

# THE RADAR REALTY!

BY AMY WESTERVELT



**KEEPING UP WITH THE CHANGS** *Clockwise from left: A suburban street in F+A Architects' "Napa Valley" neighborhood in Beijing; the Mediterranean-style waterways of 5+Design's Luxehills development; an overview of the firm's Mayland project in Macau, China; the row houses of 5+Design's Harbour Mile project, which look like waterfront property in Hermosa Beach.*



## REMADE IN CHINA

*The new Chinese bourgeoisie goes mad for the real house-lives of Orange County!*

Wide driveways lined with palm trees, exposed stone walls, turrets and balconies that almost remind you of a Mediterranean villa... almost. Shopping at The Grove? Not quite. Welcome to Orange County, China.

Just as O.C. social climbers appropriated "classy" Euro architecture, the emergent Chinese middle class can't get enough of SoCal knockoffs. Critics complain that the giant homes in sprawling suburbs sprouting up outside Beijing and Shanghai are indicative of a larger, disturbing tendency in China to repeat Western development patterns with gusto. But you won't hear Angeleno architects complaining. The sudden success of Chinese burbs modeled after Pasadena and Newport Beach could keep them afloat as the housing market dries up Stateside.

Outside Beijing, a housing development literally called "Changsha Orange County," designed by Newport Beach-based architects Bassenian/Lagoni, has been knocked for including giant California-style kitchens with islands and stainless-steel ranges that are so out of step with Chinese cooking that residents have taken to building makeshift cooking shacks in their backyards. Not that that keeps would-be Chinese yuppies from snatching up these pads. The \$1 million-plus homes in housing tracts like "Orange County" typically sell out in the first weekend.

Andy Feola, president and founder of F+A Architects in Pasadena, says even his "Napa Valley" development, with its wide streets and smattering of huge Mediterranean-style homes, was modeled more after a SoCal neighborhood than for its Northern California namesake. Feola, who has worked on a number of similar developments in the country, says the recent Chinese interest in big houses and suburbs stems partially from a new sort of freedom. "They have lived for a long time under the pressure of a political regime that didn't allow for the freedom to enjoy the sort of lifestyle they see us enjoying," he says. "But in the last 10 years, there's been a huge transition—people are getting on the Internet, everyone has a cell phone and Western-style



clothing, and developers have been allowed to travel around the world. They come back with new ideas about how to live."

The odd thing is, SoCal architecture is itself a knockoff, borrowed from Spain, Mexico and the Mediterranean, then inflated and tricked out with massive Hummer-size garages, basement movie theaters and skylights. Going straight to the original would seem to make more sense for China, where space is at a premium and most people use public transportation, so why come to SoCal in search of inspiration and architects?

"They said they wanted the people living there to feel like they were somewhere else, some great place they've always dreamed of going," says David Moreno of L.A.-based 5+Design Architects, referring to the Chinese developers of his firm's Luxehills project outside Chengdu. According to Moreno, when those developers come to SoCal, they spend time in Pasadena, and revere Santa Barbara and Palm Springs as well. Now they want to re-create the sunny, easy life they see people over here living. Never mind that Chengdu's winters are more similar to Wisconsin's than to Newport's.

Given the tragedy of the recent earthquake in the area, it may be a bit longer before Luxehills is completed, but it eventually will be a full-blown suburb of Chengdu, complete with shopping and restaurants. When the developers hired 5+Design, they had already built some *Melrose Place*-style apartment complexes and large Craftsman and Mediterranean-influenced single- CONTINUED ON PAGE 128...



A series of doors in the Schaffer Residence.

**THE RADAR DESIGN** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 64... structure that Lautner envisioned as adaptable to any terrain while freeing the walls below from their load-bearing role, thereby allowing them to be customized for each owner. Many of his works were, effectively, experiments in repeatable, pre-fab or low-cost housing solutions, but he never had the opportunity to expand his ideas on a large scale. What makes Lautner unique is that he saw the radical as essentially rational. The only thing more startling than the Chemosphere itself is a 1962 drawing for the *L.A. Times* that shows a swarm of Chemospheres, rising from the hills as organically as mushrooms.

Great houses are demanding. They can dictate how you wake up in the morning, how you walk, what you see. In exchange, they can change your perception of the world. Lautner's works always create a lookout to the outside, with arching forms that span a panoramic view or converging sight lines that focus your attention on a point. "If there's a view, he'll find it," says Olsberg. "Or he makes the house create views. He wants you to own your view. He was building a very personal relationship between you and the world." ▲

July 13–Oct 12. *Between Earth and Heaven: The Architecture of John Lautner*, at the Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA. 310.443.7000, [www.hammer.ucla.edu](http://www.hammer.ucla.edu). Lautner Home Tours, July 27 and September 14, presented with the MAK Center. Tickets \$145; to purchase tickets, you must be a member of the Hammer Museum at the Contributor level or above. 323.651.1510.



Segel Residence, Malibu, 1979.



WELCOME TO THE O.C., COMRADE! Luxehills' central plaza.

**THE RADAR REALTY!** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 74... family homes. Moreno was charged with designing similar homes, as well as a master plan for the development. The town center he created is actually modeled after a French hill town, complete with a central square and a water feature that leads down the hill, but Moreno went with California Mission style, with all the multiple arches and arcades that style suggests. Mission accomplished: Luxehills looks like a dead ringer for Newport Beach.

Over in "Napa Valley," in addition to spacious 3,500- to 8,000-square-foot homes laid out with the same master suites and great rooms that would make an O.C. soccer mom squeal, Feola even Californified the streetscape. His team created wide poplar-lined streets, a Spanish Colonial fountain in the center of a roundabout at the entry of the development, and houses set back much farther from the curb than is typical in China (in order to allow for big green lawns with flowering shrubs, large entryways and long walkways).

"They rely more on public transport than we do, but they have a huge and emerging car culture," says Feola, explaining that the Chinese have taken a shine to pretty much every overindulgent part of our lifestyle, including car dependency. "You can't get anywhere near the conference center when there's a car show going on. They get in their new cars, and they drive down this nice tree-lined lane to their spacious new homes. It's a lifestyle they really enjoy, which we do as well. There would be rebellion there if they had to give it up." ▲



Another view of Luxehills, outside Chengdu.