

DESIGNING FOR THE 99%

Living in a beautiful home can be a relatively straightforward process for someone with a large budget. But access to a quality home should not be restricted to the wealthy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Rising Home Prices

Housing costs have risen faster than income for the past fifty years, leaving 17 million households spending half or more of their income on housing.

Higher Cost of Materials

Spiking material prices during the pandemic have put additional pressure on the cost of affordable housing.

Thoughtful Design

Thoughtful design decisions can overcome budget challenges to provide quality homes for everyone, regardless of their income.



INSIGHT Thought Leadership



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The U.S. faces severe income inequality, with the top 1% of households earning a similar combined income as the bottom 40%. The Covid-19 pandemic increased this disparity, with millions of people losing their jobs while billionaires experienced substantial increases in wealth. Median household incomes have not kept up with increasing median housing costs for almost half a century, and the challenge of providing quality housing that is affordable to most households has been exacerbated by the drastic rise in building material costs during the pandemic. As designers, we have the obligation and the opportunity

to take on this challenge and find ways to provide homes of quality and dignity for everyone, regardless of the available budget.

Facing this challenge starts with a design philosophy that does not accept the premise that you cannot achieve great design with a limited budget. Market forces and funding streams demand that owners ask the question "How cheap can we possibly build it?" But that premise leads to low-quality results that wear down quickly.



Well-designed gathering areas help build a sense of community.

As designers, we need to reframe that question. We need to talk with our owners about their budget and then ask ourselves “How much can we possibly give you?”

We need to find ways to do more with less.

FOCUS ON KEY MOMENTS

Designers need to focus on high impact moves. When the budget cannot support high-cost choices throughout the project, we need to focus on key moments in a building where we spend a little more to create the highest impact. In an apartment project, this can mean selecting higher grade materials at the entrance and lobby and within the community gathering areas. These key areas are the resident’s first experience of an apartment building and set the tone for their perspective of the community they choose to call home. The rest of the building can utilize simple, durable, cost-effective materials without diminishing the project.

FOCUS ON PEOPLE

Efficiency and functionality are also critical. Spaces need to be designed for multiple functions wherever possible, with the absolute minimum limited to circulation. At the same time, we need to focus on the people who will be living in our buildings. We need to understand when codified minimums are too small and size spaces for how people live.

SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AT MODEST COST

By questioning assumptions, we can often provide simple improvements that make a big difference. A tile backsplash in a kitchen sounds like a luxury, but with careful tile selection it can be installed for less than \$500 per apartment. This can provide a significant impact at a modest cost.



Small enhancements like a tile backsplash can be a cost-effective way to improve a home.

CONCLUSION

As designers, our goal is not just to provide shelter, but to provide a home where people can live with dignity regardless of their income. We are dedicated to finding meaningful and impactful design solutions that make affordable homes beautiful, functional, and uplifting.