

A Robust But Steady Market

Hidey is not hiding anything about the past, the present or the future of homebuilding.

By SCOTT MCCOURTNEY



Robert Hidey, President of Robert Hidey Architects (RHA), is a leader and an optimist about the present and future housing market. The Irvine-based firm has had strong diversification in single-family, multi-family, attached and detached housing, mixed-use, mid-rise, interior architecture and high-rise residential design while establishing the 30-person firm's design traditions in housing markets throughout the world.

"The housing market is vibrant; a whole range of different housing and product types are resurfacing. We are now in a position to turn away work, which we have not done in four or five years," explained Robert Hidey.

Robert Hidey and his team originally built their reputation around the luxury home market, which, during the latest economic downturn, had become almost nonexistent. However, in the last four or five months, that trend has changed immensely. Demand for new production luxury housing and higher floor areas has spiked to levels not seen since the early 2000's. In addition to the luxury market, high-density attached housing has also resurfaced; Robert Hidey Architects is doing a lot more multi-family work than ever before. Hidey believes that this is because his designs address the needs of much wider and more diverse market segments than before. Historically, the master plan entity would be designed for a traditional single-family house for different market segments, from smaller and more affordable homes to an upper end program for buyers to choose from. Hidey is finding that this approach is changing.

Now Hidey Architects is being asked to design for market segments that have been ignored in the past. "Baby boomers are looking at a point

in their lives when they will want to downsize a bit and live in a one-story dwelling. That is now being addressed where before it was completely overlooked. Gen Y is now thought to be seriously looking to purchase homes. There are all kinds of different opportunities, and high-density detached and attached housing are being considered a lot, along with infill," says Hidey.

"We are seeing a demand for flats with elevators that provide access directly to the

homeowners' private space with no common corridors. I have never seen that occur at this magnitude, a very personal and private experience in a very traditional high-density product. While luxury flats with private elevators have always existed, the concept

and lobby is very new in a product developed for the market-rate consumer," explains Hidey.

Finding thoughtful, practical solutions that define a product line so that it works differently than what's currently available is what Robert Hidey believes is the right choice for the future. "We have to figure out how people are living now and how our designs can respond to that lifestyle. Maybe it is building more single-story type homes, or more accessible multi-story units, or maybe it's designing houses that provide more storage. Those ideas will lead the building industry."

Hidey is looking for ways that meet current life styles. "To some degree, when you design or build like this it seems like you are a pioneer but really you are not." He believes it is important to look to the past and see what worked before and how it can be improved upon to meet today's standards.

The rising costs of building materials affect all of us in this industry. Even Robert Hidey Architects is faced with certain budgets and a

build cost within those parameters. He says, "When costs creep up, something has to give."

"There was a time when cost wasn't an issue builders could spend more and be compensated for it. I think we are coming out of this current recession with a different approach. Large square footages are starting to resurface but we have to be practical and work wisely using the space we have," explains Hidey.

Hidey does not see another recession coming back anytime soon. He has been around the industry for a long time and has seen recessions come and go. "We are busier than we have ever been. We are at a point where we are at capacity we are hiring people, and at times we have to turn away projects. I always have to say yes to certain partners or colleagues but for the first time in a long time we are turning away customers," said Hidey. "Our billings are double and I don't see an end to it in the near future."

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Fast Facts

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