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PREMIER ISSUE

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*Soul of the West Sound*

## Wild Swimming in the Sound

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# talking the walk

Sustainable Bainbridge townhomes make earth-friendly living easy

Words by Rebecca Hall

**When Michele Bianchi decided to** move back to Bainbridge Island after a two-year hiatus, she happened upon The Walk. An artist and creative director, she was drawn to the modern townhomes, tucked neatly between a side street and Winslow's famously whimsical mobile home community. She noted the solar panels, the poured-in-place concrete walls. A light was on in the leasing office, and she knocked on the brightly painted turquoise door.

No units were available, she was told, so she left her phone number.

A few days later, Bianchi signed a lease on a nearby apartment. She hopped on her bike, then felt her phone vibrate. A one-bedroom unit at The Walk was available. She rushed back into the other apartment building and persuaded the manager to tear up her check.

The qualities she'd admired at The Walk were no accident, but the result of a 10-year collaboration between developer Kelly Samson and architect Jonathan Davis of Davis Studio Architecture + Design. Completed in 2019 by builder Clark Construction, the project recently garnered *Green Builder's* 2021 Sustainable Community of the Year.

By registering for the International Living Future Institute's (ILFI) Zero Energy certification, Davis and Samson embarked on a journey to power one hundred percent of The Walk's energy on site, sans combustion.

More than 500 solar panels power the community. Notably, when Samson procured several mismatched panels from a



company he'd co-owned, Davis added them to the east and west façades of the buildings. While this orientation wouldn't typically generate enough energy to warrant the cost, the panels help power two EV charging stations. Davis says the extra panels also "act as a billboard, declaring, 'this is a solar community.'"

An important "aha" moment occurred when Davis rotated 24 of the 38 units inward toward an elongated courtyard. While the more conventional move would have been to face the entrances toward the street, reversing the diagram creates a welcoming space where residents cross paths.

Peppered with Adirondack chairs and lit by strands of LED bulbs, the courtyard came to life during the pandemic. Residents organized outdoor parties. Bianchi





planted strawberries and tomatoes in raised beds for residents to share. Another neighbor added basil and peppers. Even the planters, Bianchi mused, serve as “a conduit for people to sense there’s something going on. And that it’s different.”

Initially, Samson contacted Davis because of his firm’s experience designing a line of sustainable modular housing called pieceHomes, based in Los Angeles. One afternoon in 2010, while still living in LA, Davis received a cold call from Samson. If Davis could devise a modular townhome concept, Samson promised, he

had the job. Intrigued, Davis sketched a solution. When he called Samson back, Davis inquired about the 206 area code.

“Bainbridge Island,” Samson replied.

Stunned, Davis told Samson that he and his wife Mary Jo were moving to Bainbridge. And while the project took 10 years to materialize, The Walk feels destined for residents like Bianchi. As Davis explains, “Our work focuses on how you design and create places where people connect—where community happens.” To hear Bianchi tell it, The Walk delivers on that promise. **t**

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