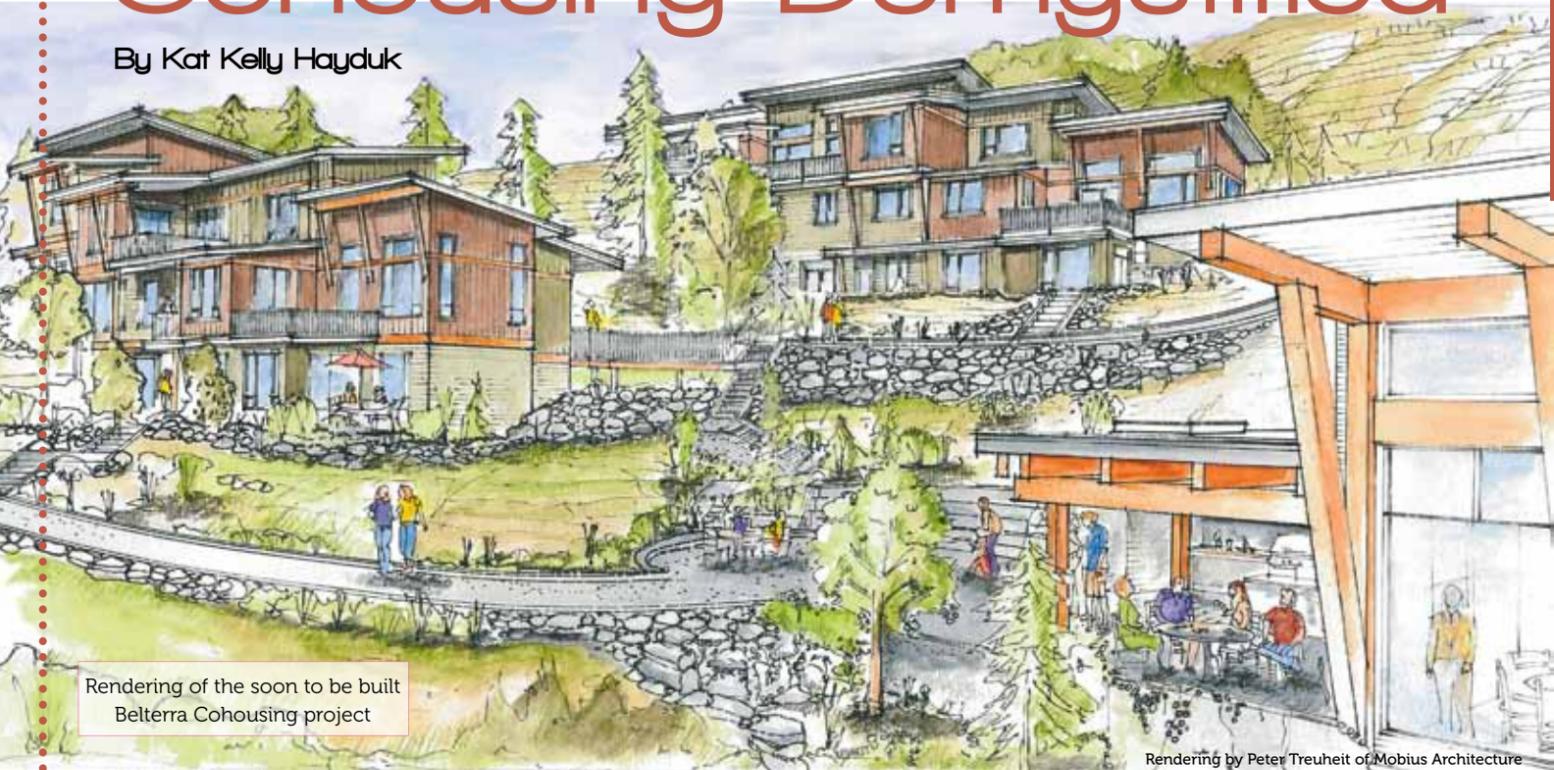


Cohousing Demystified

By Kat Kelly Hayduk



Rendering of the soon to be built Belterra Cohousing project

Rendering by Peter Treuheit of Mobius Architecture

I am a juggler. I am an astounding juggler. I juggle my career, kid and home and still find time to volunteer. I'm not that different from many moms out there. I really stink at saying "no" to anything. It's as though I think the number of hours in my day will actually expand to meet my need. Each morning, I start my day creating lists and I'm constantly thinking about the next thing on my to-do list. My husband recently noted that whenever there's a lull in the conversation during dinner or something, I break it by going through the family schedule. Sound familiar?

We don't have it too bad, really. We have one child (and, yes, I can see all of you parents of multiple children rolling your eyes), he's school-aged now, and a few years ago my hubby and I started our own home-based business, in part to simplify our lives by staying closer to home. It's actually pretty manageable. Except when it's not.

I constantly feel like I'm just a hair's breath away from totally losing it, and sometimes I seriously fantasize about going back to my 20s, lolling away the day, sitting in coffee shops reading fiction. Although I love where we live, I also yearn to have extended family close by who could take the child

occasionally, allowing my partner and I more time to reconnect and keep our marriage strong.

Financially, we're stressed. A little less stressed than we were a few years ago, but self-employment certainly doesn't offer the same stability a regular paycheck once did.

A couple of years ago we decided to put some of our home equity into our business, so we started looking around for more affordable housing in order to downsize our mortgage. We looked at a number of homes, but nothing fit the bill. And then, one day, as we wandered a community craft fair, a new path opened up for us that we could never have foreseen. We came across an information table for a "cohousing community" starting in our own hometown. At first we were suspicious; was "cohousing" really just a new word for "commune"?

Now, we're pretty social people. We live in a small town and my husband can't run to the store to get eggs or milk without spending at least 15 minutes chatting with someone he bumps into. But, the idea of living on any sort of "commune" conjures up images of people with questionable hygiene and perhaps a certain level of ... personal irresponsibility.

Not really our sort of thing. Carl Sagan once said, "It pays to keep an open mind, but not so open your brain falls out." But the folks at the cohousing table seemed to have their brains firmly attached! They were mainly liberal-minded, it's true, and there was a higher ratio of vegetarians than in most populations, but I could see that they were reasonable, intelligent people who seemed to be on to something. We realized that this might just be the way to both reduce our mortgage and simplify our too-busy lives; we were interested.

Cohousing blends the best of communal living, while still maintaining a large amount of independence and privacy. You live in your own space (with your own kitchen and everything) but you share a big common house that has guest rooms, storage, a playroom and big dining hall and kitchen for community events and meals. Most cohousing communities also include shared gardens, workshops and office spaces. A lot of condos have these sorts of extra amenities, but the big difference with cohousing is that the future owners actually plan and design the whole project. Cohousing communities are not built by a developer for profit, so the costs at the end of the project are exactly the cost of construction. Through designing



Photo by Miriam Evers.

Windsong Cohousing, in Langley, BC

and planning together, the community also naturally develops deep ties with one another. In cohousing you really know your neighbours, even before you move in. Decisions tend to be less focused on the short-term bottom line, and more concerned about the long run – like opting for deep green energies. And because of the shared common house, personal units can be a lot smaller; our unit will be approximately 1000 sq. feet, which reduces our energy costs, as well as cleaning and maintenance time. For us, cohousing achieves so many priorities all at once: reduced costs, being surrounded by multi-generational "family", reducing our energy footprint, and streamlining daily responsibilities.

Our community is in the final stage of development; we're just about to begin construction and we'll be moving in less than a year from now. Once we're settled, I think I'll finally be able to retire those juggling balls and loll away the afternoon with a book in the common house. I can't wait.

Cohousing is catching on across North America! Charles Durrant brought this style of living to North America after visiting cohousing communities in Denmark and has written several books on the subject.

The Canadian Cohousing Network provides a ton of information on all the communities across Canada: <http://cohousing.ca/summary.htm>

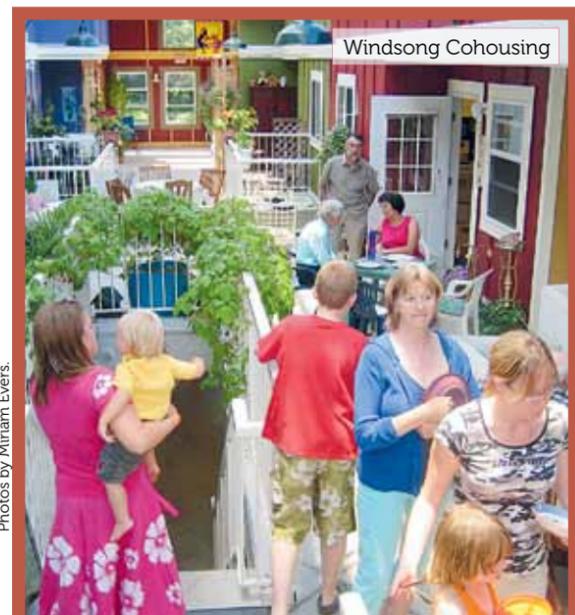


Cranberry Commons, in Burnaby, BC

Photo courtesy of Cohousing Development Consulting.

Stage	Province	Name	Location
Completed	Alberta	Prairie Sky Cohousing Cooperative	Calgary
	British Columbia	Cranberry Commons	Burnaby
		Creekside Commons	Courtenay
		The Middle Road Community	Nelson
		Pacific Gardens	Nanaimo
		Roberts Creek Cohousing	Sunshine Coast
Quayside Village	North Vancouver		
Windsong	Langley		
Ontario	Terra Firma Cohousing	Ottawa	
Saskatchewan	Wolf Willow Cohousing	Saskatoon	
In Development	Alberta	Dragonfly Cohousing	Calgary
	British Columbia	Belterra Cohousing	Bowen Island
		Harbourside	Sooke
		Nelson Land Group	Nelson
Yarrow EcoVillage	Upper Fraser		
Quebec	Cohabitat Québec	Québec City	
Forming	British Columbia	Fernwood Urban Village	Victoria near Lumby
		Okanagan Ecovillage	Qualicum Beach
		Valterra Village eCohousing	Vancouver
	Alberta	Urban Green Cohousing	Edmonton
Ontario	Convivium Cohousing	Ottawa	
Picton Cohousing	Picton		

Photo courtesy of Cohousing Development Consulting.



Photos by Miriam Evers.

Windsong Cohousing



Creekside Commons, in Courtenay, BC