

FINDING *Home*



This page: The Grove residents Stacie and Danny added color to their kitchen with stickers in a Chevron design. Stacie got the idea from Pinterest and found the stickers on wallsneedlove.com.

Opposite top: A Japanese screen creates a reading nook within the apartment's main living space.

Opposite bottom: Stacie bought the kitchen table at Browse 'N Buy for thirty-one dollars, and refinished and repainted it herself.



Residents of the valley's first affordable rental apartments settle into their new spaces, which just happen to be designed by star architect Stephen Dynia.

By Julie Fustanio Kling

Photography by Tuck Fauntleroy

At first, Stacie and Danny were overwhelmed by all the space in their 1,000-plus-square-foot, two-bedroom, second-floor apartment at the Grove, a twenty-unit complex of affordable rentals built by the Teton County Housing Authority (TCHA). The couple, who have been in the valley since 2009, thought the space felt cold and empty, mostly because of its concrete floors and white walls. But still, they were thrilled. In the last six years they had lived—mostly apart—in a multitude of rentals with roommates. Most of these weren't in the best shape or furnished with their tastes in mind. "When you have had a place furnished for you for so long you don't know what your taste is," Stacie says. "So it's been a discovery period."

Since the couple—Stacie is a nursing student, and Danny is a post-production supervisor for Brain Farm—can rent their Grove apartment for as long as they want (as long as they continue to qualify for affordable housing), they want to make it their own. "I want it to have a Bohemian feel," Stacie says. Given that architect Stephen Dynia designed the apartments with open floor plans, high ceilings, and large windows, Stacie's goal is not an easy one.

In a third-floor apartment, Jessica and Bryan, both of whom work at St. John's Medical Center (she is an audiologist and he is in accounting), don't have to do much to transform it into their vision. Having grown up in Chicago, Jessica likes the urban feel of the space. Furniture they already had matches the new apartment's modern, clean form. She says she feels like she could be in the home of one of her friends that still lives in Chicago.





Left: Jessica and Bryan's third-floor apartment has beautiful views of nearby buttes. Project architect Stephen Dynia designed the spaces to be bright, airy, and open.

Right: The couple's two-year-old son, Atticus, often turns the apartment's pantry into a playroom.

Across the hall from Jessica and Bryan is my apartment. After living in five different places in three years, I feel fortunate to have been selected for a Grove rental. I see the sense in the building's green (and rusted steel) exterior. Green is the color of stability, balance, and harmony. It promotes a love of nature, family, friends, pets, and home. (Dynia explains the practicality of the building's exterior materials palette: "Low-maintenance building materials were used throughout to reduce cost concerns for TCHA in years to come.")

Because no one with physical disabilities applied for a Grove unit, mine is one of the building's two ADA-compliant units. My kids, eleven and thirteen, each have their own bedroom, and we are able to keep our little dog, a Tibetan Terrier, by getting an emotional support dog license. We also keep a brown futon (that used to be my bed), an Oriental rug, and art—an eclectic collection of photographs and paintings. The art dwarfs the television. I bought two new

things: a runner and a high stainless-steel table. Both do double duty. My kids use the former as a practice putting green. We use the latter as a counter and our dining room table. Both came from Overstock.com.

Four months after we've all moved in, I check in on Stacie and Danny. Their apartment is well on its way to Stacie's vision of cozy Bohemian. A Japanese screen creates a reading nook outside the master bedroom. There's a porthole mirror hanging on the wall that I recognize from my own browsing at Habitat for Humanity ReStore. Stacie shopped online, too. On Target.com, she found interesting lighting options: bathroom sconces that look like candles but are battery-powered and, for the patio, bulbous Christmas lights turned on by someone clapping. There are still a few dark spots in the main living space, but Stacie repositioned lights on the two tracks of lighting running across the kitchen and living room ceiling to hit those. At Browse 'N Buy, she bought a sturdy kitchen table, which was thirty-

one dollars, and repainted it. On the glossy white kitchen cabinets, Stacie created a bright turquoise Chevron design. "I saw it on Pinterest and found the stickers on wallsneedlove.com," she says, adding that it took a while to lay out, cut, and paste.

The decks of the second-floor apartments are protected by the balconies of the third-floor apartments. Since I'm on the third (top) floor, my balcony isn't fit for year-round use, but Stacie and Danny's is. At their former rental in the Aspens, their deck was devoted mostly to gear, including bikes and river stuff. But since every Grove apartment has a storage closet, which Stacie and Danny organized nicely to accommodate their equipment, they can enjoy this deck. They've split it into two sections—one for cooking and eating, and one for relaxing. "We use it a lot," Stacie says, adding that they just began entertaining and are excited to have company for the holidays. On Christmas Day, the smell of slow-roasting meat on the grill outside



Jessica, Bryan, and Atticus in their main living space, which Jessica says feels modern, like the homes of her city-dwelling friends.

their place wafts down to the sidewalk as I'm out walking my dog.

Neighbors, some of whom I'm still meeting and others I'm getting to know as friends, love that they can walk to a coffee shop and a grocery store. Many use baby strollers and wagons to carry purchases. "You can get this [wagon] for thirty dollars at Kmart," Jessica says as she watches me lug groceries up three flights of stairs. As far as I can tell, my kids are the oldest in the building. They could start a lucrative babysitting business. "Jackson prides itself on its sense of community, and people gather around this concept," Dynia says. "The Grove encourages residents to interact with each other as neighbors, continuing the tradition of our exceptional Jackson community."

The Grove continues Jackson's community tradition in another way. Jessica and Bryan had housing woes similar to mine, which were similar to those of most Grove residents.

Called "by far the most ambitious in the agency's twenty-five-year history" by the Jackson Hole News&Guide, the Grove is being built by the Teton County Housing Authority (TCHA). (The TCHA's next-largest project is the forty-nine-unit neighborhood beside Calico restaurant on the Teton Village Road, which was finished in 2004.)

Renters moved into the Grove apartments this past fall. Before these apartments, the TCHA had only three rental properties. Eighty-seven households applied for the Grove's twenty rental units. Only families who make less than 120 percent of the county's median income qualified to apply. Critical service providers are given priority, but having such a job or volunteer position is not a requirement. Rents are based on occupants' salaries. Two-bedroom units range from \$1,125 to \$1,325, utilities included, per month. In addition to the twenty rental apartments, Phase I of the Grove includes four commercial spaces. TCHA plans to move its offices into two of the four spaces. The other two will be rented to businesses at market rates. Over two more phases, forty-eight ownership units will be built at the Grove.

Phase II consists of six fourplex buildings slated to be a mix of affordable and employment-based housing. Construction on these is underway and scheduled to finish in August. TCHA expects to offer the Phase II affordable units for sale through their lottery system; the lottery will be held in late spring or early summer 2016.

The Grove's price tag, once all three phases are built, is expected to be a total of \$31.4 million. This includes the original cost of the land. The Grove is the eighth affordable housing neighborhood the TCHA has built in the valley. tetonwyo.org/house




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The cabinetry in all of the apartments is from IKEA.

The couple lived in the valley for six years and were beginning to consider leaving. Their rent kept creeping up, and the apartments they rented—four of them over their time here—weren't worth the money. They didn't want to live paycheck to paycheck and worry about how they were going to raise their kids. (Jessica is pregnant with their second child.) Thanks to the Grove, they're no longer thinking about leaving.

Jessica and Bryan's son, Atticus, two, is curious why I walk across the hall with no shoes on, but excited to show me his couch, toys, and big-boy bed. An Elmo blanket covers the latter. "This is my airplane, zoom," he says as he flies the toy around the living room. Every morning he races his parents to the elevator. Dynia says, "The goal was to elevate the design and livability of the twenty affordable units so that the tenants will be proud to live in them for years to come." Jessica says, "I feel like we moved into a luxury hotel." 

HOUSING AUTHORITY

Teton County's Board of County Commissioners founded the Teton County Housing Authority (TCHA) in 1990. (Four years earlier, in 1986, was the last time a person earning the median valley income could afford the median valley home.) The mission of TCHA, which remains a government agency, is to further the community's goal of housing 65 percent of our workforce locally. The community established this goal in its 2012 Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan. As of January, TCHA directly provides housing for approximately four hundred valley families. It has built 153 ownership units.