

STARTER APARTMENTS

NINGBO, CHINA YINZHOU TALENT APARTMENTS DC ALLIANCE

BY CLARE JACOBSON

FACED WITH soaring prices of housing in urban China, what is a young college graduate to do? The Shanghai-based architecture firm DC Alliance provides one option in its Yinzhou Talent Apartments. The state-subsidized project in the Yinzhou district of Ningbo—a city of 5.7 million people three hours south of Shanghai—offers 1,000 rental units at a discount. It was developed by Yinzhou City Construction Investment Development Company, which is also responsible for the area's new central business district. The idea behind the apartment complex is to help university-educated people get started in Ningbo, a port city with four college campuses. The state-run developer can offer below-market rates because it is not a for-profit enterprise. Its “return” is bringing talent to Yinzhou.

According to Yinzhou Construction's general vice manager, Hu Jun, tenants pay 60 percent of the market price for the first year, 80 percent the second, and nearly 100 percent the third; they are encouraged to leave after that. Seventy percent of the units are owned by Yinzhou Construction and distributed by lottery; the other 30 percent have been sold to local businesses that offer them to their employees.

DC Alliance partner Dong Yi says the popularity of the project is due to more than the low rent. Amenities include north and south views for both the two-bedroom apartments (which are 750 square feet) and the one-bedroom units (485 square feet). The architects achieved this through smart sectional design that makes each apartment a duplex with bedroom, office, and/or storage space on the second level. Two 326-foot-tall towers sit diagonally on the site to face the preferred directions, while a pair of attached 170-foot buildings angle their windows to the views. The project also offers large public spaces every 12 floors in the tall towers and every four in the short ones. These indoor areas do not yet house the services planned for them (such as cafés and computer stations), but their current use as places to dry laundry makes them ideal communal spaces. The project includes other features that set it apart: compositionally bold facade treatments, indoor and outdoor sports facilities, and multilevel roof decks on the smaller towers. With its low rents (starting at \$95 per month) and stylish design, Yinzhou Talent Apartments serves an important but often-overlooked group: the young professionals expected to drive future growth. ■

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AWARD-WINNING With two 326-foot-high towers (above) and a pair of attached 170-foot-high blocks (right), the complex provides stylish residences at subsidized rents to college graduates new to Ningbo or living there without residency papers. The 1,000 units range in size from 485-square-foot one-bedroom apartments to 750-square-foot two-bedroom ones. Yinzhou Talent Apartments was recently honored by the China Architecture Media Awards with a special award for residential architecture.