



**2010 Excellence in Design  
AIA Montana Design Awards Program  
Honor Award**

Photography by MacArthur, Means & Wells



*Architect of Record:*

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## **Equinox**

**Missoula, Montana**

The Equinox is a 35 unit affordable housing project in Missoula, Montana and contains a mixture of studio, one bedroom, and two bedroom units. The three story building sits atop an underground parking garage with 29 spaces. The building also contains public laundry facilities, a community room with a kitchen and patio, private unit storage, and a elevator. Thirty three of the thirty five units have private balconies. The Equinox is located at the corner of two busy streets and is very close to downtown Missoula along the banks of the Clark Fork River. The site has excellent access to public transportation, and the project continued a segment of Missoula's bike/ped trail system. Developed on a gray-field site the existing building on site was deconstructed and 83% of demolition waste was salvaged or recycled.

The design team followed an integrated design process for the Equinox, including a community charrette during the pre-design phase. The design team also held an eco-charrette to establish goals for the sustainability performance of the building. Several follow up meetings tracked the design's conformance to the goals set at the eco-charrette. The owner of the project, homeWORD, also held a universal design charette for the project, involving architects, affordable housing tenants, and accessibility representatives at the state and level. This charette helped to clarify the needs of the homeWORD's tenants and to create more universally accessible units.

The Equinox sits on a 2 acre site. During schematic design, provisions were made for a second building to be built in a future phase. Both buildings are designed to create a wedge of green space that opens up to the river. This green space offers a viewshed and a physical connection to the river. Down the middle of the green space, a stream bed is designed that will allow storm water runoff to create a temporary active stream.

Along the edge of the river, a bike/pad trail connects with Missoula's trail system. Before construction began, the riverbank was covered in ugly slabs of concrete and asphalt rip rap. The bank was unnaturally steep and had significant erosion from careless public traffic. Litter and debris were scattered everywhere. The architects and owners worked with local watershed representatives and a professional hydrologist to design and permit a more naturally sloped riverbank, remove debris and rip rap, and replant using native plants. Because the trail system is highly used, the project team also designed a unique access path to the Clark Fork River. This access trail is heavily bordered with rock, plantings and small downed trees to discourage the type of "off-trail" traffic that contributed to the severe erosion of the original bank.

The Equinox includes many other measures to protect water quality besides reconstructing the riverbank. Inside the building, low flow plumbing fixtures were used, including dual flush toilets, low flow shower heads, and low flow faucets. Runoff from the roof is planned to be used as a water feature when both phases of the site are complete. To preserve open space, and to reduce impermeable surfaces, an underground parking garage was constructed. The runoff from the 14 spaces of on-grade parking flows in to rain garden. The landscaping utilizes low-water and native plantings.?