

Can San Francisco Apartments Get Even Smaller?

By *Mary Jo Bowling* / 09/28/12 at 5:00 am / 0 Comments and 0 Reactions



Courtesy of Panoramic Interests

Developer Patrick Kennedy is about to complete SmartSpace 2.0, a building comprised of 300-square-foot studio apartments built with prefab technology developed by his Berkeley-based company, Panoramic Interests. And, if the Board of supervisors passes legislation allowing it, he's set to build SmartSpace 3.0, a micro apartment development that would have 287-square-foot units, the smallest ever in San Francisco and among the smallest in America. Can this be a good idea?

Kennedy says yes. He got the inspiration for the tiny apartments after camping with his family in an Airstream trailer. "It was a 78-square-foot space, and we had great times camping in it," he says. "I thought it would be cool to bring the same experience to apartment buildings." He also found, as head of Panoramic Interests, that building and running studio apartments was a lot easier and more efficient than operating buildings with larger units. He started experimenting with a 160-square-foot prototype he had built in an East Bay warehouse (an MIT student occupied it as a test case). From that, the firm developed the prefabricated units that will make up SmartSpace 2.0 at 38 Harriet Street.



The tiny units may be small, but they have some pretty big ideas. For instance, a new take on a Murphy bed made by Inova that involves a queen-sized mattress that folds into the wall. When the bed is raised, a dining table comes up from below it.



When the bed is lowered, the table folds beneath it. Kennedy claims there's room to entertain six people (stay tuned, we'll be testing this statement when we throw a party in one of the units in November).



The apartments have 9-foot-tall ceilings, large windows and 300 cubic feet of storage to allow for gear like skis and snowboards.



A galley kitchen, which runs alongside the bed/table area, contains a two-burner cooktop, a dishwasher, a large sink and a full-size refrigerator.



The bathroom features a full-size tub. There's a in-unit laundry, albeit a LG ventless washer and dryer combo. What it doesn't have is parking. Kennedy calls it a "car-free" building.



"The people renting these will likely be single people or active couples," says Kennedy, noting that he's responding to the needs of an expensive, densely populated city. Although the rent hasn't been officially set, Kennedy says it could be as low as \$959 per month. "It only makes sense that smaller apartments have lower rent," he says.

Among the supporters of micro apartments is Supervisor Scott Wiener of San Francisco's District 8. Wiener has sponsored a plan that would lower the minimum size of SF apartments to 220 for two people, including kitchens, baths and closets (currently, building codes require the living space to be that size, not including the auxiliary spaces). This would make it legal for builders to construct the smallest apartments in the United States here in SF. The legislation was up for a vote this week, but was postponed until November. If it passes, Kennedy's SmartSpace 3.0 at 9th and Mission Streets (strategically located near the new Twitter headquarters) can proceed as planned.

Wiener was quoted on CBS news as saying: "Although in our fantasy world everyone would live in a single-family home or a huge spacious flat, the reality of life is that not everyone can afford that."

No matter how cleverly designed the units may be, not everyone is a fan. Sara Shortt, executive director of the Human Rights Committee of San Francisco, is a vocal critic who has been quoted in the Los Angeles Times as advocating a pilot test project to avoid ending up with the density problems of cities like Singapore, where space minimums have been raised.

Kennedy says he finds the opposition hard to understand. "Anyone who has traveled to London, Paris or Japan knows that small apartments work in dense cities," he says.

It's not like Kennedy hasn't tried it himself. "Just for fun, I went back and found out how big my dorm room was at Harvard Law School," he says. "It was 110 square feet." When asked how large his current home in San Francisco is, he declined to answer. "That is top secret," he said. "Let's just say we have 16 family members over for high holidays."



SEARCH

MOST ORDERS SHIP FREE

EARN 3% BACK IN REWARDS

ALL+MOD+ERN

SHOP PATIO DÉCOR >

top categories

California Homes	117
California Real Estate	104
Los Angeles Design	91
San Francisco Design	79
Modern Home Accessories	71
Design News	51

sign up for a subscription
and save 80%!

bloggers

- Erin Feher
CALIFORNIA DESIGN
- Mary Jo Bowling
DESIGN DILEMMAS, ESTATE SALES
- Philip Ferrato
RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE
- Dara Kerr
ARTS AND EVENTS

The Whirlpool® Dishwasher
See more

Designed to Simplify Whirlpool

Murphy Wall Beds

Hideaway Bed with Fold Out Table