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LIVING SMALL



BIG CITIES PROVIDE THE IDEAL
LABORATORY FOR DESIGNING
MICRO-APARTMENTS

BY MICHAEL WEBB



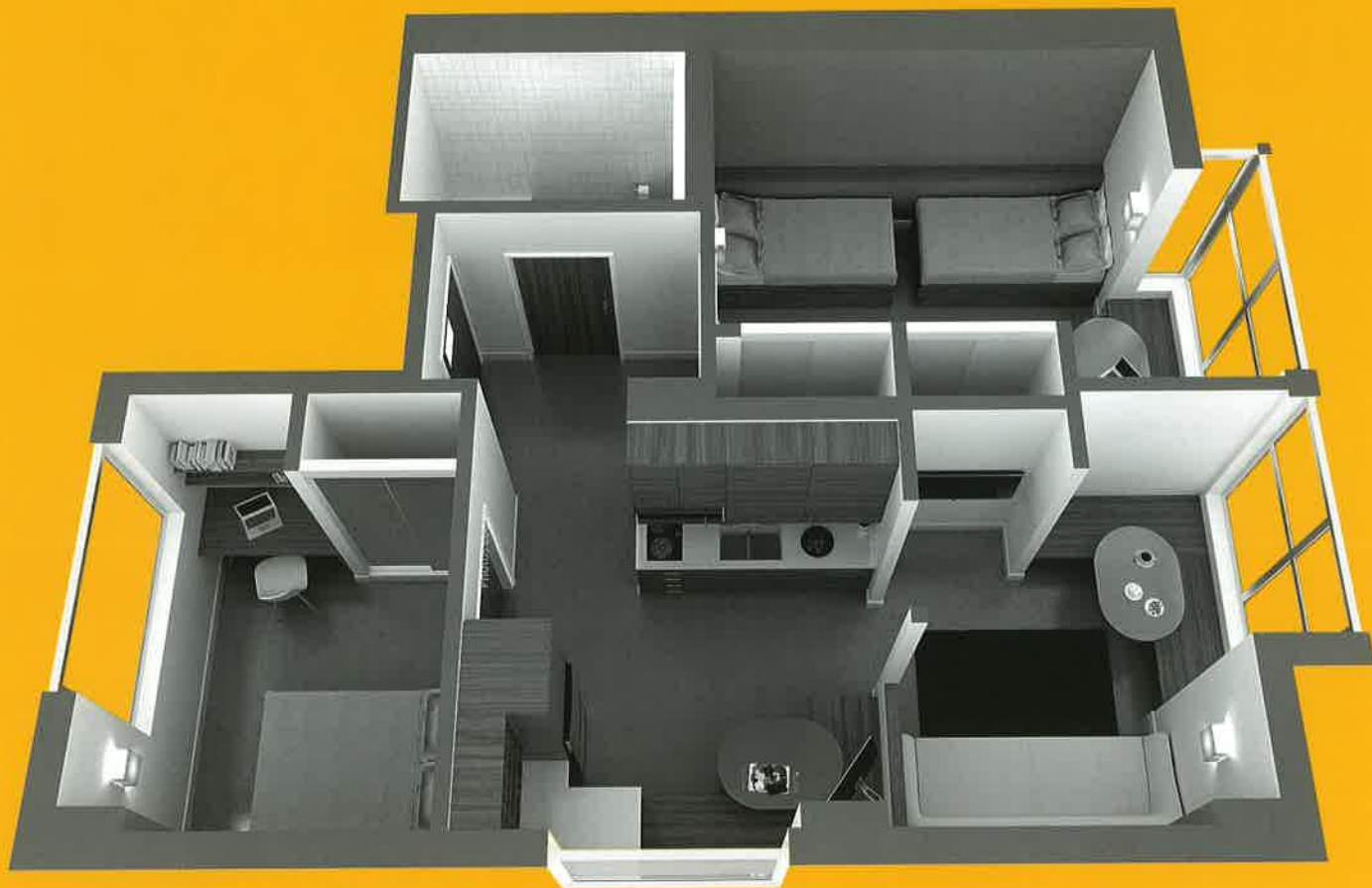
“We want to provide affordable, entry-level housing at the right size. It’s the Goldilocks principle—not too big, not too small.”

— Patrick Kennedy,
CEO Panoramic Interests



The Panoramic in San Francisco will feature 160-micro apartments with space-saving furnishings. **TOP:** The Table Bed is down and ready for a guest; **AND, BELOW,** ready for breakfast. **OPPOSITE:** The layout of a typical micro-unit.

Renderings courtesy of Panoramic Interests



Thirty-three architectural firms entered a competition initiated by Mayor Bloomberg for 300-square-foot apartments in New York, and it's likely that his successor will push even harder to foster innovative housing solutions. In San Francisco, the city authorities are part of the problem. In 2012, they revised their minimum space requirements to permit apartments as small as 220 square feet, but cautiously capped their number at 375. Panoramic Interests, a Berkeley-based developer, has already demonstrated their viability. CEO Patrick Kennedy was inspired by vacation trips he took with his wife and child in a 78-square-foot Airstream trailer. "It provided all we needed for a few weeks and it gave me the idea of building smaller apartments,"

he recalls. "We want to provide affordable, entry-level housing at the right size. It's the Goldilocks principle—not too big, not too small."

Kennedy spent five years perfecting the concept, building a full-size mock-up in a warehouse, and inviting an MIT student to live there for three weeks and provide a critique. Based on her feedback and his own research, he built an infill of 23, 295-square-foot apartments, which were soon snapped up. The furnishings are exemplary. There's a queen-size pullout bed, and a table that can accommodate four diners, or lower to become part of a bench that doubles as a guest bed. A sliding door conceals high-end appliances, and storage cabinets are built in. A more ambitious project, the 11-story Panoramic,

should be completed next summer. Located in SOMA, two blocks from the Civic Center, it comprises 160 studios and minisuites with 9-foot ceilings and a high level of sustainability. There are public lounges on every floor, a rooftop garden and a ground-floor café-lobby. A BART station, bike storage, and a City CarShare make parking redundant. "I'm curious to see if older people will be interested in renting along with young singles," says Kennedy. "I think they will."

Given these early successes, the concept of micro-apartments is bound to catch on, making cities livelier, greener, more compact and inclusive. Developers and designers are ready to act once the politicians and bureaucrats step out of their way. ■