

## Roof

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"And in the end, that is the best thing about this project," he said.

Carolyn Aldwin, a University of California, Davis professor who does longevity studies, said while such a living arrangement is unique, it's becoming more common.

"You are much more likely to have one blended family," she said, noting that three generations often come together under one roof after a divorce or death.

Aldwin had a graduate student build a wing on her house for her mother.

"The middle generation takes care of everything," she said. "But it's great because the kids have lots of company and benefit from their grandparents."

She cited a recent study that found 80 percent of elderly people live within an hour of a child.

"It's a total myth we are abandoning our elderly. Nursing home admission rates are going down," Aldwin said.

"There are more people over age 65 who live with their families now."

The "commune" sits on a hillside. From the top of the hill, a view of Benicia's mothball fleet is seen.

"I think it's the last piece of land with acreage to develop within the city limits," Joe Shilts noted.

The house is a dream. The kitchen has a six burner stove, a double oven, an extra large refrigerator and two sinks.

From there, the families have access to a walk-in pantry big enough to hold an easy chair.

There's a communications center where mail is sorted into slots, messages are posted and one can sign themselves in or out.

On the way to the laundry room is a chute where the dirty clothes, sheets, etc. come down. The laundry has two washers and dryers and features cubby holes for the children's clean and folded clothing, which they take up to their rooms.

A deck off the laundry room gives a birds-eye view of the children's play yard.

The Shilts live on the lower level. Also on the same floor is a guest room overlooking a pool under construction.

On the main staircase there's a landing with an open view of the great room below. "I imagine puppet shows here," Gretchen Shilts noted.

Up a few more stairs, the only room on the third floor is a small space referred to as the meditation room.

"It's a place to come for some peace and quiet," Gretchen Shilts said. "Maybe we'll have some cushions on the floor."

The second floor is respectfully divided into the Curry and Lavell wings.

Each family chose its own color scheme, which makes for some beautiful combinations. The Curry children include son Jack, 1, and daughter Grace, 3.

Grace wanted the same cool green color for her room as 13-year-old cousin Jenny Lavell.

A hallway on the second floor overlooks the great room. A perfect place to peer down



Judith Sagami/DAILY REPUBLIC

Grace plays with cousin Jenny Lavall, 13, in an upstairs room before the house is finished.

and ask, "What's for dinner?" noted Gretchen Shilts.

The Lavells have three children, including Jenny, Michael, 11, and Danny, 9.

"It's just like the White House," Gretchen noted as she pointed out the different colors in the rooms. "We have the blue room, the red room."

The families had contemplated purchasing three separate homes next door to each other.

"But then we don't get the economy of a single home. And, how would we handle the meals?" Bernadette Curry said. "When we saw this lot, we knew this was it."

The Currys have been married for 10 years. After finishing college, Bernadette lived in a religious community where "we had to decide who would do what. I know what it's like to make it work," she said.

The Currys have also vacationed with the Shilts. "We spent so much time together with my parents before the kids were born. I miss that intimacy," she said.

The Currys and Lavells were outgrowing their homes while the Shilts were in a house that was too big. (They raised five daughters in the house. Three live out-of-town and opted not to live in the new house.)

It's been 18 years since Lavell lived with her parents. Her husband was in the mili-

tary for many years and they returned to the area about four years ago.

"I think this is going to be a great opportunity for my kids to grow up in the middle of a big, loving family," she said, comparing it to a family reunion that never ends.

Contractor Steve Sutton and his wife, Lisa, should get an honorary wing in the house, Lavell explained.

"We should get T-shirts that say, 'Whatever you want Steve,'" she said. "He's got wonderful taste and even better advice."

Sutton said he would love to live at the house, if he could. But he has his own family.

However, he plans to check up on the families often.

He was there on moving day to get plenty of hugs and praise.

"He's the kind of guy you can give a set of plans to along with your wallet," said Joe Shilts. "In the end the job will be done right and you will get change back."

Sutton's co-worker, Tim Senior, enjoyed working on the house, too. He was particularly interested in the solar panels.

He's also impressed with the three generation's commitment to living under the same roof.

"In the beginning I didn't know how it would work," he said. "But being here with everyone, you can see how it's

## House is its own power plant

Each adult family member was entitled to one item for the new house they wouldn't budge on. Joe Shilts chose energy efficiency.

"My bottom line was I wouldn't move in unless we did this," he said.

So, the house has structural insulated panels that offer about 50 percent more insulation than other panels.

And, the roof facing directly south has photovoltaic cells that harness energy. They are made of silicon and when light strikes

the surface some of it's absorbed into the silicon. This light energy bumps the electrons loose and starts the energy flowing.

"And, we'll manage our use of power," Shilts said. "We do the heavy stuff on off-peak hours."

He estimated their Pacific Gas and Electric bill should be next to nothing and that the utility company may be buying energy back from them.

"We became a power plant on the PG&E system. They'll buy from us when we have access," he said.

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