Is LA the Next City to Go Micro?

In the U.S., high density cities like New York, San Francisco and Boston are the key candidates for minimizing rooms. Their densely populated areas have limited space and so public transportation infrastructures make them ideal for small housing. But other large cities are now experimenting with compact living as a solution for growing their housing capacity in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible manner. Two exhibitions that just opened in Los Angeles, a city that has become synonymous with small living, and are looking at how that city might include micro-apartments in its future.

An exhibition at the WLAHOF Gallery called “How Small Is Too Small?” is presenting Los Angeles the opportunity to discuss and evaluate the viability of micro-living. The show is organized by the LA Forum and curated by architects Katrina Still, Studio TAT and Takako Yama. Like the “Making Room” exhibition in NYC and the Faucet in exhibition in Boston, How Small features a mockup 300 sf apartment where visitors can experience firsthand what micro living feels like. Unlike those two shows, how small mockup is a bit rough around the edges. LA Times writer describes the structure like this:

To create a feeling of transparency and an understanding of the structure, the mock-up has no doorknobs, instead unattached dimensions. The frame flows the elements, and fixtures such as toilets, sinks and counters have been made from hardwood helping to illustrate the flexible nature of the various potential inhabitants. The show also includes a model of a micro-apartment that was furnished.

It also seems like a much cheaper way of building a temporary exhibition than that anyone asked us. In fact, the minimal furnishing was intentionally designed to be highly customizable. Still told Architect "we're trying to show an ambiance, so that someone has their grandparents' chair and their doubts like lived-in. That's something they can bring to the unit."

This ability to bring existing furnishings to small spaces is something rarely discussed before, and strong arguments can be made for a more open floorplan like how small.

A concurrent exhibition at WLAHOF called “Bringing the Design” explores the relationship between built design and high design, more the LA Forum site.

Created by LA favorites, the exhibition centers common expertise resident projects by builders and real estate developers with examples of projects designed by various architects over a similar scale, scale, and location. The gardens are then linked into contemporary examples that bridge design from the past with ideas for how to live in urban environments.

The exhibition looks at examples of architecturally significant multi-family housing in the LA area that might point toward the future of small high-density growth.

The pairing of the two exhibitions creates an interesting conversation. On one hand, small scale living is growing, while on the other, higher density is diminishing. This exhibition tries to savor that challenge and move toward a new vision.

The exhibit runs through August 4th.

Photos by Luke Gibson for Architect

- Event: Museum Exhibit Dedicated to Small Scale Living
- Big Apple Gets Small Acts in 2012 NYC Competition
- The Vanishing Soul of Soho's Micro Apartments
- Very Brief History of a U.S. Bed
- A Marks the House

---