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# BOHEMIAN

NORTH BAY

## *Monocrop Madness*

*One world, one crop—  
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## Green Gold

*Is Sonoma Mountain Village really as great as it seems?*

By GIANNA DE PERSIIS VONA

**A**s Tina Montgomery, project manager for the Sonoma Mountain Village, gives me a tour of the Rohnert Park site, which is in midconstruction, I try to keep an open mind. With development, there is always controversy, and I don't want to be lured into believing that something is a positive action for the community only to discover later that I have been overly gullible, unable to tell the difference between real sustainability and corporate brainwashing.

This isn't to say that I don't want to believe. I do. I want to see something good here. We need places to live, especially in the North Bay, but I'm getting a little tired of "sustainable" housing at half a million dollars, no rentals anywhere and "green" living for those who can afford it. I want to see green buildings where I could live, not just my rich neighbors. Sorry to be so selfish, but it's getting harder and harder to admire how green the wealthy can be. What about me and my family?

I've read the stats. Sonoma Mountain Village is the largest privately owned solar installation in Northern California, covering over 88,000 square feet. It will boast a village square with a daily farmers market, a movie theater and environmentally conscious businesses—no big-box stores allowed. There will be a neighborhood grocery store, dog parks, an all-weather soccer field and edible landscaping. The project is pedestrian-oriented and zero waste, with a sustainable water system, affordable-by-design housing, natural habitats and abundant wildlife. But can such a rattle of green faktz be believed?

According to BioRegional Development, an independent environmental group operating out of the United Kingdom, and the World Wildlife Foundation, who have partnered to develop the One Planet Living (OPL) model, Sonoma Mountain Village actually is what it claims to be. As such, it has been certified by OPL, making it the first community in North America, and one of only three officially endorsed developments in the entire world, to adopt the 10 conditions for sustainability outlined by the OPL.

The idea behind the OPL model is that if everyone lived like your average North American, we would need five planets to live on. If everyone lived like your average European, we would need three. If everyone lived by the One Planet model, we would need one, which, I'm sorry to break it to you, is all we actually have.

Until fairly recently, the 200-acre site

in Rohnert Park that once housed Agilent Technologies had been an empty wasteland as outsourcing and eventual closure left 3,000 people unemployed and the warehouse-sized buildings empty. Now Sonoma Mountain Village is actively working toward its goal of creating a community of 1,900 homes and over a hundred businesses, all of which will meet the One Planet Living Communities guidelines by the year 2020. This means zero carbon, zero waste, sustainable transport, local and sustainable materials, local and sustainable food, sustainable water, natural habitats and wildlife, culture and heritage, equity and fair trade, and last but not least, the health and happiness of the community members.

Sound ambitious?

I would say so, but Brad Baker, CEO of Codding Enterprises, which owns the development, is obviously looking to the future. If developers don't change their ways, no one is going to buy anything, because we will all be dead.

But what about affordability?

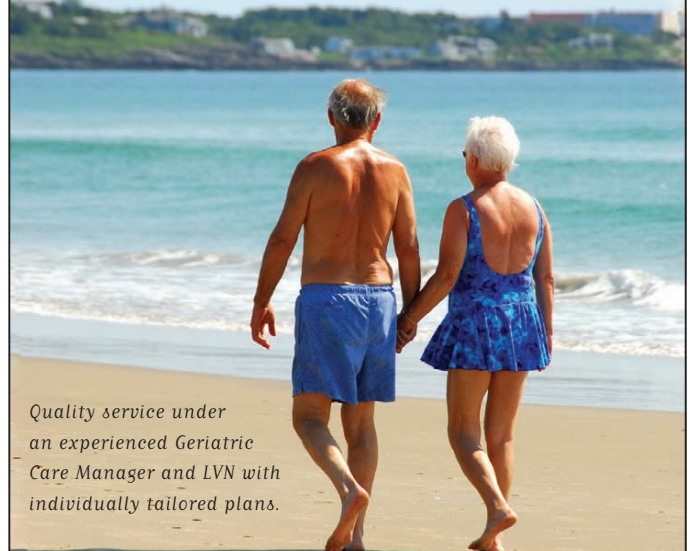
Sorry to be stuck on this, but I would love to live somewhere where I can walk everywhere, can eat the bushes, live in a LEED-ND Platinum certified house and not have to feel guilty for breathing. By the time we reach the end of our tour—which includes walking through Codding Enterprise's on-site recycled steel plant, where eight recycled cars, as opposed to about 43 trees, will be used to make the frame for one home—I'm convinced I'll never be able to afford it. Add to my low income the fact that everything I've seen so far is esthetically pleasing, and that the homes will be designed by different architects to avoid that despicable "cookie cutter" feel, and I figure my chances are about nil.

Montgomery is full of reassurances. For one thing, there will be affordable rentals and for-sale houses that go above and beyond municipal requirements. Affordable-by-design homes are smaller and aren't as fancy as, say, the one down the street selling for \$2.5 million, but they are built with the same level of commitment to efficiency of design, and they are projected to break in around \$300,000. Will Sonoma Mountain Village be as irresistible as it promises to be? Only time will tell. For those interested in having a peek, model homes should be ready for viewing in the fall.

For more information on Sonoma Mountain Village go to [www.sonomamountainvillage.com](http://www.sonomamountainvillage.com). For more information on One Planet Living, go to [www.oneplanetliving.org](http://www.oneplanetliving.org).

*I would love to live somewhere where I can eat the bushes.*

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