

## Introduction

From the moment I first entered a cohousing community, it was apparent that I was in a special place. While attending the University of Copenhagen in 1980, I discovered cohousing on my one-mile walk to and from the train station each day. I walked by single-family homes, apartments, and clustered housing. There was never anyone in between the houses; there was no chatting, no visiting — and there were no people. But there was one cluster of brick houses where I saw a lot of activity between the houses. People were stopping with laundry basket in hand to talk to their neighbors. In the evening, there might be three or five people sitting around a table with a

cup of tea or a beer. On the weekends, two or three people were in a parking area looking under the hood of a car. One day I stopped and knocked on someone's door and asked, "What's going on here?" The woman explained how this group decided to purchase a property themselves and to play an integral role in

Although this is a book specifically about *senior* cohousing, many of the photos in this book show *intergenerational* cohousing. The reason is two-fold. Firstly, it is to give you some idea of what life for seniors can be like in multi-generational cohousing. Secondly, when senior cohousing got started in Denmark, it was the multi-generational cohousing model that served as inspiration for seniors considering new ways of creating great lives for themselves.



*The author visiting Munksøgård senior cohousing in Denmark and listening to stories of life before cohousing compared to life after moving in to cohousing.*

the design and development of their own neighborhood. Over the year, I learned more. In 1984, Kate and I went back for an intensive 13-month research project. We visited 185 projects, studying 46 in detail. We lived in several of them, and while cooking dinner and during late-night conversations over a bottle of wine, we learned what cohousing entailed. We had planned to stay only six months, but it took 13 months before we found out what it really takes to co-develop, co-design, and co-inhabit this new type of neighborhood — and why it is so important.

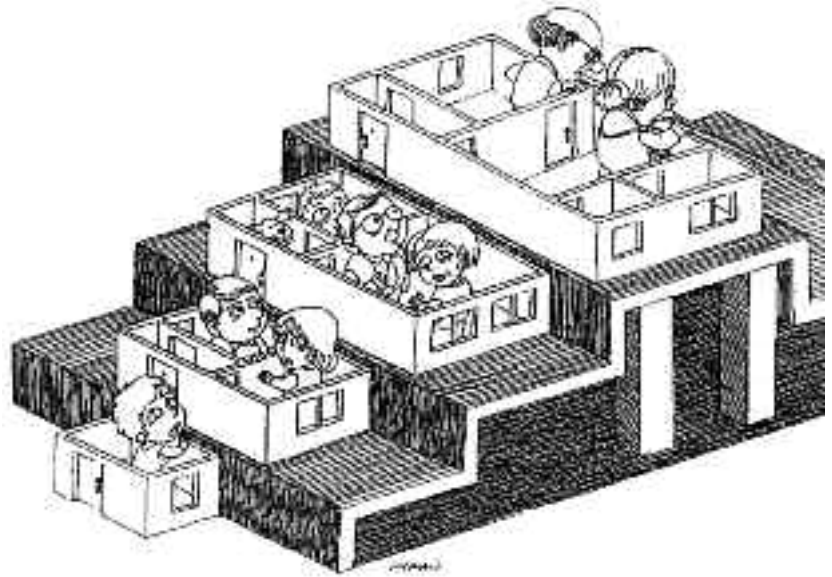
We find cohousing communities immensely inspiring. Cohousing has a unique ability to create a positive and humane environment and meaningful and sustainable relationships. This is evident in the feelings of those who live there and our own observations and comparisons of cohousing developments with other, typically more traditional, housing schemes.

This finding is fortunate because it is clear that traditional forms of housing no longer address the needs of many older Americans. Dramatic demographic, economic, and technological changes in our society have

created a population that lives longer, ages healthier, and is looking for alternatives to current housing situations as it ages. Successful housing solutions for these “young-old” seniors reflect seniors’ desire to maintain comfort, control, and independence. Indeed, the booming growth of pre-planned, suburban-style “seniors-only” housing developments is testament to this trend. However, despite slick marketing campaigns to the contrary, these pre-planned “communities” simply do not meet the real long-term needs of today’s seniors. They are speculative, for-profit development schemes, like any other of their type. It is not community. It’s business.

Individuals often now live many miles and perhaps a world away from their extended families. Traditional forms of social and economic support that people once took for granted — family, community, and a sense of belonging — must now be actively sought out. As a result, many seniors are mis-housed, ill-housed, or even homeless simply because they lack, or feel they lack, appropriate housing options. But there are better options.

*Intergenerational* cohousing is a well-established form of housing in Europe and North America. Cohousing specifically designed and built for *seniors* is somewhat more recent. Pioneered in Denmark and successfully being adapted in other



*Southside cohousing courtyard, Sacramento, California.*

countries (including the US), the senior cohousing concept re-establishes many of the advantages of traditional villages within the context of 21<sup>st</sup>-century life. It is community re-defined. This book is designed to provide seniors with the inspiration they need to be proactive in planning for their future living needs; to give them the knowledge and resources to examine whether senior cohousing is

right for them; and to show them how to build such a community.

Portions of chapter 2 first appeared in *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*. I hope that this new book will help put cohousing for seniors on the map in North America.

— Charles Durrett.

*This is what matters most — a caring and daily community life.*

