

Architizer News

Best Dorm Room Ever! A Peek Inside San Francisco's New Tiny Apartments

June 27, 2013



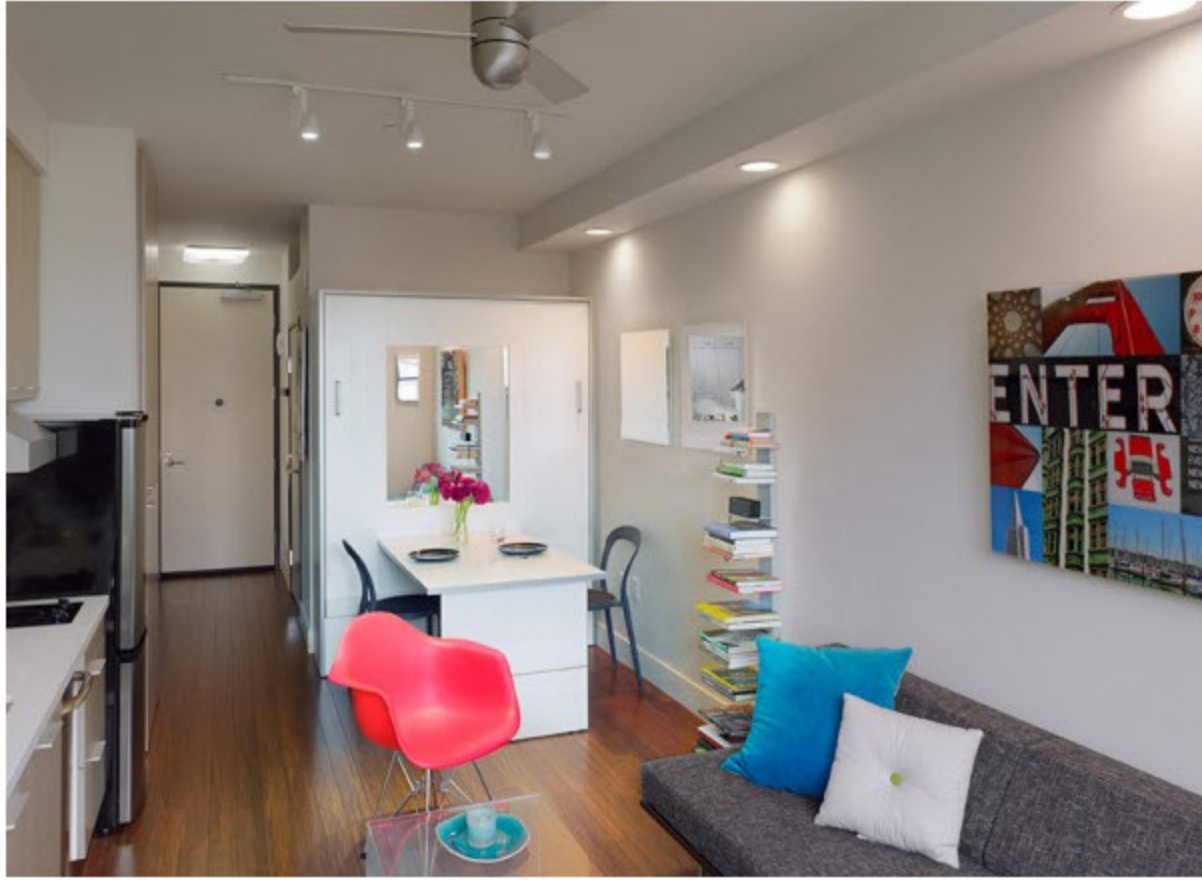
The Berkeley, California-based developer Patrick Kennedy does not like to hear his apartments compared to dorm rooms. "That's a bad word in our office," he told Architizer. Kennedy, who owns [Panoramic Interests](#), had just wrapped up a tour of SmartSpace SoMa, a new micro-living development in San Francisco's trendy tech corridor, South of Market. The urban research nonprofit [SPUR](#) had organized the tour, giving a few dozen architects, builders, and micro-enthusiasts the chance to size up the project's 295-square-foot units—which, in an inconvenient twist of fate, are slated for student housing. Come fall, California College of the Arts will lease the building while Panoramic looks for a buyer.

SmartSpace's 23 prefab apartments are nearly the same size as the 300-square-foot micro-unit prototypes recently on view in Los Angeles and [New York](#). But in the sadistic real-estate market of San Francisco, 295 square feet still counts as a full-on studio. You have to dip below 290—and tempt the insanity of [220](#)—to claim micro status. By comparison, a Panoramic unit sounds perversely alluring. And that's not just because of the washer-dryer and flat-screen TV. These are maybe, just maybe, the most livable tiny apartments we've yet seen. [Read more.](#)



With manufacturer [Zeta Communities](#), Panoramic Interests prefabricated much of SmartSpace SoMa. Each 65-foot module, containing two units divided by a hallway, was craned into place. Installing all the modules took just four days.

In contrast to the more free-form approach suggested by LA Forum's [300-square-foot mockup](#), Kennedy and his team (which includes [Lowney Architecture](#) and [Zeta Communities](#)) designed the SmartSpace layout down to the last square inch so that the entire unit could be manufactured at once. Features like nine-foot ceilings and the shallowest of bay windows lessen claustrophobia, and the convertible furniture is clever enough that sleeping in the living room feels less like a horrendous sacrifice than merely a tasteful drag. There is storage and seating everywhere. Pulling up the hideaway queen-size bed, for instance, reveals a dining table that accommodates four or five non-micro-size people. Of course, you will need that translucent coffee table shown in the photos—or at least some [mirrored furniture](#)—to keep the walls from closing in.



A SmartSpace unit with the bed up and the table down.

With transit nearby, City CarShare just out the door, and amenities like SFMOMA and the [Boor Bridges-designed Sightglass Coffee](#) close by, SmartSpace SoMa is well located enough to give residents the city-as-living-room experience that anyone who sleeps eight feet from the stove deserves. The \$1,600 monthly rent is, on the other hand, San Francisco bonkers, but remains several hundred dollars lower than comparable units, at least according to the graphs in the back of Panoramic's real-estate brochure.



The bed folds down and rests on the dining table.

Since micro-living necessarily involves tradeoffs, Kennedy and his colleagues did a lot of research to account for taste and preference. At one point, the company even had a graduate student from MIT's real-estate-development program living in a 166-square-foot prototype in Berkeley. Her feedback led to some changes, including a full-size kitchen sink and a full-size tub (the original shower-bath combo had a tendency to drench the toilet paper). In other surveys, Kennedy said, the pint-size refrigerator met with overwhelming disapproval. "Very few Americans will tolerate an under-counter refrigerator, especially if they cook," he said. "And there's the other cohort that says, 'Where do you put your beer?'"

With their upgraded full-size fridges, the California College of the Arts students won't face such hardships. But they will likely have to double up in twin-bed versions of the units. With two students per room, the only private space will be the bathroom. "It's where we recommend people go if they have to have a private conference with someone when something else is going on in here," said Kennedy. "It's soundproofed and it's quite spacious."



SmartSpace's shared back patio includes lounge furniture, plants, and bike storage.



All images courtesy of Panoramic Interests



by Lamar Anderson
posted in [New Projects](#)
tagged [micro-apartments](#), [micro-living](#), [micro-units](#), [Panoramic Interests](#), [prefab](#), [prefabrication](#), [San Francisco](#), [tour](#)
[more articles by Lamar Anderson](#)