



This Month's Featured Business: Abacus GC
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by Sarah Ohlson, for thegreenspot.org

A certain mountain town in the Rockies has a sign on the wall of a coffee shop: "European Seating. Please share your table with others." I love this message because it suggests an elegant method of adjusting to a problem plaguing the world, and, in particular, the beautiful, small towns of the American West. I am referring, of course, to population growth.

Regardless of whether one was born in Central Oregon or is seeking refuge here from another highly-colonized part of the country, there is no getting around the fact that more people means less wide-open space. We see it on our roads, in our schools, on the skyline and, yes, in the availability of coffee shop seating. We can kick and scream, we can place blame, we can complain, but our greatest ally in handling this unstoppable change is in our perspectives and our tactics. We must live lighter, with less impact, in lives devoted to feeling fundamentally at peace so that we can pass along our well being to the earth and her inhabitants. Builders Barry Seaton and Cary Martinez dwell in such a philosophy, and in so doing, have made it their life's work to offer a solution.

Most residents of Bend's west side have watched the progress of Martinez and Seaton's first endeavor, the Newport District Modern House Project. Doing business under the name Abacus GC, Martinez and Seaton have dubbed the style of this five-structure project "European Communal Living."

The Newport Project utilizes a plot of land on the bustling and conveniently located intersection of 12th and Newport. The homes, which are 1,970 square feet and sit on 3,000 square foot lots, are a bold and innovative move. Abacus GC's intention is to make it hip to live on such a busy corner by creating structures that communicate with their environment and are steeped in luxury. They believe that as much as people want to live on Bend's west side, the west side wants to respond with efficiency and

diversity in the way it houses its residents. The houses, made from glass, wood, steel and stone, look to be promising ambassadors of such an idea.

The Newport project boasts environmentally friendly features such as: the utilization of locally sourced and sustainably harvested wood; paperstone counter tops in the bathrooms; formaldehyde-free insulation; boilers with a 96% efficiency; 2 kilowatt solar panels (they have the equivalency of 10 regular panels); zero VOC paint; glass-front refrigerators (reduces the amount of energy spent standing in front of an open door whilst looking for something to eat); cork flooring; dimmers on all lights; native and drought-resistant landscaping. In addition, the renewable energy provider, Blue Sky, powers all construction of the project.

There is no skimping on comfort and amenities in these homes; they make graceful use of their rooms, but they do not fall into the sequestered, cavernous privacy our culture has come to value so highly. In fact, if one is to stand in the living room of a home located at the end of the row, one would have an unobstructed view through to the end of the last home on the opposite side via all five sets of living room windows. That is, of course, if nobody has their drapes drawn. While this intimate proximity to one's neighbors might not be the first choice for many people in the market for luxury, environmentally sustainable housing, what Abacus GC suggests in their project is worth pondering.

What if we lived, and were able to trust that our neighbors would live, in such harmony with our own families and the families around us, that we would not need acres of land and six-foot fences in order to feel peaceful and safe? What if we were willing to risk a little exposure because our good-natured generosity left nothing to hide? What if our personal environments were so aesthetically pleasing and non-toxic that the moment we entered, we felt sanctuary? In a world governed by a common desire for the highest good and the eventuality of liberation from suffering for everyone, we would not need artificial boundaries imposed by space. Since we are living in a world where space is less and less available, it could serve our very survival to reassess our physical perspectives regarding our neighbors.

Martinez and Seaton are planning to build a line of affordable town homes in Bend's mid-town region. The concept is similar to the Newport Project, with less luxury details and a different location to keep the price reasonable. "Abacus is seeking people who want to be a part of its modern, affordable adventure," says Martinez. "These structures will be fun and simple," adds Seaton. The two men claim they are not choosing their route based on profit. They would like to make enough money and gain enough trust from the community so that they can continue their work of remaining on the cutting edge of green building.

"Construction is all about waste," says Seaton. "We seek to incorporate our work life toward (environmental) consciousness." They have, admittedly, found the path of green building to be on a steep learning curve. They hope that with each project, they will get a little more advanced. "For this opportunity to participate in the unfolding of our community," says Martinez, "we are thankful."

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