and a sound wall—to keep traffic noise from disturbing residents.

A new walkway links the seven buildings and gives the complex a sense of connectedness that it previously lacked. The outdoor cooking area and two courtyards give tenants space to interact with one another and form a sense of community. “I just love this. It’s playful,” said juror Bill Valentine of the project.

The buildings on the property are painted in colors bright in both name and hue: tangerine, glossy bluebonnet, and green. Native and noninvasive grass, trees, cactus, agave, and wall-hanging plants punctuate and enliven the palette. The king-sized eye-candy, however, is the colorful 500-foot-long sound wall on the south end of the site, a billboard for drivers on the nearby highway. GSM hired artist Carmen Lomas Garza to riff on the motif of *papel picado*, Mexican cut-paper folk art, for four plasma-cut galvanized steel murals integrated into the sound wall. Although not effective at blocking sound themselves, the perforated panels are carefully placed in spots where the buildings abutting the wall serve that function.

The murals give New Hope Housing at Brays Crossing that marquee touch for the client, but the jury united in recognizing that the project itself is a kind of banner for the building type.

PROJECT CREDITS

New Hope Housing at Brays Crossing, Houston

Client New Hope Housing—Benckenstein & Frey Architects (project manager)