

BUILDING DESIGN + CONSTRUCTION

A COASTAL CALIFORNIA CITY REAWAKENS ITS DOWNTOWN

The Prado West mixed-use redevelopment gives Dana Point a new look.

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Prado West, a mixed-use development consisting of three buildings for retail and residential, is the newest addition to Dana Point, Calif.'s, re-emerging downtown. Images: AO

Dana Point, Calif., is a coastal city in Orange County best known for its harbor. Lately, the city's downtown area [has become more appealing](#) to visitors and residents alike, thanks in part to redevelopment that has created more live-work-play options. Prado West is one such project. This mixed-use development on 2.3 acres consists of three buildings that encompass 32,500 sf of retail and restaurant space, 109 apartments with 50 floor plans, and a 24-hour fitness center.

The developer, [Raintree Partners](#), had owned this site for a while, and was on board with the city's vision to regenerate its downtown area, says Michael Heinrich, a Principal with [AO](#), the architectural design firm that was the design architect and AOR on this project.

Raintree, he adds, "was not the typical multifamily client we usually work with. But it always intended for the project to be mixed use."

Smoothing a hilly site



Dana Point's Prado West includes 109 for-rent apartments, with 50 floor plans.

Prior to Prado West's emergence, this site was an assemblage of buildings and parking spaces that included a post office and distribution center (both of which Raintree tried, unsuccessfully, to acquire). The site's "urban character" was "pretty sparse," recalls Heinrich, with its collection of sheds for street merchants.

The triangular site was sloped, and required a considerable amount of grading to make Prado West work, especially for the retail stores and restaurants. Heinrich notes, too, that the project required subterranean parking under a street called Amber Lantern that needed to be rebuilt.

(The building team on Prado West included [W.E. O'Neil Construction](#) (GC), [Psomas](#) (CE), [H. Hendy Associates](#) (interior design), [Nova Services](#) (geotechnical engineer), and [GMP Land Architecture](#) (landscape architect)).

Scaled to its surroundings



The triangular, sloped site for the development of Prado West required considerable grading.

The 3- and 4-story-tall buildings at Prado West had to stay within a prescribed 40-ft height limit, and the building team conducted a story pole analysis using cranes to make sure the buildings wouldn't block residents' seaside views.

AO, says Heinrich, does a lot of shopping mall renovations the incorporate residential to create a sense of place, like a village. At Prado West, the plaza is open to the city and is available for community events. "I'm all for this," says Heinrich about this kind of access, noting that the plaza is well lighted so there's less concern about security.

This project followed form-based zoning, and AO did a unit plan that was almost like condos: the apartment sizes go up to 1,200 sf, with 100 ft of patio.

Heinrich says that among the takeaways from Prado West were "we learned about putting retail on a hilly site. And because this is a coastal town, the design had to be sensitive to appearance," meaning that the buildings were scaled to seem smaller than their actual mass.



A mile of California's Pacific Coast Highway that runs through Dana Point's downtown has been widened and upgraded with new curbing and landscaping.

At the same time Prado West was under construction, the city was renovating the mile-long stretch of the Pacific Coast Highway that runs through downtown, widening the road to two lanes both ways, adding new curbing and planting new palm trees.

"It's beautiful," says Heinrich, "and I can see Dana Point finally fulfilling its vision."