

Community Development: Wakefield Beach

A British Columbia community proves that responsible development can be beautiful too.

Text by James H. Schwartz

Less than two hours from Vancouver, the new community of **Wakefield Beach** redefines development. Perhaps it's the pristine setting along 700 feet of coastline outside the town of Sechelt. Or it could be the design of the 31 homes here (15 more will be completed by August), each one topped with a gently arching metal roof. Or maybe it's the remarkable swath of green space that developers established by placing all houses well back from the water's edge. "We had a chance to do something different on this magical



(Photo: Dave Delinea)

site," says developer Lance Sparling. "That sense of responsibility drove all the decisions we made."

Lance's first atypical choice was inviting Sechelt residents to help conceptualize the community. He convened an "envisioning session," soliciting opinions from residents, planners, historians, and town officials. Many appreciated Lance's decision to build fewer units than permitted by local regulations. One town planner told him, "You're the first developer who ever came in here asking for *less!*"

With the site plan complete, architects at Helliwell + Smith Blue Sky Architecture, along with collaborator Teryl Mullock, took great care executing the designs. "We reduced the presence of toxic building materials on site and reused excavated rock and soil to eliminate the need to haul away waste," designer Kim Smith says. The team specified local, natural materials such as Douglas fir for the homes, and sourced materials from area mills to reduce energy expended on transporting supplies over long distances. They also ensured that 80 percent of the site is "soft," permitting water from roofs (and common household chores) to drain slowly into the soil, instead of coursing into the natural habitat and contributing to coastal erosion.

All of the one-, two-, and three-story residences at Wakefield Beach are "deep green," meaning they have minimal impact on the environment. Heated and cooled with geothermal power, the homes are landscaped with natural, indigenous plants requiring little or no irrigation. They're also equipped with ultraefficient appliances and brightened outside by solar-power street lighting.

Thanks to innovative master planning, the houses capture unobstructed ocean views. Triplexes stand highest on the hillside, looking over the roofs of duplexes arrayed in a gentle crescent below. Farther downhill and closest to the waterside green space, single-family homes enjoy easy access to the public beach. "We tried to create a development where homeowners and visitors could feel special," Lance says. "The most rewarding piece of this project is the pride residents take in their community."

Wakefield Beach; 888/741-9899 or wakefieldbeach.com