

Urban planning

Berkeley developer sees future in small, smart homes

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The prototype SmartSpace nestled in a secret Berkeley location offers all the essentials for an urban dweller -- and no more. Photos: Tracey Taylor

In a top-secret location in Berkeley, Patrick Kennedy is showing a reporter around a tiny living space — so compact in fact that, at 160 sq ft, it is the smallest apartment one is legally allowed to build.

"It is how small you can go without causing psychological problems," jokes Kennedy, who, through his company, [Panoramic Interests](#), is responsible for developing swathes of Berkeley. His projects include the Gaia Building on Allston Way, the Berkeleyan Apartments on Oxford Street, and the Touriel Building on University.

The "bijou" apartment in which we are standing, with its *trompe l'oeil* view of the Bay Bridge, is the prototype for the [SmartSpace](#), a largely prefabricated, furnished space that, when multiplied and stacked together like Lego blocks, creates a fully fledged apartment building.

The SmartSpace comes with a sofa that doubles as a bed, a desk that doubles as a breakfast counter, a window bench that, at a pinch, doubles as a spare bed, a diminutive bathroom, and a surprisingly large amount of storage space.

Working with local company [Zeta](#), Kennedy is developing two such buildings in San Francisco's SoMa and Mission neighborhoods.

And Kennedy hopes to bring them to Berkeley too. He is bidding to build one 300-plus bedroom project for UC Berkeley. Kennedy believes these sustainably built, economical units would be perfect for students.



Housing developer Patrick Kennedy hopes to build SmartSpaces for Cal in Berkeley.

Or for any modern city dweller for whom home need not mean much more than where you wake up and go to sleep.

"They distill the essence of urban living in that they are efficient, esthetically pleasing and easily duplicated," says Kennedy of the units.

The apartments will not offer parking — the assumption being that downtown residents will rely on public transit and/or bikes. The San Francisco units will rent for \$1,595 a month.



The tiny apartment has a decent amount of storage space

The fact that the unit is prefabricated — once the units are stacked together, all that needs to be added is the "skin" to make it an apartment building — keeps costs and building waste down. To emphasize the point, Kennedy remarks that Jesus, a carpenter if you recall, would likely feel at home with the balloon framing method most homes are built with these days.

"Traditional ways of building means you start from scratch every time," he says. Case in point, Kennedy has worked with most, if not all Berkeley-based architects over the years designing new projects. For SmartSpace, he sought the input of many local firms, including Ratcliff Architects, Trachtenberg Architects, Kahn Design Associates, Lowney Architects, and Mikiten Architecture.

An MIT student lived for three weeks in the Berkeley-located model in order to test it out, and it is very much a work in progress. Already, the 2.0 version has incorporated upgrades such as an extra seven feet of space, a reconfigured bathroom and the addition of a washer/drier.

Although the focus of the SmartSpace roll-out is currently San Francisco, Kennedy is hoping to be able to be back on his usual stomping ground

soon.

"I'm homesick to work in Berkeley," he says. "It's a regulatory thicket in San Francisco. Also, Berkeley began embracing the concept of high density living 10 years ago. It's a city that has gotten the gospel about urban infill."