Program Summary:

A two-level multi-family building containing forty-four affordable units for low-income residents, age 55 and older, with gym, computer room, community room, and community garden amenities.

Program Statement:

Morgan City, LA is a small coastal city at the tail-end of the Atchafalaya River delta that has historically relied on petroleum and fishing industries to keep its population of 11,000 above water. The per capita income hovers just below $25,000, and median household income just above $40,000. As a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) project, this multi-family building is the first low-income senior housing built in Morgan City in over a decade meeting the dire need. The design and construction of the project coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Labor shortages and broken supply chains increased the construction cost even more. The geographic and economic context of the project produced design challenges for creating quality affordable housing with a limited budget which kept the design team grounded and laser-focused on the essentials – how small design decisions can have a subtle, yet outsized impact, on the quality of life of the older residents. At every make-or-break junction during the 3-year long process when value engineering threatened the integrity of the design, the design team strived to find alternative cost-saving solutions while not compromising, if not adding, value to the project. From massing moves to finishing treatments, opportunities were identified to increase efficiencies in a thoughtful and human way.

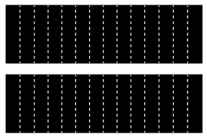
A280.01

Building Area: (sf)
40,563 sf

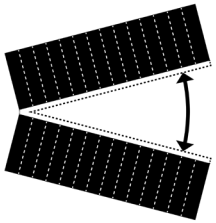
Cost per Square Foot:
$156.70/sf

Construction Cost
$6,355,820

Date of Completion:
01/25/2023



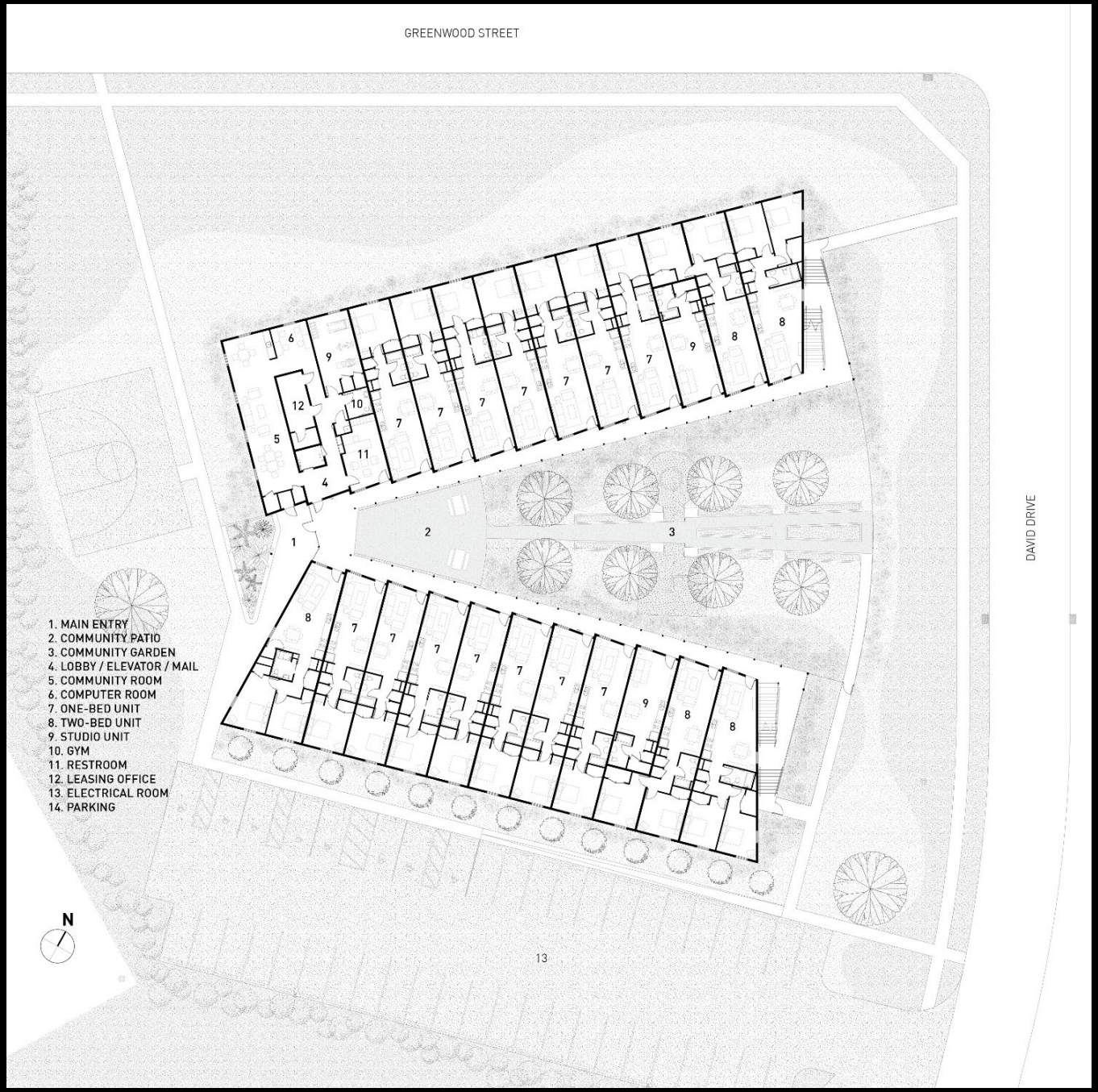
DOUBLE-LOADED CORRIDOR



OPEN FOR COURTYARD

A280.02

The design breaks apart the double-loaded corridor parti associated with traditional apartment building circulation, pouring light and communal programming into the residual space.



A280.03

Focusing social programming at an inflection point, the building is divided in half and hinges open to envelop a vibrant courtyard space to be shared by residents for socializing, recreation, and gardening.

The courtyard opens onto the main access street, a welcoming posture for a large building, and a reversal of the (often-hidden) courtyard typology.

Pushing the main entry deeper into the oversized lot helps to activate the entire site.

A280.04

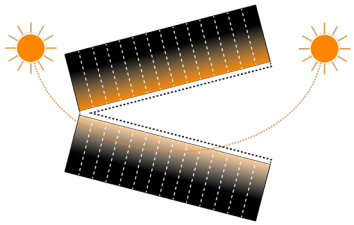
Designing the exterior walls with rainscreens of varying depths brings the large mass down to a more domestic scale, giving the perception of 3 stacked volumes. The tiers are calibrated to achieve a balance in proportion and material efficiency to avoid horizontal seams and minimize cuts in the field.

Through subtle gradations of color and texture, a uniform yet dynamic facade is created using one of the most prolific products and construction methods on the market: board and batten fiber cement panels. This traditional residential siding is applied in a contemporary way to emphasize the verticality of the building and further differentiate between the tiers by varying the spacing between battens which employs the use of shadow to heighten the slight color variation depending on the angle of the sun.

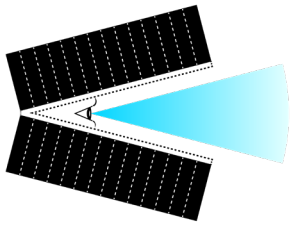
A280.05

An asymmetrical gable roof provides shelter for the hinged entryway and exterior circulation that lines the courtyard-facing façades. The plywood soffit blankets exterior spaces in a warm luminance, beckoning residents into the communal programming area immediately adjacent to the covered entryway.

Rainwater collection is celebrated through the design of a custom conductor head and scupper at the entryway to the building. Gravel pits are strategically located within the landscape to control erosion at scupper locations.



SOLAR EXPOSURE

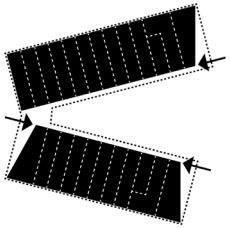


VIEWS OUT

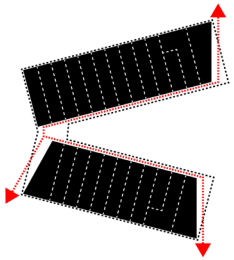
A280.06

As the building is sited at the periphery of the city, the perspectival arrangement of the building's wings provides for both an expansive view of the central courtyard, and a vista to the open green space on the flood-protection levee and wetland beyond.

The building's circulation is externalized which reduces mechanical costs and creates a communal porch from which residents can mingle and enjoy the views.



HINGE AT CORNERS



EXTERIOR EGRESS

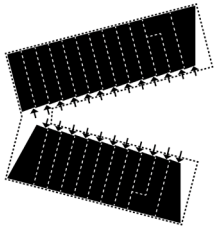
A280.07

The lower tiers of the building hinge toward the courtyard at the corners, creating covered vertical circulation and site access. The same massing move creates ideal locations for the placement of two-bedroom units.

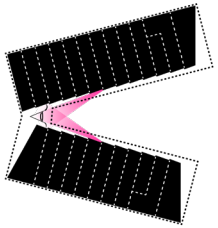
A280.08

In what would be impossible for corridors buried inside a traditional apartment complex, both residential levels are made visible simultaneously, visually activating the space as residents access their dwellings while providing equitable connections to the community's shared courtyard amenity.

At a detail level, the passage of columns in front of the deck edge emphasizes vertical proportions and reinforces the communal connection between the upper and lower residential levels.



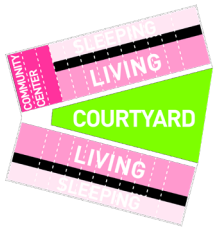
DISTINGUISHED ENTRIES



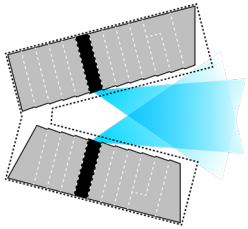
UNIT NUMBER VISIBILITY

A280.09

The sawtooth facades lining the courtyard create a thickened threshold between public and private spaces, providing small niches at entry doors for residents to claim by placing doormats or other personal mementos. The sawtooth configuration also allows for signage to be clearly visible to support wayfinding for an aging population.



PULIC-TO-PRIVATE PROGRAM



VIEWS INTO COURTYARD

A280.10

Where the exterior delicately suggests differentiation across a uniformly rhythmic façade, the interior design provides a muted palette, where residents exuberantly express their personalities through uniquely curated views into the neighboring courtyard that becomes an extension of the living space. Providing everyone with their own front porch bridges the gap between individuality and communality.

A280.11

The asymmetrical geometry of the gabled roof is designed such that the ridge, thus the entire roof volume, disappears from the line-of-sight of the courtyard, placing the primary focus on the active circulation space and community garden at the literal and figurative heart of the project. Low-maintenance native plantings, like white fringetrees and sweetbay magnolias, were chosen for their ability to flourish in the absence of a costly irrigation system, instead using water collected and directed into the courtyard from the broad roof. Once mature, the courtyard will become a lush green space centered around resident-managed planter boxes for flowers and vegetables of their choice.

A280.12