



Picture This...

Developer of Aura at Camelback creates eco-savvy digs fit for luxury lovers, including himself ☞ By Melanie Winderlich

While being "green friendly" is threatening to become a mere fad, responsible citizens are trying to make caring for the planet their lifestyle. Though caring for the planet falls on the shoulders of every person, there are relatively few who can truly stand by claims of green, sustainable deliverables through measurable results. Chad Gifford is one of these people, relieving nature's woes through his own undertaking.

Gifford, founder and president of Catalyst Communities, is creating a residential development that elevates what he calls "sustainable luxury living" to a new level. Aura at Camelback is predicted to be Phoenix's first sustainable residential project, merging environmental responsibility, luxury and a sense of shared community into one unique property.

"People should be really proud of where they live," he says. "This development will have a cachet surrounding it, as residents will say 'I love living in this project because I'm doing my part for the environment.'"

Aura at Camelback, located at 25th Street and Campbell Avenue within the booming Camelback Corridor, exemplifies Gifford's goal to connect sustainability with luxury. He is striving to attain a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver rating. To achieve this lofty goal, he has spared no expense in creating a luxurious, energy-conscious development.

"Everyone puts a green angle on everything to try and spin that side of a project — but that's not LEED certified, which is a measurable response," he says. "We've really put critical elements into place and are giving credence to the project. LEED certification shows people you've gone the extra mile."

Left: Chad Gifford, founder and president of Catalyst Communities, the development company of Aura at Camelback. Photo courtesy of Brian Fiske.



Above: The layout of Aura at Camelback encourages community and social interactions among residents. Here, condos look out over the pool area. Rendering provided by Catalyst Communities.

Right: Construction of Aura at Camelback will be completed next year, and residents are expected to move in around summertime. Developer Chad Gifford makes himself at home in what will soon be his living room. Photo of Gifford courtesy of Brian Fiske. Rendering provided by Catalyst Communities.

Residential



The 36-unit development includes features such as underground, compartmentalized garages to minimize the presence of cars; an asphalt- and concrete-free paver system to help reduce the "heat island" effect; low-flow water systems and dual-flush toilets; and, the icing on this earth-friendly cake is a four-kilowatt solar panel system installed on each home's roof.

"Because of green building interests, rising utility bills and abundant sunshine in Arizona, (solar power) is generating increased interest," says Mike Eisele, president of Agenera. Gifford has hired Eisele's company to advise and assist in developing and installing the most appropriate solar panels for Aura at Camelback.

"The average homeowner will reduce his or her bill by two-thirds," Eisele says. "If you're frugal (with electricity consumption), you'll barely pay anything at all."

In addition to eco-friendly elements such as solar panels and low-water consumption plants, Aura at Camelback's modern design incorporates top luxury features. Residences have private elevators leading to every level of living space, including rooftop gardens, private yards and private garages. The property's design, overlooking majestic Camelback Mountain and Piestewa Peak, encourages residents to get to know their neighbors within this urban oasis.

"Sustainability is about sustaining life and your overall mental well-being. It's not just environmental," Gifford says. "Taking part in sustaining our own life for the future embraces a different lifestyle than living in suburbia."





Above: Some units are already sold, and residents look forward to rooftop views of Piestewa Peak. Rendering provided by Catalyst Communities.

Right: A contemporary kitchen merges earth tones with sleek fixtures for a relaxed, streamlined living space. Rendering provided by Catalyst Communities.



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Perhaps the strongest expression of Gifford's confidence in Aura and what it stands for is the fact that he will be one of its residents. Gifford, his two business partners and 33 other buyers anticipate moving into the development in mid-2009 when the project is complete. Units will range in price from \$900,000 to \$1.2 million.

"If you would ask other developers if they were going to live in a project they were building, most would say no — they already have their McMansions," Gifford says. "I'm choosing to live in (this development), which says a lot about Aura."

Gifford started out in San Diego's commercial real estate market and originally bought the property as an apartment complex, wanting to promote "balanced luxury" where he and other responsible buyers would feel proud to live. His passion for nature inspired the mix of responsible design with luxury: Aura. His only hope now is that the project motivates other developers to follow suit.

"There is a paradigm shift toward responsibility, and other developers will see the demand and have to keep up," Gifford says. "If you plan sustainability from the beginning stages (of design), it's only 2 to 3 percent more expensive (than a standard build). If you do a little research and change your mind-set, you can make a huge impact."¹⁰

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