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Production architects Mark Scheurer, Walt Richardson, and
Robert Hidey turned the house upside down. Cover and photo
above by Mark Robert Halper.
Restoration/Renovation Show
January 15–17, Washington Hilton & Towers, Washington, DC
This annual trade show attracts over 275 manufacturers from across the country exhibiting products that highlight advances in the ever-growing field of restoration and renovation. Focus on building exteriors, interiors, landscapes, streetscapes and gardens. Also, there are over 75 conference sessions and workshops about the latest methods and materials for restoration/renovation projects. For more information call 800-982-6247 or log on to www.restorationandrenovation.com.

Surfaces Show
January 30–February 1, Sands Expo & Congress Center, Las Vegas, NV
The annual Surfaces Show draws over 850 manufacturers of counter tops, flooring and related products. New Comprehensive Education Program with six seminar tracks to build your business and improve your bottom line. Call 800-547-3477 for more information or log on to www.SurfacesExpo.com.

Design With Memory
Fifth International Design Resource Awards
Annual design contest competition encourages the use of post-consumer recycled, reprocessed and sustainably harvested materials for use in new product and building designs. Registration and submission deadline is February 1. For contest rules visit www.designresource.org.

Industry Calendar of Events
January/February 2001

A WORK OF ART. COMPLETE WITH A STAINLESS STEEL FRAME.
NAHB International Builders’ Show
February 9–12, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, GA

The annual Builders’ Show moves to Atlanta after a lengthy, successful stint in Texas. This show attracts building products, design and materials manufacturers from around the world. Events include the Hearthstone Dinner, Home Plans Design Dinner, and Live/Work Exhibit. Whirlpool Corporation is a proud sponsor of Live/Work. Appliances for all three Live/Work homes in Atlanta were donated by Whirlpool. Come see the latest and greatest in appliance technologies at the Whirlpool Exhibit, Booth # 4614.

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Circle no. 353
as the Irvine Company begins to run out of buildable land, Orange County architects scramble to widen their playing field.

by s. claire conroy

For 40 years now, Orange County, Calif., has been plowing down greenfields and putting up red tile roofs (see story, page 46). But the end is in sight. Large tracks of buildable land grow scarcer and scarcer, especially on the famous Irvine Ranch. Estimates vary, but most experts think only 20 years of development on smaller and smaller parcels remain. So, what will all the production housing architects planted in Orange County do next?

Veterans like Walt Richardson plan to ride the last wave and leave the calmer waters to successors. But newer players like Mark Scheurer and Bob Hidey, who are just hitting their stride, are thinking long and hard about the future. And they're even more concerned about the contribution they're making in the present. "Orange County has always built outward. It is officially at its boundaries. The next 20 years will be infill," Scheurer says. "And that means we'll have context and history to deal with. You can't fail and drive over the next hill and try again."

And that is a sea change. When Orange County entered its wild growth period in the early '60s, architects had no context to follow. Virtually nothing covered the land but orange groves, avocados, some ranch buildings, and a Spanish mission here and there.

Well, that's not entirely true. About nine miles up the brand-new road from Irvine, Calif., was Disneyland. The cartoon kingdom opened in 1955, just five years before William Pereira drew the master plan for the Irvine Ranch. And the man who implemented the plan for The Irvine Company, Ray Watson, went on to become president of Walt Disney.

So was Irvine's strongest context, and it accounts, in part, for the area's squeaky clean, surreal quality. There's an eerie Stepford feeling to both places. Both worlds are organized in "themed" villages, and that tight, unified control over planning shows self-consciously in every building and hedgerow.

The Irvine Company's enduring sovereignty over so much Orange County land has at different times encouraged and stifled creativity. Says architect and land planner Will Haynes, of Hezmalhalch Architects, "Orange County was like the Renaissance. It had the intensity of demand for housing, the talent to do it, and the patrons—the large-scale developers—to pay for it."

The Irvine Company was a formidable dynasty, and it's left a huge fabric for architects to respond to. So most Orange County architects are sharpening their already razor-edged high-density skills, preparing for the special demands of infill. They're also learning to split microscopically fine hairs among Mediterranean, Spanish, and Italian architecture—The Irvine Company's sanctioned styles for the last 20 years. Furthermore, the canny ones are quietly diversifying their portfolios (adding multifamily, light commercial, land planning work) and their territories (designing in Northern California, the Sunbelt, the Pacific Rim). Most are doing all of this without staffing up to their pre-recession numbers, finding peace of mind in staying lean and mean.

"Being busy as an architect doesn't mean you get rich," says Mark Scheurer. "You just get to be picky."

Questions or comments? Call me: 202.736.3312; write me: S. Claire Conroy, residential architect, One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005; or e-mail me: cconroy@hanley-wood.com.
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On the contrary

Contrary to the views expressed by Amy Haight (Letters, October 2000, page 12), I have always believed an architect's responsibility is to give the client the best design possible within such project limitations as budget and context. Part of that process often includes exposing the clients to options and approaches they may not have thought of before engaging the services of an architect. An architect is supposed to bring a client experience and expertise, based on design principles learned during education and honed during subsequent experience.

I do not believe an architect serves any client (or the profession) well by merely serving as a pencil in giving the clients "exactly what they want," especially if what the client wants harms the environment (visually or otherwise). A builder can do that ... why should an architect, too?

I sense from her letter that Ms. Haight's "posh" custom home designs are likely derivative designs, and I take no exception to her right to take that approach in her work. However, it is disingenuous of her to expect a national publication such as Residential Architect, which promotes original, quality design, to also promote her derivative, "posh" designs.

Ms. Haight may do better to try other publications that do feature such work.

Lynn A. Myers
Jacobs Facilities
Arlington, Va.

Good taste

I had not heard of Residential Architect magazine until the last day of the Congress for the New Urbanism conference in Portland, Ore., last June. The task force on design discussed
whether there was a need for the CNU to sponsor a publication of appropriate New Urbanist residential buildings; the consensus was that residential architect already filled the bill.

I thumbed through an issue recently and found the designs refreshing—and a stark contrast to the “expensive bad taste” cataloged in alternative publications.

Al Burns, AICP
Bureau of Planning
Portland, Ore.

all aboard

I was interested in your article “Winning by the Rules” (July/August, page 28) and wanted to share with you my own experiences as a member of an architectural review board.

I, along with a number of other residents, helped draw up a comprehensive master plan for my local community shortly after it incorporated 10 years ago.

About three years ago, the community appointed an architectural review board to review new projects being proposed for our city of 40,000-plus. The group consists of four architects, a landscape architect, a graphic designer, and a banker. This has proved to be a good mix, bringing a broad perspective to our considerations of proposed work.

One of our first priorities was to draw up written architectural guidelines, defining what we, as a group, felt were good practices to follow in developing new designs for the community. We also addressed poor design practices that we wanted to discourage. The group spent hours discussing these guidelines and we feel they are helpful to all community members, both citizens and developers.

We meet twice a month, in public sessions, to review current proposals and discuss each submission. We architects in the group have experience working with other design review groups in other communities and I think we are sensitive to the importance of being positive and helpful.

Other architects and developers have told us off the record that they appreciate our help in encouraging good design. Many are genuinely interested in improving the quality of work being done and are willing to do better, if they know what is recommended.

David L. Whitfield, AIA
Chesterfield, Mo.

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Circle no. 311
viva la resolution!

We know: New Year's resolutions too often translate into broken promises, making them easy targets for cynicism. Yet they also force us to ponder what's truly important, what's working and what is not. In that spirit, we polled a collection of architects around the country, asking them to identify their priorities for their practices in the year 2001.—Cheryl Weber

**stephen muse, faia**  
*muse architects, washington, d.c.*

Our resolution is to stay the course, making sure we don't get seduced by the good economy. It's very tempting for firms to fall into the trap of growing too fast, taking on too much work, or the wrong kind of work. We will continue to pay close attention to what we do.

**barry berkus, aia**  
*berkus design studio, santa barbara, calif.*

My wish is that I might find the light at the end of the tunnel. I want to be able to realize thoughts I've had for years about what the next generation may need in terms of place and community. I want to explore new methods of powering communities, such as the use of hydrogen fuel cells, and new ways of gathering people together in urban environments. Being part of the evolution is what gets me up in the morning.

**duo dickinson**  
*duo dickinson architect, madison, conn.*

I resolve to never say the word “schedule” again. The building boom,

**natalye appel, aia**  
*natalye appel architects, houston*

I'm trying to delegate management responsibilities and devote more of my time to design and the things that I find most fun.

**margaret mccurry, faia**  
*tigerman mccurry architects, chicago*

My priority is getting control of my life back. Whatever is a convenience for us—cell phones, faxes—has also caused the world to speed up so that we can accomplish more. But there's less downtime. I'm going to limit my clients and be more focused.
gary parsons

gary earl parsons, architect, berkeley, Calif.
I resolve to forgo multi-tasking for mindful and focused consideration, and the deep enjoyment that flows from it.

elizabeth moule

moule & polyzoides architects and urbanists, pasadena, Calif.
As a board member of the Congress for the New Urbanism, I want to work more closely with women's and children's advocacy groups to get them involved as coalition members in the fight against suburban sprawl.

robert m. gurney, aia

robert m. gurney, architect, alexandria, va.
My resolution is to renovate our house this year. When we bought it 2½ years ago, we ripped out the kitchen with the intention of redoing it before we moved in. We're still using a temporary oven up on bricks. My plan is to gut the entire house and add an addition.

Hugh Newell Jacobsen, FAIA

Hugh Newell Jacobsen, architect, centerbrook architects, essex, conn.
I promise never to design a project that must be approved by an architectural review board, if that board does not include an architect.

jeff riley, aia

centerbrook architects, essex, conn.
I hope to achieve more simplicity and serenity in my work.

Pfun with Pfaucretry

These aren't your grandmother's faucets, but they could become your children's. The ultramodern spigots claimed top honors in Price Pfister's Pfaucrety of the Pfuture design contest.

To mark its 90th anniversary, the Pacoima, Calif.-based manufacturer invited industrial design students from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif., and Parson's School of Design in New York City to submit cutting-edge designs. The three winners, chosen from 30 entrants, received $10,000, $5,000, and $2,500 awards—money that will be split between the students and their schools.

Aside from funky styling, the faucets are dripping with practicality. Silas Beebe, architecture school graduate and Art Center junior, gave his "Water Go" spout an indent-ed loop that holds a bar of soap or a wash-cloth (above, center). Parsons' Hlynur Vagn Atlason, also a junior, designed "Arch" so that wet hands operating the faucet stay over the lav bowl, reducing messy dribbles (top). And "Chameleon," by Shane Koo, an Art Center senior, features a special film on the spout's end that changes color in response to the water's temperature (bottom).

So what are the chances you'll spec these someday? According to Walter Strater, Price Pfister's vice president of engineering and advance development, "The basic concepts could survive. But all the details? Probably not."—nigel f. maynard
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In Canada, 1-800-263-6161  www.marvin.com
Vancouver-based artist Stan Douglas explores questions of identity in the modern world. This survey of his work features film and video installations as well as photographs. Shown below: a still from *Win, Place or Show* (1998), inspired by the artist’s research into urban development in the 1950s and '60s. For additional information, call MOCA at 213.626.6222.

**Wood: an American Tradition**  
National Building Museum  
Through April 22

Its strength, beauty, workability, and availability have made wood the quintessential American building material for almost 400 years. This exhibit examines the four major wood-building traditions: log construction, timber framing, balloon framing, and platform framing. Left: Fay Jones used balloon-framing techniques in his design for Thorncrown Chapel (1980), in Eureka Springs, Ark. Call 202.272.2448 for museum hours.

**International CES Conference**  
Las Vegas  
January 6–9

Expected to be the largest Consumer Electronics Show ever, this technology trade event will feature more than 1.1 million square feet of exhibits from 1,500 international companies. Keynote speakers include Intel president Craig Barrett and Microsoft chairman Bill Gates. Visit www.cesweb.org for registration information.

**Nahb International Builders’ Show**  
Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta  
February 9–12

One of the biggest conventions in the world, the annual International Builders’ Show features more than 1,000 manufacturers and attracts more than 72,000 industry professionals from 120 countries. An educational conference boasting some 80-plus seminars accompanies the show. To register, visit www.nahbexpos.com.

**World of Concrete**  
Las Vegas Convention Center  
February 27–March 2

Hanley-Wood Exhibitions presents this international exposition and conference for architects, contractors, developers, manufacturers, government officials, distributors, and engineers. In addition to nearly 700,000 square feet of exhibits, more than 80 seminars will be offered on everything from concrete basics to specialized techniques. Call 800.837.0870 or visit www.worldofconcrete.com for more information.

**29th International Conference on Making Cities Livable**  
Savannah, Ga.  
March 4–8

Attend sessions on community development, New Urbanism, sustainability, rediscovery of public space, redesigning suburbia and edge cities, and urban design for children’s well-being. Join with city officials, planners, developers, community leaders, behavioral scientists, artists, and other architects to exchange ideas and expertise pertaining to livability issues. For further details, call 831.626.9080 or visit www.livablecities.org.

**Continuing Exhibits**

- *Masterpieces from the Vitra Design Museum*, through February 4, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York, 212.849.8400;  
- *Flight Patterns*, through February 11, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 213.626.6222;  
- *The Opulent Eye of Alexander Girard*, through March 18, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York, 212.849.8400;  

Chair (1967) by Nguyen Manh Khanh, from Blow-Up, an exhibition at Berlin’s Vitra Design Museum.
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Circle no. 303
gorlin on town houses; berkus on berkus

The New American Town House is a handsome assemblage of urban residences selected by New York architect Alexander Gorlin. An acclaimed designer of town houses himself, Gorlin brings a skilled eye to his task. The 20 buildings he presents—by 20 different firms in nine cities—are consistently clean, elegant, and contemporary, as is the design of the book by publisher Rizzoli.

Gorlin opens with a history of the town-house form, which he traces to ancient Rome. This well-researched section is one of the book’s strengths. Photographic documentation throughout the book is superb as well. Individual project narratives are a bit too brief, and should have been supplemented by descriptive captions.

For an equally handsome and more thought-provoking read, turn to Architecture, Art, Parallels, Connections, by California architect Barry Berkus. This is an intensely personal book, and is best read by devotees of Berkus’ muscular and frequently over-bold aesthetic. It is essentially 195 pages of Berkus on Berkus, in which he analyzes the spectrum of influences that have shaped his architecture and planning work. So you will see page upon page of Berkus buildings, interspersed with Berkus-drawn sketches and images of the places, art, and photographic pieces from which he has drawn his “parallels and connections.”

Architecture, Art, Parallels, Connections contains no outside voices at all: no preface by an architectural eminence, no enthusiastic jacket quotes. But Berkus is a good writer, and the book makes for an intriguing read if you consider his point about the uncanny parallels that exist between architecture and art through the ages.—Susan Bradford Barror

super site

Shopping for building products on the Internet is about to get a whole lot easier for architects and other building professionals. Ebuild, a subsidiary of Hanley-Wood, LLC, publisher of Residential Architect and other building-trade magazines, is launching a new Web site (www.ebuild.com) this February that will feature a comprehensive, interactive guide to thousands of building products from hundreds of manufacturers. This one-stop-shopping site aims to provide building professionals with all the information—updated continually—they need to research, compare, and specify residential building products. In addition, ebuild.com will offer product reviews and news about trends and technology. Watch for the site’s debut at the International Builders’ Show, February 9–12 in Atlanta.
Millennium siding has no equal. We're not kidding.
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Steven and Cathi House, House + House Architects, San Francisco, are hoping Parrot Tree Plantation will become one of Honduras’ newest hot spots. They’ve teamed up with developer John Edwards to master-plan the 300-acre resort community on Roatan Island, just off the country’s north coast. The resort is divided into about 250 private homes, 50 luxury condos, a 150-room hotel, a yacht club, and a marina, plus an arboretum and nature preserves.

“Steven and I spent a couple years documenting the Mediterranean architecture of little waterfront villages,” Cathi House says. “This plantation is built in the historic tradition of a very dense, rich environment of terraces and twisting walkways through natural areas.” The architectural guidelines include elements such as stucco, red tile roofs, columns, and stonework.

During the past seven years, the couple has designed all the community’s public structures, which are still under construction, and many of its private homes. “The property owners are allowed to use whatever architect they choose,” House notes.

Some of the private homes are being used as rentals, though a lot of people are retiring there from Canada, Texas, and California, the architect says. “The spectacular coral reef makes it a popular place for divers.”—cheryl weber
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practice

playing the stock-plans market

one-of-a-kind doesn’t necessarily beat a full portfolio of houses.

by cheryl weber

Residential architects spend many months designing a house for a one-of-a-kind client. A stack of sketches later, the building’s forms are perfected, the floor plan flows, the design intent is clearly expressed. Then the house is built, and the plans are put away in the drawer. One more project for the portfolio, one more eager client checked off the waiting list. In this fast-paced economy, wouldn’t it be nice if you could clone yourself?

The next best thing to cloning yourself, of course, is to clone your plans, tweaking the design to make it appealing to a variety of clients and sites. Architects are doing it a number of ways: by designing an “idea house” for a consumer magazine that offers the blueprints for purchase, by selling their plans through a self-published book or on the company Web site, or through the stock-plans market.

Admittedly, the notion of selling a house plan makes many architects queasy. It goes against the grain of how they view themselves—as professionals devoted to a select audience of design-savvy elite. Purists argue that selling plans cheapens what they do because their services are inextricably linked to a specific client and site. “It’s a risky business with architects to even broach the subject,” says architect Sarah Susanka, author of The Not So Big House books. “We do have to relinquish a fair amount of control, and that is hard for architects.” Others, though, embrace the concept as an opportunity to diversify their business and to take good design mainstream. Susanka’s advice?

Those who feel squeamish about the idea should simply stay away from it.

Who’s buying?

Yet one has to ask: Who is this consumer market, spurning production builders and custom architects in search of its own version of Shangri-La? A decade ago, when Cincinnati architect John Senhauser, FAIA, dabbled in the stock-plans market, he encountered a professional’s worst fear—the do-it-yourselfer. “I would get calls from people saying, ‘Well, I finished the foundation and was thinking of making this breakfast room smaller. What could I do?’ They thought they could just buy the plans and build it themselves.”

DIYers may still represent a portion of consumers who purchase plans. But Dorothy Jordan of Home-Styles.com, a large stock-plan broker in St. Paul, Minn., says her company also serves the in-between market—people who can’t afford to hire an architect at 12 percent of the construction cost, but still want a custom home.

“I think the home-plans market is expanding because consumers in general are becoming more savvy and bolder about asking for what they want,” she says. “Rather than going to an established development and choosing an existing home, they want to participate in the design development and construction of their home.”

Robert Knight, AIA, of Blue Hill, Maine, has come to the same conclusion. Four years ago, a house he designed was published in a national magazine. As continued on page 36
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requests for the plans poured in, he told people the blueprints weren’t for sale, that they should hire a local architect to design a house that’s right for them. “After 200 calls, I finally realized people who buy plans are a subset of the population of people who hire architects,” Knight says. “A lot of people want a better house, but think you have to be wealthy to hire an architect.”

self-publishing

With some hesitancy, Susanka has stepped into that great, untapped gap. “There’s something terribly amiss in the suburbs,” she says. “And we’re the people who can come up with better solutions. But we have to make sure the quality of the information we include with the plans is very high. I’m convinced that if we offer a refined product, it will absolutely increase the amount of people who realize they want a custom design.”

That belief is what prompted her to make available plans for the houses featured in her newest book, Creating the Not So Big House. They include more information than what the supermarket plan-books offer, she says, such as photos or 3-D images that show what the interiors look and feel like. And just as all good design tells a story, each package conveys the house’s ideas—say, a passive-solar house designed to face south on a sloping lot. The literature also stresses the importance of hiring a local architect to make the necessary modifications for regional codes, the site, and the clients’ needs.

As an outgrowth of Creating the Not So Big House, Susanka is also developing a Web site (www.notsobighouse.com) with links to others who want to get their plans into the marketplace. “I’m trying to develop a market for plans such as the Life magazine Dream Houses,” Susanka says, “in which each design is highly detailed.” She views herself as a middleman of sorts, able to deliver inquiring consumers to the appropriate architects.

After Knight’s epiphany, he put together a book of 13 houses he’d built for clients. The architect, who specializes in small homes for rural New England, chose designs that could work on a variety of sites. By advertising the $15 book in Fine Homebuilding, in Down East magazine, and on his Web site, each year he sells about 1,200 copies of the book, and 30 sets of drawings at $400 apiece. And, as a goodwill gesture, 10 percent of the sale price goes back the original client.

Getting the clients’ blessing, of course, is both a legal and ethical obligation. Before pursuing the book venture, Knight called his former clients to see how they felt about offering the plans to the public. “Most were quite enthusiastic,” he says, “a surprise to me.” Susanka also stresses that even though most architects retain the rights to their work, the clients’ wishes must be honored. “I talk about the issue fairly early on in the design process,” she says. “It’s amazing to me how many people are just fine with it.”

Knight discourages the kind of calls Senhauser encountered by charging $125 an hour to give design advice over the phone—with a two-hour minimum. “We encourage people to hire a local architect who knows codes,” he says. “Their money is better spent locally.” And, like other architects, at first Knight wrestled with the issue of selling a product rather than a service. “My initial concern continued on page 38
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was that I was shooting myself in the foot by offering something somebody else might make $30,000 on,” he says. “But it’s led to a lot of custom design work. People read the book and like my philosophy. Then they come back and say, ‘I really like the book but I want my own house.’”

dream teams
When New York architect Dennis Wedlick, AIA, designed the 1995 Life magazine Dream House, he, too, saw it as a chance to broaden his name recognition and introduce innovative design ideas to the marketplace. Nevertheless, parting with the blueprints made him nervous. “Selling plans confuses what we deliver and reduces architecture to a few good ideas about how to arrange rooms,” Wedlick says. “But plans can be good for a reference tool. Many great designs can be presented to the public, like the historic houses of Frank Lloyd Wright.”

Two years later, in fact, Life asked Taliesin Architects, Scottsdale, Ariz., to design a house that followed Wright’s principles of organic architecture. For a firm focusing solely on custom design, “this was an opportunity to stretch out beyond that,” says Taliesin architect John Rattenbury. Like Wedlick, Rattenbury accepted the project not for the royalties but as a way to stimulate the public’s thinking about architecture.

Yet he worked hard to adapt the plans to a range of real-life clients and sites. Establishing a minimum lot size of 65 by 120 feet, Rattenbury designed for privacy from the street and from neighbors on both sides, opening the house to a rear yard. Creating plans for both a side- and front-opening garage ensured the house could be turned sideways on the lot. It could also be cut apart in the middle and 5 to 15 feet added without having to be redesigned. The architect went so far as to design five roof systems appropriate to different climates. Thanks to the rigorous planning, “well over 600 sets of plans sold,” Rattenbury says. “People have built it all over the country.”

From a cost/profit perspective, it’s hard to track how designing and selling plans for an idea house pays off, notes David Giulietti, AIA, Portland, Ore., whose “21st-century lodge” was published by Sunset last fall. “We look at it as a marketing tool,” he says. “But so many house plans are not designed by architects, and so many builders are using plans that are years...
“so many house plans are not designed by architects, and so many builders are using plans that are years old. I don’t mind getting something fresh into the marketplace.”

—david giulietti, aia

The idea houses commissioned by consumer magazines, which pay architects’ design fees up front, result in more or less instant gratification. Conversely, playing the stock market takes working capital and a long-term commitment. “It looks so easy, and yet it’s not,” says Mark Englund, who heads up designer relations for HomeStyles.com. He notes that architects are fronting real dollars for design, renderings, and working drawings that may not be recouped for a year or more—if at all. “It can take three to 12 months for the plan to appear to the public, and sometimes another year before it has sold enough times to pay back the expense, let alone start a profit,” Englund says. Most stock houses like to see a portfolio of 50 plans at the outset, and look for at least 10 new plans a year. Of HomeStyles.com’s 125 contributing designers and architects, its top 10 firms deal exclusively in plan sales.

Donald A. Gardner Architects, Greenville, S.C., comes close to being a dedicated plan-book company. Eighty-five percent of its annual revenues come from the sale of house plans, marketed to consumers, builders, and developers through all the major fulfillment houses (see sidebar, page 42) and its own publishing arm. Don Gardner, AIA, says the company’s custom architecture cross-pollinates the stock-plans side. The firm also keeps an eye on market trends around the country by regularly calling both consumers and builders who’ve ordered plans to find out what changes they’ve made.

continued next page

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In some cases, with the client’s permission, Gardner Architects will modify a custom plan for the stock market. “We adjust the plan so it will sell better—such as changing the walk-out basement to a bonus room,” Gardner says. “We also scale it back in detail but try to stay true to the original program of the plan. The masses would be consumed with that level of detail and probably would not be able to build it.”

Site-specific structural information must also be removed—for example, substituting a stick-framed roof with a truss system “engineered to local conditions.” “We try to design for middle America in terms of live and dead loads,” Englund says. “A house built to California’s seismic codes would be overdesigned for the rest of the country.”

According to John Shaheen, AIA, director of the architecture department at Home Planners in Tucson, Ariz., (owned by residential architect’s publisher, Hanley-Wood) a house’s square footage determines the cost of the blueprints. Packages start at $400 for a 1,500-square-foot home and peak at around $1,000 for a house over 9,000 square feet. The architects’ cut varies from 20 to 40 percent. “We look for a variety of architects to fill certain niches, such as vacation or seaside homes,” Shaheen says. “The drawings have to include a foundation plan, floor plans, four elevations—one fully detailed—two or three cross sections through the house, connection details, and a nicely rendered elevation or perspective for publishing.”

Like Home Planners, HomeStyles.com looks for design diversity and high-quality drawings. Although there is money to be made on all kinds of houses, “there’s a definite normal curve to the sales success of plans,” Englund says. “The mean size is a 2,400-square-foot home—too much bigger or smaller goes away from the bulk of the plan marketplace.” And a traditionally styled house would be “dead center” among the bestsellers.

Within traditional design, Looney Ricks Kiss Architects, Memphis, Tenn., zeroes in on a market segment not widely served by the stock industry—single-family homes with alley access in high-density neighborhoods. “We have a little over 100 plans in the market, and less than a dozen are designed specifically for home-plan sales,” says LRK’s Dawn Henley. Most of the plans come from the firm’s work with production builders and developers of TND communities such as Celebration. “The niche for plans in traditional neighborhood design prompted us to get into it more than anything else,” she says.

Although the greatest portion of its sales and fulfillment are handled through stock houses, the continued on page 42
firms does offer a small selection of house plans on its Web site. “We’re developing a database to put all our plans on the Web and will do our own fulfillment, unless the volume gets out of hand,” Henley says.

Most firms, including Danze and Davis Architects, Austin, Tex., use their own Web sites to supplement the stock houses. “The Web is a fairly small segment of our market now, but it’s expanding rapidly,” says partner Gary Wagner, AIA. HomeStyles.com’s Kirk Bruce notes that whereas more than 10,000 plans are available on its Web site, paper still does a better job. “Even though consumers can narrow their choices with a site search, people still seem to prefer paging through theme books,” he says.

Good architecture may be not only about designing a perfect house, but about helping a lot of different people to have great houses. “Plan sales is just an additional service we can offer to introduce a better house into the market,” Henley says. “Good design shouldn’t be unaffordable.”

Cheryl Weber is a freelance writer in Severna Park, Md.

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Architect Sarah Susanka’s Web site—a companion to her second book—includes links to architects who offer detailed blueprints for modest-size houses.
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Circle no. 320
The beach boys. See page 58 for the complete cast of characters.

Photo by Mark Robert Hapner
of the suburbs

A group of pioneering architects transformed Orange County, Calif., into a laboratory for the American house.

by S. Claire Conroy
research contributed by Nigel F. Maynard
let’s face it:

Despite all the buzz about New Urbanism and back-to-the-city movements, most Americans still prefer to live in a clean, safe suburb. What’s more, they’re even happier if their house is located inside a guarded gate and on the biggest wedge of a cul-de-sac. With clear, defensible boundaries, limited access, and a good view of approaching enemies, these gated ‘communities’ are not unlike our ancestors’ favorite real estate—the cave.

That doesn’t sound very progressive, does it? Perhaps that’s why architects, trained to think visionary thoughts and to design on the cutting edge, have largely ignored merchant housing. Sprinkled across the country are a few courageous souls who’ve dared the disdain of their peers by designing houses for the masses. But most production builders churn and recycle their plans in-house, without benefit of the talent and expertise of licensed architects. One place is different: Orange County, California.

Hugging the Pacific Ocean between Los Angeles and San Diego counties, California’s third largest county is predominantly wealthy, white, and Republican. Before 1950, it consisted primarily of agricultural land, remnants of huge Spanish land-grant ranches. After the widening and building of several major highways between Los Angeles and San Diego and the founding of the University of California, Irvine, Orange County’s building boom began. However, unlike building booms elsewhere in the country, this one was conceived and implemented by architects. Think Reston, Va.; Columbia, Md.; or Greenbelt, Md., but on a much larger scale.

The convergence of greenfields and greenbacks drew newly minted architects from San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, eager to put their pencils to this vast sheet of blank paper. Many of those original pioneering architects, like Walt Richardson, Art Danielian, and Aram Bassenian, and members of the latest generation, like Mark Scheurer, Bob Hidey, and Bill Hezmalhalch, still live and work in Orange County, while also practicing their trade beyond county lines. They and their peers give the area the single highest concentration of expert production architects in the country and make it ground zero for innovations in merchant housing. Orange County architects are the masters of the suburbs, constantly honing and improving what Americans call home. And, with the current economic boom, they’re having the time of their lives.

simply irvine

So why didn’t Orange County end up paved in Levittowns like other post-War boom regions? The most important reason is the county’s largest landholder, The Irvine Company. A family-held company until the late ’70s, its principals decided to develop their land themselves, instead of selling it off piecemeal to builders. And even more crucial, they did so according to an architect-designed master plan.

Acquired during the last half of the 19th century by San Francisco merchant James Irvine, the Irvine Ranch topped out at around 120,000 acres and stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Santa Ana river. Today, the company controls about a fifth of Orange County, including nine miles of oceanfront and 22 miles of inland property.

During the post-War expansion years, this land was like gold. But its canny owners understood the far greater value of keeping control and making that gold work for them. In a bold strategic move, they lured the University of California, which was shopping for a new location in the late ’50s, with the offer of 1,000 acres for $1 and a new, master-planned city. In 1960, they hired architect William Pereira (who went on to design the Transamerica Pyramid in San Francisco) to plan the build-out of the entire ranch, including the university campus, the city of Irvine, several business centers, and more than 25,000 acres of residential property.

village people

Pereira’s plan called for a series of 16 residential villages, each with its own clear boundaries and entrance, a school, a park, a church or synagogue, and a shopping center. To implement this vision, the company brought in a 34-year-old architect named Ray Watson.

The University of California, Berkeley-trained architect, steeped in Eichler houses and Case Study innovations, was excited at the prospect of building communities—of making places. “This family-owned company was the best-known agricultural company in the state and they owned land three times the size of San Francisco,” Watson recalls. “I saw that, with all the development from L.A., things were going to change.”

With open land and no architectural heritage to consider, the Irvine Ranch was the kind of blank slate every architect dreams of. “In L.A., we had fabric to deal with,” says Barry Berkus, AIA, who designed houses at Turtle Rock, one of the earliest Irvine villages. “But Orange County was not inhibited by tradition. It was a new place. We invented...
there's no question that housing here leads the world. we are the detroit of the housing industry.”

—aram bassenian, aia

From the outset, Orange County's housing offset high density with artful landscaping. In 1970, Walt Richardson teamed with landscape architect Don Brinkerhoff to design The Arbor Apartments in Fullerton, Calif. (left and above). Even at 25 d.u. an acre, there were no stacked flats and each apartment had its own garage or carport.

Windward, Aram Bassenian's high-end project with builder Richmond American, recently opened in Orange County's most sought-after development, Crystal Cove (below left). Bassenian's firm also does high-density work like 1993's Cantada, with builder California Pacific Homes (below).
MVEP has carved out a niche in high-density work. An early example is 1978's Mountain Gate, an 8- to 9-d.u. townhouse complex designed for builder Barclay Hollander. But the firm's wildly popular small-lot, detached houses, Balboa at One Ford Road, broadened their portfolio (below right). Don Jacobs' firm, JBZ, has diversified into assisted-living facilities, with Crown Cove on a beautiful site overlooking the Pacific Ocean (above). But its bread and butter is still small-lot, single-family detached projects like Cricket Club at Oak Creek, which it designed in Irvine for John Laing Homes (right).

"suburbia is not all bad. in the past, it's just compounded its shortcomings through numbers."

—Will Haynes
things there that became common across the country: volume houses, zero-lot line, kitchen/family rooms at the back of the house. Orange County was an incubator for those ideas.”

law of the land
Were it not for Ray Watson, The Irvine Company might have simply developed its “villages” with the usual builder boxes. But as the company’s manager of planning and later its president, he laid down the law: “Since we owned prime land wanted by the builder, the first thing I said was, nothing can be built on our land without a design by a licensed architect.”

Of course, he encountered resistance. With so much buyer demand, builders knew they could sell their houses without expensive design services eating into their profits. And they also worried that architects, untrained in penny-wise “value engineering,” would design houses too costly for them to build.

Watson was sensitive to their concerns. “I don’t want to be remembered for the beautiful development that went bankrupt,” he says, “or the ugly successful community.” So he recruited architects he thought would understand the exigencies of merchant housing: commercial architects. “I wanted to bring in architects who were concerned with a house costing 10 cents more to build.

“I founded this company with some young Turks, among them Walt Richardson—I went to school with Walt—and Kermit Dorius,” he says. “Walt helped design our first village, East Bluff.”

Dorius sold his firm, now called JBZ Architecture + Planning, to the next generation, but Richardson is still active with his 30-person, Newport Beach-based firm, RNM Architects/Planners. Known as the “dean of Orange County architects,” Richardson, FAIA, refined his community planning skills by designing military housing after graduating from Berkeley in 1950. “I was in Long Beach working for Hugh Gibbs, whose firm was one of the first to really integrate design and land planning,” he says. “But builders and architects started making pilgrimages to Orange County. We were in orange groves, but it all began to develop.”

Many successful Orange County architects claim to have attended “grad school at RNM,” where the special strength was and is in land planning. “We invented Z-lots in this country,” says Richardson. “It was something I picked up in France 25 years ago.” And his firm mastered high-density cluster housing, which it used to great success on many Irvine projects, including Pelican Point.

tyranny of the middle
Watson recruited architects from Northern California and elsewhere to design both housing and commercial buildings on The Irvine Company’s holdings. Some came for just a project or two, others came for a lifetime. The bountiful work triggered a gold rush of would-be housing architects, who were thrilled to set up shop in an area with beautiful geography and perfect weather.

Art Danielian, FAIA, arrived in the mid-60s. “This is a place where everyone would like to live,” he says. “Walt Richardson, Kermit Dorius, and I had the first three major offices. We were on the ground floor, looking at the vast property of an owner who really cared. They set a high tone for quality of life. And project by project, the villages got better.”

Danielian’s 45-person firm, Danielian Associates, based in Irvine, concentrates on the tricky middle range of production housing, much of it high density. “The least expensive house is a no-brainer,” he explains, “and the most expensive house is easier, too, because there are no rules. But the middle range puts the greatest pressure on architects, because you have to engineer every dollar to make sure the builder can make money.”

The middle range was Orange County’s bread and butter in the first decades of its development. The aerospace industry and the university brought in predominantly white-collar, move-up buyers. “Builders in the ‘60s were not just building first-time houses,” Watson explains. “People were upgrading and design became more important. As our work became more successful—meaning builders began to make a profit—merchant-built housing became better here than in other places. The success of it here became the role model to follow.”

High-density land planning was key to making those middle-range houses affordable to the home buyer and profitable for the builder. Solving

“[in orange county] you have problems of land costs and a need for higher densities causing opportunity for great solutions.”—don jacobs, aia
the density issue led to many innovative lot configurations and, consequently, fresh ideas about floor planning. Don Jacobs, AIA, who bought out Dorius’ firm, thinks these are among Orange County’s most important contributions to production design. “In other areas of the country, land planning and architecture are separate,” he says. “But here, you have problems of land costs and a need for higher densities causing opportunity for great solutions.

Architects are stepping in with some pretty creative land-planning concepts and floor plans.”

In addition to zero-lot line and Z-lot houses, Orange County architects were among the first to pack houses in clusters. Mitigating the smaller lots were borrowed views from landscaped parks, man-made lakes, golf courses, and the Pacific Ocean. With all the architecture firms focusing on the equation, densities of single-family-detached dwelling units climbed higher and higher. Like the 4-minute mile, everyone raced to break the record: 4 to 5 d.u. an acre, 8 to 9, 14 to 16, and, yes, even 18.

“Some of the too-dense projects are depressing. They’re a sea of concrete. They’re no more dense than where I live on Balboa Island, but there we have the amenity of the ocean as our yard,” says Richardson. “You can do nice things up to 9 or 10 units an acre. The trick is privacy.”

“We’ve done 18, but we don’t like the way they live,” says Danielian. “I think we’re making a mistake by pushing the single-family detached limit. But with land costs so high now, even those densities don’t work for affordable housing.”

**condo attitudes**

For-sale multifamily and single-family-attached projects are often a better way to do high density and they were a staple of The Irvine Company’s early attempts at market segmentation. But lawsuits for faulty construction brought by homeowners’ associations in the ’80s scared nearly every housing professional out of this specialty and into super-density detached. The financial picture finally looks attractive enough to encourage builders and architects to try these projects again. But, aimed at the high-end-single or childless-couple market, these pricey units could hardly be called affordable housing.

Older and wiser, architects taking on this work have been doing so with great caution. Aram Bassenian, AIA, who started his firm, now Bassenian Lagoni Architects, Newport Beach, in the early ’70s, established a separate business division to handle multifamily. Like several other architects with larger firms, he has an MBA on his 90-person staff to vet contracts.

One firm that’s specialized in high-density attached and detached work since its start in the early ’70s is McLarand Vasquez Emsiek & Partners, Irvine. The 104-person firm balances its portfolio with 40 percent commercial work—everything but “penitentiaries and hospitals,” says Rick Emsiek, AIA. The commercial projects and multifamily-rental work kept the firm going during the litigation years.

**diversify, diversify**

Although many firms have specialties, there’s so much design work in California right now that everyone is doing a bit of everything. For instance, MVEP broke free of their multifamily typecasting with the much-lauded project One Ford Road.

The 110-acre community (“subdivision” is a dirty word in Orange County) in Newport Beach has a wide variety of “product type,” says Emsiek. But what got people’s attention when it opened in 1994 was a series of smallish alley-loaded houses, wrapped in recognizable, mostly New England architectural styles.

With no attached garage and starter-home square footages of 2,500 to 3,000, the houses still managed to sell like hotcakes for close to $1 million apiece. “In retrospect, we wished we had done more alley-loaded product at One Ford Road,” says Emsiek. “All the stars were aligned for this project: the opportunity, the vision of the client, the land. It was a think tank for us.”

Those stars are aligning more often these days, and Orange County architects keep pinching themselves, hoping the real estate boom isn’t merely a short-lived burst. Some have just staffed up after the recession caused cutbacks in the early ’90s; some vow never to get as big as they were in the ’80s again. After all, the county declared bankruptcy only six years ago.

“I keep looking over my shoulder, but I don’t see an end in sight,” says Bill Hezmalhalch, AIA, of Irvine-based William Hezmalhalch Archi-
"when i started, i never thought we'd see $1 million. now it's $3 to $4 million. it's just staggering."
—robert hidey

Bidding wars for Robert Hidey's latest project, Watermark at Crystal Cove, have topped $4 million (top). Hidey's breakthrough plans for Mahogany established his reputation as the premier architect of high-end production homes (above).

"i give bob hidey a lot of credit. he broke the mold. there was a ready market for a different kind of house."—walt richardson, faia
Courtyards are back in a big way, especially in small-lot, high-end production projects, where they provide private outdoor space. Mark Scheurer's design for Strada tops a courtyard wall with an extra room (above). Scheurer's Trovare set new standards for builder profits in Orange County's multifamily market (far right). Castaways' popularity among wealthy buyers launched Scheurer's career in luxury production design (right).

“if architects only put on the wall what they think the builder wants to see, they haven’t done their job.”
—Mark Scheurer, AIA
masters of the suburbs

tects. After working for Art Danielian, Hezmalhalch started his own firm with a couple of partners in 1980. Now busting out of his current office space with a staff of 90, he’s got more on the boards than he can handle. Like Danielian, his niche is high-density move-up housing and lower-end econo-box work. But the high times have brought in more land-planning jobs, an opportunity he’s very excited about.

“We’re going back and looking at neighborhoods from the ’20s, ’30s, ’40s—even ’50s—to see what made them work. They had a variety of housing styles; they were pedestrian friendly,” he explains. “We’ve been hired to do projects in South Korea, the Philippines, and now Turkey,” he says. “It’s much more difficult to deal internationally with housing than it is to deal locally. But they come over here and they see what we’ve done; they recognize its quality and they want it.”

Difficulty notwithstanding, overseas jobs helped keep many Orange County firms afloat during the recession. They prevented Aram Bassenian from having to lay off much staff, and he still finds the work gratifying. “There’s no question that housing here leads the world. We are the Detroit of the housing industry,” he says. “Our plans are better, space relates to furniture better, function is better, and the introduction of light is more sophisticated.”

out of the box
Orange County architects are certainly masters of the move-up house—or, to continue the automobile metaphor, they make a great Ford Taurus. They’d proven themselves indispensable to builders in land and floor planning, but until recently they had yet to demonstrate their designs could “add value” to a project.

Of course, curb appeal has always been important, but the conventional wisdom was that design came along for the ride while square footage really sold the house. Hence, the proliferation in the ’80s of big, boxy houses atop three-car garages. “In the big box, space is the amenity,” says Hezmalhalch. “We designed them at $29 a foot.” But the price everyone paid was monotony.

“As a design industry, we were in a trap,” Bassenian explains. “We had cracked the plan: a two-story house, three-car garage in front, living room in front, family room in back, downstairs bedroom, upstairs master with secondaries. Without realizing it, we were all doing alternatives to that plan. There was nothing wrong with that plan—it worked. But then the massing on the outside became the same as well and the three-car garage became the dominant element. Every community suffered from sameness. And you really can’t expect the buyer to move up to the same house.”

Nearly everyone agrees it was Bob Hidey and his 38-person firm, Robert Hidey Architects, Newport Beach, who busted the box. With a project called Mahogany, he shifted the paradigm. Backed by entrepreneurial builder Taylor Woodrow, he spent a little extra money to move the garage off the front elevation and behind a motor court. He also bucked the prevailing “big bang theory” by de-emphasizing the front stair and entry hall, and tinkering with sight lines to build drama and interest. Those

“there are architects who think every day about how to save a dollar. our firm thinks about how to spend a dollar to make two dollars.” —mark scheurer, aia
moves, combined with an extensive list of high-end options and flexible floor plans, caught everyone’s attention—especially the buyers’. The houses, which opened in 1995 at $450,000, sold out at $1 million.

“Mahogany got a lot of attention from builders, because it was done very well and sold very well,” says Eric Zuziak, AIA, of JBZ. “Flipping the garage around was something a lot of architects were trying to get builders to do. We were all drawing houses like that.”

Perhaps, but Hidey got it done. His diverse professional background, which included both the practicalities of commercial work and the indulgences of high-end custom, seems to have prepared him perfectly for the niche he helped create: the high-end production house. Admittedly, it’s a boutique niche, but one that’s thriving in Orange County right now. His latest project, Watermark, in Crystal Cove, The Irvine Company’s stunning hillside site overlooking the Pacific Ocean, has prompted bidding wars among buyers. Prices are at $3.5 million and still climbing. “When I started, I never thought we’d see $1 million. Now, it’s $3 to $4 million,” he says. “It’s just staggering.”

“I give Bob Hidey a lot of credit,” says Richardson. “He broke the mold. There was a ready market for a different kind of house.”

**higher and higher**

Yes, California’s economy is booming and home buyers with real estate equity and stock market liquidity are moving up and into the stratosphere. And they don’t seem to have the patience to build a custom home. They want to see and touch before they buy. They prefer to write a check and turn the key.

“California is white-hot. The market has returned in a big way,” says Bassenian. “We’re at a unique position historically: We’re at ground zero of the high-tech economy; add to that the connection with the Pacific Rim, the entertainment industry based here, and the general stability of the American political system. It’s fueling a demand for unique, expensive homes.”

Another emerging star of the high-end niche is Mark Scheurer, AIA, of Newport Beach-based Scheurer Architects. Like Hidey, his projects are also skyrocketing in price between opening and build-out. A veteran of Dorius’ firm, he’s run his own shop since 1991. His fame came quickly with two multifamily developments, Trovare and Altezza, and the high-end single-family projects Castaways and, most recently, Strada. Patterned after Italian hill towns, sister projects Trovare and Altezza in Newport Beach sold out at close to three times their starting price. “My client, Taylor Woodrow, told me Trovare was the most profitable project they’d ever done,” says Scheurer. “Then Altezza was even more profitable.”

Rob Elliott, head of The Irvine Company’s urban planning and design department, cites Mahogany, Altezza, and Trovare as among the best of what Orange County has to offer these days. “Scheurer and Hidey are really great designers,” he says. “They’ve raised the bar for everyone.”

Most important, they proved to builders that good design can make money. Encouraging builders to take creative risks is tough, Scheurer says, but it’s incumbent upon architects to do so. “I have no sympathy for architects who say bad work is not their fault,” he says. “Every project begins with a builder deciding how far he wants to go. If architects only put on the wall what they think the builder wants to see, they haven’t done their job.”

Maybe it’s just the difference between old math and new math. “There are architects who think every day about how to save a dollar,” Scheurer explains. “Our firm thinks about how to spend a dollar to make two dollars.”

**art and science**

Fortunately, there are buyers right now willing to spend those two dollars. For architects interested in exploring new territory in production design, these are exciting and challenging times. Indeed, there’s increasing pressure to do better and more creative work. And everyone’s approaching the challenge a little differently.

Hidey, for instance, is looking to older California towns, like Santa Barbara and Capistrano, for design inspiration. Another firm, Irvine-based KTGY Group, which does a variety of multifamily and single-family work in Orange County and the Sunbelt states, prefers a more systematic methodology. Says partner John Tully, “When we design a project, we think about marketing that house to a particular buyer. We put you in one of 26 categories. If we know where you are in your life cycle—whether you’re married or not, how old your kids are—we can tell what kind of car you drive, where you shop, and what kind of floor plan you like. Designing housing is not different from what retailing is doing or automobile manufacturers are doing. In Southern California, people move three to five years. It’s fashion driven. You move every time your life cycle changes.”

Hezmalhalch disagrees: “We’re
“we’d like to do modern. but people don’t understand modern.”
—theron pate, aia

Production housing has come a long way in its use of natural light and, on higher-end projects, in detailing with natural materials, like the iron accents in DHP’s Emerson—The Promise (above and left).

For its award-winning Newport Bluffs Apartments at Bonita Village, KTGY placed tower elements throughout to break up building massing and chose economical C-shaped buildings best suited to mid-density projects.

“designing housing is not different from what retailing is doing or automobile manufacturers are doing ... it’s fashion driven.”—john tully
shifting from a market-driven to an architecture-driven business.” And Scheurer claims he “throws all the marketing research in the trash.”

Whatever the approach, it’s relatively easy to do good work now. The real test, says Zuziak, is to keep the standards high when the economy starts to sink. “Right now it’s very competitive in terms of creative design, which is great for buyers. And builders are much more apt to embrace creativity. In periods of contraction and recession, though, it’s the opposite. Builders back down and build the typical box so they can get the price way back down,” he says. “If you took those award-winning projects and laid them over a time line, you’d see that they happened during times of economic expansion.”

the spanish inhibition

Much credit for Orange County’s achievements goes to The Irvine Company. Guided by its master plan and continuing stewardship, Orange County architects have done a great deal to improve the suburbs. With innovative floor plans, their houses “live” better than ever, and extensive options bring buyers even closer to a custom-designed home.

For all that progress, though, there remains a pervasive monotony in the architecture of Orange County. And the credit for that may also belong to The Irvine Company.

Don Bren, who bought the company from the Irvine family in 1977, loves Spanish architecture. And every house built on Irvine’s extensive holdings must pass through his planning and design department. Hence, most of what’s filled the villages since Bren came to town is a variation on Spanish, Italian, Mediterranean. The same-ness makes even the much-dated architecture from the late ’60s and early ’70s in Orange County feel like a relief. At least architects were freer to experiment a little back then.

Most architects still working and looking for work in Orange County insist there’s plenty of variety in Mediterranean. And Bren is lighten-

ing up a little on some restrictions, allowing some forays into other architectural styles. But, says Elliott, “Bren won’t let us do a design unless it has a precedent.”

So, while you may see cutting-edge design inside Orange County houses, you won’t see it on the elevations anytime soon. The inhibition is daunting, especially to the newer firms eager to make their mark, like Dawson Hannouche Pate of Newport Beach. Says Theron Pate, AIA, “We’re still waiting for the opportunity to do a contemporary subdivision. We’d like to do Modern, but people don’t understand Modern.”

Sad, but largely true. Bren, who’s inhabited Forbes magazine’s list of the 400 richest people in America since 1982, obviously hasn’t gone broke underestimating the public’s capacity to embrace new architectural styles.

But thanks to some masterful Orange County architects, traditional architectural styles have never looked better. In their hands, the suburbs are alive and thriving.
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twenty years later, the battle rages on between allies and enemies of new urbanism.

by meghan drueding

Illustration: Douglas B. Jones
The great divide

Everyone seems to have an opinion about New Urbanism, the town planning movement that got its start in the early 1980s. Jane Jacobs, author of the 1961 urban planning classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, dubs it “a very positive thing.” *Metropolis* magazine columnist Michael Sorkin has called it “disquieting” and “scary.” *New York Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp identified it in 1996 as “the most important phenomenon to emerge in American architecture in the post-Cold War era.”

Love it or hate it, no one can deny that New Urbanism has gotten a dialogue going more effectively than any architecture or planning movement since 1930s Modernism. And since it’s still a relatively new practice with few built projects, that dialogue has been its biggest contribution to date.

In a nutshell

New Urbanism evolved from several architects’ simultaneous explorations into long-abandoned patterns of residential development in urban, suburban, and rural areas. The best known of this group, Miami-based Andres Duany, FAIA, and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, FAIA, began developing their ideas during the planning phase of Seaside, the now-famous town on the Florida panhandle that just celebrated its 20th anniversary. Also during the 1980s and early ’90s, their Berkeley, Calif., counterpart Peter Calthorpe was busy investigating the idea of transit-oriented development as a way of reducing traffic congestion and pollution problems. San Francisco’s Daniel Solomon, FAIA, as well as Elizabeth Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides of Pasadena, Calif., occupied themselves with infill and downtown revitalization projects, emphasizing the integration of regional character into new communities. For inspiration, all six of these designers looked to historic models, from great cities like New York and San Francisco to 1920s commuter towns to traditional New England villages.

Together they decided that the best way to design or redesign any community—a new town or an infill project—was to make it less auto-dependent. Hence, they promoted walkable access from residential areas to retail, office, and civic buildings. They also agreed on the importance of having a mix of housing types in a community and access to public transportation when possible. A respect for local building traditions, climate, and topography only made sense, they reasoned, and by building housing units at a higher density than was the custom in post-World War II subdivisions they could both conserve land and create an interesting streetscape. They thought housing should reflect a respect for vernacular styles, with more experimental architecture saved for civic buildings and public gathering spaces. Small parks within neighborhoods, the preservation of historic buildings, and environmentally friendly heating and cooling methods were also part of their vision. After much deliberation, the six architects collectively settled on the name “New Urbanism” to describe the use of these principles in town, city, and regional planning.

In 1993 Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Calthorpe, Solomon, Moule, and Polyzoides invited nearly 200 like-minded designers, community activists, and political leaders to a meeting of the minds they called the Con-
Urban Design Associates of Pittsburgh worked with HUD's HOPE VI program to turn Louisville, Ky.'s low-income Park DuValle area (left) into a mixed-use, mixed-income New Urbanist neighborhood (above).
“I’m afraid that a new, unholy alliance between new urbanists and developers might be forming.”

“i find most of the criticisms to be pretty shallow.”

William Rees Morrish, AIA

The great divide

gress for the New Urbanism (CNU). They established a nonprofit organization of the same name to handle the growing number of inquiries about New Urbanism. Three years later, they wrote down their ideas in a document signed by 266 architects, planners, developers, academics, and government officials. They called it the “Charter of the New Urbanism.”

While the CNU’s founders and their followers continued designing and planning New Urbanist communities (among them Seaside; Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Md.; Disney’s Celebration near Orlando, Fla.; and Laguna West in Sacramento, Calif.), other design professionals and critics were formulating arguments against them. The two most commonly voiced of these criticisms were a rejection of the nostalgia that many identified with New Urbanism, and a skepticism about its purported environmental benefits. And so the situation we have today—passionate New Urbanists vs. equally gung-ho opponents, with interested observers falling somewhere in between—was born.

Out with the old?
The anti-nostalgia argument is perhaps the oldest and most obvious criticism of New Urbanism. It stems partially from the fact that New Urbanist communities usually have pattern books or guidelines that dictate design elements like setbacks, building materials, and window heights. Though many conventional developments also have design regulations, those in Neo-Traditional communities—as New Urbanist projects are often called—tend to be more stringent.

Due to New Urbanists’ belief in incorporating vernacular styles, the guidelines in most of the Neo-Traditional developments built so far have required items that are regionally popular, such as front porches in the Southeastern part of the country. Because these elements often echo the characteristics of older houses in the area, they can make New Urbanist communities look old-fashioned. So New Urbanism has gained a reputation for being an anti-Modern movement, though its charter says nothing about excluding Modernism.

“I find the New Urbanists’ emphasis on nostalgia to be disturbing,” says David Baker, FAIA, a San Francisco architect known for his Modernist-influenced multi-family work. Although some of his projects contain such New Urbanist-like elements as a pedestrian-oriented site plan and a mix of unit types, he resists the New Urbanist label because he associates it with a certain retro style. “Traditional style isn’t necessary for the things that make New Urbanism work,” he says. “You don’t have to have a cutesy building to have a five-minute walk.”

Others in the anti-nostalgia camp suggest that New Urbanists simply aren’t thinking about the way people live today. Take rear alleys, a major design element in many TNDs (traditional neighborhood developments, another name for greenfield and suburban New Urbanist projects). “In olden times, rear alleys were used as service areas—you’d have your coal delivered to the back of your house, for example,” says production-housing guru Barry Berkus, AIA. “There’s no need for them now.”

Peter Kavaluzzi, AIA, of Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects, a New York City firm known for its successful mixed-use and historic preservation work, concurs. “New Urbanists tend to try and re-create a moment in time,” he says. “It’s not a bad thing, and a lot of people like it. But it’s not really moving forward.”

Then there are those who aren’t necessarily opposed to using pre-World War II towns and vibrant city neighborhoods as reference points, but find the hyperbole surrounding New Urbanism’s “rediscovery” of them to be misleading. “It’s important to remember that the New Urbanists didn’t invent walkable, mixed-use downtowns,” says New York City architect Deborah Berke, AIA, who spent two years designing houses at Seaside and has since distanced herself from New Urbanism.

“I’m an ‘old urbanist,’” says Alexander Garvin, a professor at the Yale School of Architecture and a member of New York
City’s planning commission, who thinks that the movement has been extremely valuable in the suburbs. “I was interested in urbanism before there was a ‘New Urbanism.’”

**Beyond seaside**

The New Urbanists make a multipronged response to these charges. First of all, they point out, people think entirely too much about Seaside and its pastel Victorian cottages when they think about New Urbanism. “I find most of the criticisms to be pretty shallow,” says William Rees Morrisey, AIA, head of the Center for the American Landscape, an urban design research center at the University of Minnesota, and a member of CNU’s board of directors. “People tend to focus too much on Seaside and not enough on the other exciting things New Urbanists are doing.”

Seaside may have been the sinisterly perfect setting for the 1998 movie “The Truman Show,” the New Urbanists argue, but what many viewers failed to realize was that some of the less gingerbread-y houses in the community were given false, more traditional facades for the movie.

Celebration has probably received the most press coverage of any Neo-Traditional community other than Seaside, and it bears partial responsibility for many of the mistaken impressions people have of New Urbanism. It resembles a conventional development in that its guidelines specify house styles like French, Mediterranean, and Classical, rather than leaving it up to architects to reinterpret local characteristics. “When Celebration says, ‘This house has to be Victorian, this one has to be Colonial,’ that’s when people get hung up on the issue of style,” says architect Alexander Gorlin, AIA, of New York City, a CNU member who’s designed both Modern and Traditional town houses in Seaside. “For me, that’s not at all what the New Urbanism is about.”

As a rule, the New Urbanists are exceptionally media-savvy. Recognizing the damage the impression that they’re “against” Modernism might do to their movement, many of them have started to stress the inaccuracy of this notion. Stephanie Bothwell,
Elizabeth Moule, director of the AIA’s Center for Livable Communities, which promotes discussion about smart-growth issues, thinks there’s a place for even the most avant-garde architecture in the New Urbanist fabric. “Of course there’s room for a Frank Gehry building in New Urbanism,” she says. “It’s just backed by an urban fabric that’s not so singular.”

Elizabeth Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides’ firm, Moule & Polyzoides Architects and Urbanists, has designed a master plan and three-quarters of the buildings for Civano, a sustainable community in Tucson, Ariz. “The houses at Civano are spare and elemental,” says Moule of the flat-roofed, adobe-and-straw-bale structures. “And our plan for the Beverly Hills Town Center is very Modern. There’s no reason why Modern buildings can’t be included in New Urbanism.”

Duany, who recently founded a school in Miami to teach Traditional architecture, has been one of the most vehement defenders of a Traditional vocabulary for New Urbanist work. But even he is not an absolutist; his firm, Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., is currently planning Aqua, a Modernist community in Miami. Aqua will feature town houses and mid-rise apartment buildings by contemporary designers like Gorlin, Walter Chatham, FAIA, Alison Spear, AIA, and Hariri & Hariri. Both Civano and Aqua use regional architecture to inform their designs—Civano’s homes borrow from ancient Indian building traditions, and Aqua’s will take their inspiration from Miami’s Art Deco district.

The New Urbanists haven’t been as quick to address the broader accusation that they’re rehashing the past. That’s not for lack of ammunition, though. Calthorpe, DPZ, and others have turned their attention to grayfield redevelopment, most notably in the case of defunct shopping malls. Calthorpe, for one, recently recycled a failing mall in Mountain View, Calif., into a mixed-use, transit-oriented development called The Crossings. And the live/work housing designed by DPZ for BUILDER magazine (see its January issue) responds to one of the biggest lifestyle trends of the new millennium: working at home. The three live/work units feature rooms whose functions and size can change according to the occupants’ needs. Neither adaptive re-use nor live/work are revived traditions of yesteryear; they’re new solutions to present-day situations.

Berke’s and Garvin’s frustration with the term “New Urbanism” is understandable. The name implies that the New Urbanists have come up with a completely original philosophy about design, when really, by their own admission, they’ve taken old ideas and adjusted them to modern lifestyles. The CNU addresses this issue in a recently released collection of essays, The Charter of the New Urbanism, which includes a piece called “What’s New About the New Urbanism?” by Jonathan Barnett, FAIA. Barnett is a CNU board member and professor of city and regional planning at the University of Pennsylvania. He writes that New Urbanists are unique because they’ve articulated holistic solutions to linked problems like urban sprawl, environmental degradation, and the decline of inner cities. Unlike so many organizations that represent one profession and attack single problems, he says, the CNU’s members come from a variety of disciplines and attempt to address issues generally rather than specifically.

green dream
Like the anti-nostalgia critics, those who challenge New Urbanism on environmental grounds present a variety of arguments.

Many, for example, doubt that pedestrian-friendly Neo-Traditional neighborhoods really produce less air pollution than auto-oriented developments. About two-thirds of Neo-Traditional neighborhoods are built in suburban or rural areas, and some of these (again, Celebration and Seaside are two oft-cited examples) are not connected to major public transportation lines. If traveling to and from the community requires an automobile, detractors wonder, how does that contribute to an overall reduction in driving?

Last year, at an AIA Convention panel called “Urban Thinking for the 21st Centu-
Aqua, a town-house and apartment community planned by Duany Plater-Zyberk, occupies the former site of an old hospital on Allison Island, in Miami Beach, Fla. It will contain Modernist architecture laid out along a Traditional grid.

Like many New Urbanist towns, Kentlands has seen a dramatic rise in property values since opening in the early 1990s. Located in Gaithersburg, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C., it was master planned by Duany Plater-Zyberk.
“it’s not as simple as the new urbanists say.

**stop-and-start driving uses more gas than highway driving does.**”

**the benefits of public transportation and mixed-used neighborhoods outweigh any pollution created by short car trips.”**

deron lovaas

“**the argument about stop-and-start driving is like Ronald Reagan’s old argument that trees pollute,”** he says. “**There’s a tiny grain of truth in it, but the fact is that public transportation, pedestrian options, and mixed-use neighborhoods produce environmental benefits that far outweigh any pollution created by short car trips.”**

Rocky Mountain Institute, a nonprofit environmental resource center based in Snowmass, Colo., also has a strong relationship with the CNU. The founder of the Institute’s Green Development Services consulting unit, William Browning, has developed sustainability guidelines for such New Urbanist communities as Civano, Haymount in Caroline County, Va., and Coffee Creek in Chesterton, Ind. Even when these types of guidelines aren’t part of the project, though, he still feels that New Urbanism is inherently “green.” “The ability to mix uses and create a pedestrian environment means fewer cars on the roads,” he says. “Also, in New Urbanism, buildings are set up to evolve over time. They can be adaptively re-used easily, unlike those in a standard subdivision.”

Garreau’s density argument is becoming more and more important as larger builders like Pulte Homes and Centex Homes dip their toes into the waters of New Urbanism. (Both companies are either planning or have already built creditable TNDs.) However, no one is more aware of the perils of confusing just plain high density with New Urbanism than the New Urbanists themselves. It’s true that some developers, encouraged by the rapid sales pace at many New Urbanist communities, have slapped TND labels on projects that contain only a smattering of New Urbanist principles. This problem infiltrates every market. Not every “New York-style” bagel is what it purports to be, but that doesn’t mean the makers of the real thing should stop. The watered-down versions of New Urbanist communities weren’t planned by New Urbanists. Or, if they were, their planners’ visions were compromised in the project’s execution.

“The ones that have been done poorly have been done by inexperienced developers...
and in the wrong locations,” says Joe Duckworth, a partner at Arcadia Land Co., a respected developer that has several New Urbanist projects in the pipeline. “You have to have the right mix of residential and retail—not just another subdivision with a few new ideas.”

As for the charge that TNDs still consume open space, the movement’s proponents take a realistic point of view. “If we could stop all suburban growth tomorrow, we probably would,” Speck says. “But we must acknowledge that it is happening. The people who want it will continue to buy it. Those who don’t want it have no choice but to buy in old neighborhoods, and we’re trying to give them another alternative.”

In addition, at least one-third of the work that New Urbanists are doing takes place in cities, according to the CNU. Whether it’s due to lack of interest in the press or insufficient promotion by architects and developers, these projects receive less media coverage than the New Urbanists’ greenfield projects do. Among the most successful examples of New Urbanism are such city revitalization projects as River­side in Atlanta, Belmont Dairy in Portland, Ore., and Diggs Town Public Housing Transformation in Norfolk, Va. Diggs Town was built in conjunction with the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s HOPE VI program, which applies New Urbanist design principles to failed public housing projects.

**a modest proposal**

The list of criticisms goes on and on. New Urbanists have been accused of naïve idealism, social engineering, gentrifying city neighborhoods to the detriment of poor residents, and unjustly vilifying sprawl.

Yet even their harshest critics will admit that they’ve had an enormous impact on the way people think about development. The challenges for New Urbanists in the years ahead will only multiply as they tackle more ambitious projects, but the hardest task of all may come from within: “We’ve got to keep questioning ourselves,” Bothwell says.

Here’s hoping that these talented designers and thinkers don’t slow down in their quest to find ways to improve the built landscape in America. And here’s hoping their equally capable critics continue to appraise the validity of their ideas. A time for judging whether or not New Urbanism has succeeded will come, years or decades down the road. But now is the time for both backers and doubters to try to shape New Urbanism into as viable a model for development as it can possibly be. Only then will its limits be known. **ra**
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Funky strips of lighting incorporated into the design of the Helix Stair lend the steel spiral unit definition and flair. Three different models offer a variety of lighting effects; the low-voltage lights contained in the center column of the stair shown—Model FL—illuminate tube-shaped lenses beneath the dimpled treads. The units come in diameters from 3 feet 6 inches to 8 feet. Boston Design Corp., 800.225.5584.

open case

The Knock modular open stair offers numerous design possibilities for small and large environments, including straight and U- and L-shaped units. The structures are made of an iron-like metal and feature a telescoping system for rise and adjustment. Available with beech steps, metal balusters, and a wood or polypropylene handrail. Rintal International, 312.409.7432; www.rintal.com.

a good turn

Thanks to a 6-foot 8-inch diameter, this wooden spiral works well in small spaces. The red-oak unit shown includes the company’s standard railing and balusters. Other wood species and railing options are also available. York Spiral Stair, 800.996.5558; www.yorkspiralstair.com.

—katy tomasulo
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by nigel f. maynard

The Egyptians knew the power of decorative molding. So did the Greeks and the Romans. They understood that a deftly placed stucco medallion or an artfully carved cornice could do wonders for a room’s style.

High-end production housing pros also know this. Without calling attention to a room, molding finishes off the space and makes it more appealing. It’s often the reason people say a room feels great but can’t explain why, says architect Mark Jones, senior associate at Memphis, Tenn.–based Looney Ricks Kiss.

Looking for the perfect molding, however, is like looking for a black cat in a dark room. The list is long and varied—from soft and hard woods, composites, metal and metal-clad to marble, vinyl, and engineered wood. All of these materials have benefits, but some may not fit a builder’s budget. It’s up to you to make the right choice.

wood works

Pine and poplar are the old standbys, and the most commonly used materials in production houses, says Thomas French, of Thomas French Architects in McLean, Va. “Even in high-end production houses, the material doesn’t often change.” At a cost of about $2 a linear foot, the woods are ideal for the builder’s bottom line.

Drawbacks? Though wood accepts paint well, it can split or warp, depending on the application. One solution might be Wood Plus, a solid-wood product coated with a latex bonding. Wood Plus is the anti-wood, says Joey Shimm, marketing director of Wood Ridge, N.J.–based Architectural Products by Outwater, the distributor of the product. “It is rock-hard, so it is durable. And it can be painted, faux finished, or glazed.” The product installs like wood and can be painted without priming. The price ranges from 33 cents to $4.28 per linear foot.

Real wood is architect Jim Bodoia’s preferred

continued on page 84
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spec. But if he needs an even lower price point, he chooses medium-density fiberboard. “The profile isn’t as sharp as wood or other types of materials, but the cost is low and it keeps the budget down,” says the principal of Mithun Architects in Seattle.

Made from recycled wood fibers and resins, MDF molding costs about $1 per linear foot. Aside from MDF’s bargain price, manufacturers say it offers more benefits than wood because it will not split, warp, or shrink. “Whatever looks you can achieve with pine, you can achieve with MDF—and for less,” says Timm Locke, marketing representative for Roseville, Calif.–based Sierra Pine. The company’s line of molding is factory-primed and will accept most brands of commercial paint. If you’re looking for patterned MDF, White River Hardwoods & Woodworks in Fayetteville, Ark., markets eight embossed profiles at a slightly higher cost than regular MDF.

Over the past four years, New England Classic in Portland, Maine, has generated buzz with decorative panel products made from engineered wood laminated to premium wood veneers. An alternative to custom wood products, the panels are available factory finished in oak, maple, and cherry. They can also come painted or in paint-grade.

The panels are much less expensive than custom wood panels and therefore are suited to budget-conscious or volume construction, says CEO John S. Crowley. For example, a 9-foot by 12-foot room in the company’s paint-grade raised-panel system runs about $950; a custom wood product would cost about 50 percent more, says Crowley, a former architect who developed the products. The panels are designed with labor-friendly standard parts and interlocking systems, he adds.

one word: plastics

Some architects aren’t sticklers for natural materials, particularly if they’re just going to be painted. For them, plastic (or polymer) is the way to go. “We rarely spec wood,” says Don Jacobs, AIA, of JBZ Architecture + Planning in Newport Beach, Calif. “We get into alternative materials, like foam-based products. The products are stable, and, once painted, you cannot tell the difference from wood.”

Composites are gaining converts for other reasons, too, says French, including their consistent patterns, sharp details, and easy installation. Many of these materials have higher up-front costs than wood, but they save on the back end. “Labor is hard to come by these days, and a skilled carpenter is even harder,” French explains. “The time saved on installation is more significant than the cost of the products.” Polyurethane is a lightweight product that has about the same density as white pine. Long prized as an exterior spec for its weather resistance, it also wins praise for its availability in large-sized profiles for interior applications. It’s continued on page 86
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often considered the best economical choice for big, beefy crown moldings.

“We cast the product in molds so we can get intricate patterns on pieces measuring 14 inches,” says Steve Roth, marketing director of Style-Mark in Archbold, Ohio. The product works well for stacked-look applications, adds Roth, and has sharper shadow lines than wood or other composites. Style-Mark’s products come in white and accept lacquers and most paints. They can be faux finished in the field and installed with adhesives and finish nails.

But polyurethane isn’t perfect. For one, it’s pricey. “We are not the least expensive product you’re going to find out there,” Roth admits, referring to the $4 to $27 per-linear-foot price. Moreover, faux finishing will add to the tab. Where the product saves money is on labor. An average finish carpenter can install about 100 linear feet in a day, Roth says. Another disadvantage is the material’s softness: It isn’t dent-resistant. “You would not want to install it where people can touch it,” says Jacobs. Consequently, Style-Mark is not recommended for chair rails or baseboards.

Extruded polystyrene may work well for those applications, and one choice is Perimeters by Los Angeles–based Hunter Douglas. Perimeters is lightweight but impact resistant, and therefore ideal for dent-prone areas, says company general manager Kim Kiner. “Because the product is hard, you can nail closer to the edge,” she says. “And it does not need adhesives for installation.” The standard product comes in white, but many profiles are available in faux finishes like “crème crackle,” burnished, gold, and silvered gold. Custom finishes are available in a minimum quantity of 5,000 linear feet.

Again, the up-front cost is high. The company says a 4½-inch gold rope piece measuring 9½ feet costs about $113, compared with about $92 for a similar style in wood. But it comes finished, so installation and touch-up bring the cost to only $134, compared with $211 for wood.

**go crazy, within reason**

In a large, multiroom house, molding options are nearly limitless, says Angela Kostelecky, project architect with Devereaux & Associates in McLean, Va., who rarely specs the same design twice. You can use various types of materials and styles in a single project, as long as you consider the merits and drawbacks of each product.

Molding is as much about defining a sense of scale in a room as it is about implementing an architectural style. Still, you can have too much of a good thing. Knowing when to show restraint is a sound economic and aesthetic move for budget-conscious projects. Says Jones, “You can scale back on the molding upstairs and put that money into products that homeowners can touch and feel—like countertops or appliances.”

You and your clients should weigh those kinds of decisions carefully. Strategically and artfully applied, decorative molding enhances the overall comfort and pleasure a home gives its owners—perhaps more so than any other design flourish you could provide.
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Virtual building modeled and rendered in ArchiCAD by Mr. Peter Bach and Mr. Peter Hadadi.
When an architectural design has integrity, every detail relates to the whole. And the proportion, scale, and craftsmanship of those details reflect the larger design’s myriad influences: site, climate, and the architect’s and clients’ personalities and aesthetics. The eave and rake details shown on these pages come from three custom houses on Casco Bay, Maine, designed by James Herrick. For each project, the Brunswick, Maine, architect used intricate roof-edge treatments to help define and resolve the house’s overall design.

Rick Vitullo, AIA, is founder and principal of Vitullo Architecture Studio, Washington, D.C.

For a one-bedroom cottage hideaway, Herrick detailed the 20-inch fully exposed rafter tails with a scroll-cut motif and square-cut ends that run perpendicular to the roof slope. He used the same scroll-cut design at the ends of the ridge beam—which extends past the bargeboard—and capped its exposed top edge with copper flashing. A fiared wall-shingle detail just below the rafter tails continues the motif. Functionally, these lighthearted ornamental exterior details divert water from the house; aesthetically, their proportions complement the house’s scale and add a whimsical touch to its design.

continued on page 90
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**bungalow**

These details grace a large bungalow on a wild, woodsy stretch of the bay. In keeping with the tall, expansive house's lodge-like character, Herrick designed the roof as a sort of canopy, with deep 40-inch eaves and 24-inch rakes.

To give the area beneath the eaves and rakes some interesting delineation, he laid V-grooved 1x6s across the underside of each rafter tail, then accentuated the rafters with 2x2s. The protective treatment keeps rain off the walls and lends the house a secluded, protected feeling.

**farmhouse**

This project, a very traditional New England house surrounded by farmland, required classic detailing. The building's flat, soffitted eaves project 12 inches from the wall, over a frieze board. To connect the rake and the eave in the traditional manner, Herrick used Greek returns. These are 3-foot extensions of the soffit that wrap around the corner of the house at the rakes beneath a small hip roof. To meet modern building standards, Herrick detailed the roof edges with a metal drip and added ventilation at the eaves.

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* Issued mailed in regional editions.
Why did you decide to become an architect?
I’m the son of a carpenter who was the son of a blacksmith—making things was part of my growing up in New York City.

What is your favorite book?
I’ve been trying to get through de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America. As I get older I’ve become more patriotic. Working overseas has given me a deeper appreciation of how great this country is—our mail system, our telephones. Really!

Where are you from?
I was born and raised in the Bronx in the 1940s and ‘50s. The North Bronx was and still is a quintessential New Urbanist neighborhood: great streets, parks, mixed use, housing of all different types—everything within walking distance. Pete Mirando’s deli, Sam Weiss’ candy store.

What is your favorite building in Washington?
The Jefferson Memorial is not only my favorite building in D.C., it’s also the best building in the city.

What would you be, if you had to be something other than an architect?
A builder—I like that sense of leaving something behind after you’re gone.

What is your hobby?
This is going to sound really corny, but ... spending time with my kids. They’re young adults now, and I try to stay connected with them. I also love watercolor painting and sailing.

What is your greatest vice?
Eating.

What is your favorite city to visit?
Internationally, Rome. In the United States, Charleston.

Of the projects you’ve worked on, what are your favorites?
Bahcesehir, a new town in Turkey, near Istanbul; and a master plan for the next 100 years of the National Cathedral in Washington.

What’s the best career decision you’ve ever made?
Switching from engineering to architecture in college. Also, committing my firm 100 percent to the New Urbanism. That took our firm and skyrocketed it.

John Torti, AIA, is managing principal of Torti Gallas and Partners/CHK in Silver Spring, Md. The firm won a 2000 AIA Honor Award for its plan for Bahcesehir in Istanbul, Turkey.