



George Calys
SF Architecture & Design Examiner

This is how we do it: Cavallo Point

March 18, 4:53 PM

While the debate about appropriate development in the Presidio rages on, just north of the Golden Gate the redevelopment of Fort Baker has shown that private development within a National Park Service property can be successful.

With the new Cavallo Point Lodge, Equity Community Builders did what few thought possible—they were sensitive to the historic context of the fort and built a modern retreat center that is environmentally sustainable. According to ECB principal, Tom Sargent, “the key to success was a great team that understood the simultaneous challenges of working in a historic district and constructing sustainable buildings.”



photo: Michal Venera

ECB tapped architect Leddy Maytum Stacy for the 14 new buildings (all built on the location of previously razed nonhistoric structures). Architectural Resources Group designed the renovation of the historic buildings. The design team was rounded out by Brayton Hughes (interiors) and Cheryl Barton (landscape architecture).

When I toured the development recently (after a perfectly delightful lunch at Murray Circle, the onsite restaurant), my first thought was “what a cool secluded spot”. Looking across the old parade ground down to the water, you see the San Francisco skyline in the distance and the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge above the Marin Headlands. The seclusion is both real and illusory—after all, you’re a mere 15 minutes from San Francisco, but once there you feel like it’s another world far removed from the city.

There are 140 plus lodgings in the development but you really don’t feel like you’re surrounded by hotel rooms at all. That’s because about half of the rooms are in the renovated historic officers’ quarters and the new lodging buildings, while quite modern in design, blend effortlessly into the background.

Lots of attention was paid to sustainable design here. The buildings make extensive use of daylighting, natural ventilation, energy-efficient lighting, hydronic radiant heating, and water conserving plumbing fixtures. Plenty of recycled and renewable materials figure in the construction—cork flooring, bamboo, recycled cotton insulation, and my favorite, redwood salvaged from other dismantled buildings. The new lodging buildings feature a thin film solar panel that can generate enough electricity to power the new units.

Cavallo Point is one of those all-too-rare developments where developer, design team, and the National Park Service collaborated so well that the retreat center feels lightly inserted into the park. One can only hope that the proposed Presidio developments would take note.

photo: David Wakely

