Multifamily Design Influences Residential

By Kelsi Maree Borland | Los Angeles

Eric Akutagawa: “Osaka Residences adds to the overall low housing inventory, specifically on the Westside, by introducing two single-family properties to a site that was formally only built for one.”

LOS ANGELES—The Osaka Residences are illuminating a new trend for residential development: height. To increase density, the two custom-design and detached homes have multiple stories and a rooftop sundeck to maximize living space in an urban setting—reminiscent of the designs of many luxury multifamily developments. The newly completed three-bedroom homes have Zen landscaping, rooftop terraces, smart technology throughout and walkability to retail and restaurants. At 2,700 square feet, the homes range in price from $2.125 to $2.195 million. To find out about the urban living trends that inspired the design, the booming Sawtelle Japantown neighborhood and why it is time to build for-sale product, we sat down with Eric Akutagawa of brokerage firm Gibson International for an exclusive interview.

GlobeSt.com: What was the vision for the Osaka Residences?

Eric Akutagawa: Osaka Residences is the vision of Sawtelle Japantown resident David Owen Taylor, aka “DOT,” who was seeking to leave his stamp on this quickly emerging neighborhood that he calls home. ZEN-inspired elements can be found in the design of the landscaping and hardscape, all with the intent to pay homage to the community’s legacy and simultaneously provide a glimpse of the future direction of architecture in the area. Taylor's main focus for the two custom, detached homes was to highlight both the bold architecture and green technology to provide an indoor/outdoor lifestyle.

Since the two homes border an original Japanese nursery across the street from the West LA Buddhist Temple, another focus was to create a consistent flow with the neighboring existing
structures without overbuilding. With Taylor’s contractor, John Kwan, and his architect, Andres Cardenas, the Osaka design and development team created ground-up structures with distinctive design elements using only the finest materials that would harmoniously blend with the surrounding neighborhood.

GlobeSt.com: Why was the evolving Sawtelle area a good fit for the development?

Akutagawa: Sawtelle Japantown is truly the gateway between Venice/Silicon Beach and Westwood/Century City, allowing the area’s residents to enjoy relatively shorter commutes to major employment centers across West LA and to take advantage of some of the best dining and retail in the region. In addition, Osaka Residences adds to the overall low housing inventory, specifically on the Westside, by introducing two single-family properties to a site that was formally only built for one. This type of maximization of a tight footprint is typical for current new construction projects in the area. Brentwood, Mar Vista, Westwood, and Santa Monica have either very strict building limitations or parcels that cannot accommodate two homes and “LAR2” zoning makes Sawtelle land unique and valuable from a builder’s perspective.

Furthermore, a quick tour of the neighborhood foreshadows how artists, developers, and visionaries are pioneering “a style revolution” into Sawtelle filled with clean lines and unique details, similar to how Venice’s transformation began 20 years ago. The Osaka Residences are at the forefront of the neighborhood’s transition and have set a new bar for quality and design for future projects.

GlobeSt.com: Why are developers building up? What is driving this new trend that we haven’t seen in L.A. until the last few years?

Akutagawa: For most developers, the best use of any property is to maximize profit, which means maximizing usable space. Many Los Angeles communities have anti-mansionization ordinances, limiting how much livable square footage there can be depending on the lot size, and for most developers, building up (or down) is the only option. Nowadays, it’s very common to find multilevel homes complete with fully outfitted subterranean basements that feature wine cellars, screening rooms, and gyms, as well as rooftop terraces and gardens that offer additional entertaining areas. All of these factors are driven by consumer demand and builder’s profits, of course. Also, the sudden explosion of the “mixed-use project” identified by ground floor retail space and residential units above is simply a result of limited land and a huge housing demand, combined with the “cool cache” of residing above your favorite market, restaurant, or yoga studio.

GlobeSt.com: When was the project completed, and what has interest been like from the community?
Akutagawa: Osaka Residences were just completed in December 2015 and the interest has been astounding in the community. Many of the local residents and YMCA members watched the one-and-a-half-year construction process from the ground up and were eager to tour the properties during and after construction. We have already received offers on both homes and hope to be in escrow soon.

GlobeSt.com: Why are you building for-sale housing rather than rental housing? What is the demand for-sale housing?

Akutagawa: Developers are still interested in building for-sale housing because history has proven that there has, and always will be a desire to own a piece of the “American Dream.” Whereas homeownership was once viewed as a place solely to live and raise a family, today it embodies so much more. The opportunity to be a part of a community and have a voice truly matters to buyers today, coupled with the fact that real estate ownership has proven to be one of the safest, long term investments, means that for-sale housing will always be a hot commodity. This is regardless of the fact that the prices are out-of-reach for many in urban areas like Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York. Given that there is such a dearth of available land in highly desirable neighborhoods like Sawtelle Japantown, many developers are following the high demand by continuing to invest in larger scale, mixed-use projects and single-family homes and shying away from smaller apartment complexes.

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