

Energy Design Update[®]

“Sustainable Luxury Living”

Ranging in size from 2,469 to 3,150 square feet, the homes will be aimed at the luxury market; prices are set at \$900,000 to \$1.3 million. Gifford explains, “The idea is sustainable luxury living — living a life of luxury without compromise, the lifestyle that you deserve. That is what the brand is about.” The Aura condos will have a few electrical loads that are unusual for single-family homes; for example, each condo will be connected to a two-car underground garage by a private elevator.

The Aura at Camelback buildings will aim for LEED Silver certification. Asked about energy-efficiency features, Gifford had little to say, except that each home would be equipped with a 15 SEER air conditioner and a 4-kW PV array installed on a low-slope roof. Said Gifford, “Remember all the bad press about solar from the 1980s? Solar panels on homes are so ugly. Here, you won’t ever see the solar panels” (see Figure 2).

Unfortunately for Aura homeowners, the local electric utility, Salt River Project, buys excess PV power generation at wholesale, not retail, rates; moreover, homeowners are not allowed to carry over any kilowatt-hour credits from one month to the next.

More Than Zero

Of course, the developers of the Aura project expect its residents’ electricity bills to be higher than zero. (After all,



Figure 2. The rooftop photovoltaic arrays at the Aura at Camelback condominium project will not be visible from most vantage points.

grid-connected homes with PV arrays need to pay the local utility a fixed monthly connection charge, even if the home produces just as much energy as it uses.) The developers are nevertheless ready to pay these bills for five years, in hopes that the investment generates a publicity payback. Gifford may find, to his dismay, that residents with children who enjoy playing with their private elevators rack up some unexpectedly high electricity bills.

“The developers have the belief that some of the owners of these 36 units may not be year-round residents,” said Greg Sexton, a public relations spokesperson for Catalyst Communities. “So the benefits of the energy bill guarantee outweigh the gamble. It will be close.”

According to Sexton, “A handful of potential buyers have expressed interest, including a few from Canada.” Gifford hopes that his publicity stunt will generate interest in zero-energy homes. “If other builders follow the model, well — copying is flattery,” said Gifford. For more information, visit www.auraatcamelback.com.