

THE NEW URBANISTS

The Second Generation

TACKLING PROJECTS IN THE INNER CITY AND THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES,
THESE LATTER-DAY PLANNERS ARE TAKING THE MOVEMENT IN NEW DIRECTIONS.

by Beth Dunlop



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Miami

The Hometown Plan by Dover, Kohl & Partners aims to transform a deteriorating South Miami area into vibrant mixed-use neighborhoods.



2

Ecuador

Using canals as water-retention devices, Correa Valle Valle of Miami have planned a new community near the port city of Guayaquil.



3

Detroit

In the Weber Block, the firm Archive D.S. is upgrading existing housing and adding new live-work lofts to a tough part of town.



4

Mercer Island

Just outside Seattle, Lennertz Coyle & Associates is bringing some urban values to a place known for its suburban strip development.



5

Chicago

Farr Associates is reviving the Parkside neighborhood by playing on its strengths: access to mass transit and a location next to Garfield Park.

For a decade or so, the New Urbanism was the province of just a handful of practitioners—most notably Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk in Florida and Peter Calthorpe in California. From the start, their projects—among them Seaside (in the Florida panhandle), Kentlands (outside of Washington, D.C.), and Laguna West (near Sacramento, Calif.)—were the focus of one of the most intense debates in the planning profession. Some critics hailed these new “traditional towns” as the next great places to live, while others dismissed them as artificial communities dressed up in historicist architecture. Many in the profession saw them as a passing phase, assuming the New Urbanism would go the way of Deconstructionism. It did not. Instead, the ranks of traditional town planners continue to grow.

A new generation of New Urbanists is coming of age. No less fervent or idealistic than their mentors, these latter-day New Urbanists carry the movement’s banner but are unafraid to diverge a bit. Responding in part to criticism that the first wave of New Urbanist projects were mostly middle-class, suburban developments comfortably buffered from the hard realities of urban America, the second generation of New Urbanists (as well as many of the first generation) are now applying the principles of traditional town planning to a wider range of projects—including ones in the inner city and third-world countries.

And as public policies shift and governmental entities ranging from small towns to state planning departments to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development start to question post-war Modernist planning principles—these younger New Urbanists are helping to set the agenda for the next century. Their clients range from federal agencies to what architect Victor Dover of Miami calls “the regular, just-walking-around folks.”

Although the New Urbanists are anything but a homogenous group, they share a common set of ideas that they agreed on in a 1991 document known as “the Ahwahnee Principles.” Named for the historic lodge in Yosemite National Park where the planners met, the principles state that planning “should be in the form of complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, work places, schools, parks, and civic facilities,” and that these activities should be “within easy walking

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distance of each other” and “of transit stops.” The document goes on to say “a community should contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries” and “should contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens, and parks.” In addition, the principles call for networks of streets and paths that encourage pedestrian and bicycle activity and for the use of greenbelts and wildlife corridors to define the edges of communities and protect them from development.

Latest projects address key complaints

The new wave of New Urbanists is just beginning to move from drawings to construction. But many of the latest projects address complaints made by critics of the movement’s early work: that all too often plans were made for “greenfield” sites beyond existing urban cores, that low-income groups were given only lip service, and that practitioners dealt mostly with private developers and only rarely with public housing.

Consider these examples of work from second-generation New Urbanists. The five-year-old Portland firm of Lennertz Coyle & Associates recently worked on the 1995 revision of the Oregon Transportation Planning Code, setting forth principles to determine which streets should have strong retail and commercial orientation and which should be parkways. Dover, Kohl & Partners of Miami has done an urban-infill plan for what Victor Dover calls “the hardscrabble-poor” downtown Orlando neighborhood of Parramore. Rick Williams of Van Meter Williams Pollack in San Francisco is using the tenets of the New Urbanism to grapple with ways to rework tough public housing projects (in such places as South-Central Los Angeles), and he is taking a similar approach on the “campuses” of some of California’s big biotech companies; in both cases, he is bringing things down to a more human scale and creating a clearer definition of public and private space.

Portland architect William Lennertz, who as a former project manager for Duany and Plater-Zyberk (DPZ) shepherded such communities as Seaside and Kentlands from sketches to construction, says he sees fewer “greenfields” planning projects in the future and a greater emphasis



Two by Dover, Kohl:
Okeechobee, Fla.
(above) and Rustville
& Fort Negley (below)
in Chattanooga, Tenn.

on work in central cities (as is going on in cities ranging from Providence, R.I. to Cleveland to Los Angeles). “What I have learned,” says Lennertz, “is that Oregon is now confronting problems that the rest of the country will soon have to confront.

The battles we have to fight are set out before us in our existing urban fabric, in our suburbs, in towns with main streets that have become state highways, in big-lot residential areas that will have to diversify to survive. I know that there’s a tremendous appetite and need for communities, real communities, out there among the populace.”

Having preached the need for new planning and zoning codes that allow apartments to be built above stores, granny flats to be included in single-family homes, streets to be narrowed, and other such “neo-traditional” devices, the New Urbanists won over a growing number of city and state officials during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Now they are starting to win important friends on the federal level as well. At the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), for example, several programs have now adopted the tenets of the New Urbanism. “As we move forward on public housing, demolishing high rises, reducing densities, and creating mixed-income environments and really livable communities, we are embracing New Urbanism,” states

Marc Weiss, special assistant to HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros. “It’s not just a style,” says Weiss. “What the New Urbanism is really about is community planning and urban design, and it is a really good approach not just for transforming public housing but for rebuilding cities in general.”

When HUD began to explore New Urbanist principles, looking into new ways to replace or revamp public housing projects and renew dangerous, derelict neighborhoods, it was “first generation” architects such as Ray Gindroz, AIA, of UDA Architects in Pittsburgh who took up the challenge. But as the work in transforming public housing and rebuilding inner-city neighborhoods filters out, it will often go to the younger firms. “Certainly we have planted a lot of seeds at the local level,” says Weiss.

To date, the second generation of New Urbanists has worked with far less fanfare than the first; often, the jobs they take have been less glamorous than say, Seaside, and on a smaller scale—fixing up a main street in such decidedly



Lennertz Coyle & Associates' plan for Bend, Ore., turns a parking lot into a new civic square (below).

Van Meter Williams Pollack redesigned outdoor spaces at Genentech's campus in South San Francisco

(opposite top). Looney Ricks Kiss designed rowhouses at Harbor Town in Memphis (opposite bottom).



unsexy places as Fort Pierce, Fla., a current project of Dover, Kohl, or the Weber Block in Detroit, a small urban infill housing project that Archive D.S. has under way.

More projects are downtown

Indeed, much more of the work now being done in the name of traditional town planning (another moniker for the New Urbanism) is in inner-city areas. Much of what is being done, too, is fixing places that went wrong, imbuing them with the movement's idealism, rather than creating new idealistic towns from scratch.

"It's fundamental," says Richard Bernhardt, planning director for the city of Orlando, Fla., where the codes include traditional city design standards and where Dover, Kohl's plan for revitalizing the downtown neighborhood of Parramore paved the way for two additional in-city traditional town planning projects being done by other firms. "It's building a community, not just a development project," asserts Bernhardt. "It is mending the community, putting it back together." Often it is work that, as Victor Dover says, requires "surgical skills" such as filling in parking lots rather than demolishing the existing urban fabric.

Says J. Carson Looney, AIA, of Looney Ricks Kiss of Memphis: "We do some land planning, but the majority of what we do is take an existing land plan and fix it and then do the architecture."

If the earliest New Urbanists were fairly orthodox about its terminology and methodology, they have also had to be the standard-bearers. "They are more formal and focused on the recipe," says Jaime Correa of Miami. "We can afford to be less rigid, less reflective and more pragmatic." His firm, Correa Valle Valle, has created a model code for the

environmentally precarious Florida Keys that stretches the New Urbanist planning lexicon to include such offbeat (but useful) terms as "hamlet" as a zoning type.

In their work in South and Central America, Correa Valle Valle have found themselves working with new governments and having to persuade entrenched military establishments to embrace their plans. Williams, working with public housing tenants, has to summon all his persuasive powers as well. "We do enjoy working on complex projects," says Williams, "but they can't always be as pure. In some ways we can't be as philosophical about it. We're trying to work on projects that have a lot of issues—social issues, philosophical ones, financial issues—and you can't solve them all with design."

Among this "second generation" of New Urbanists there is a growing understanding of the nuts and bolts of the development process. For example, Looney Ricks Kiss uses Jim Constantine, a market research expert from New Jersey, as a "front man," to determine what will be acceptable to potential buyers. For example, Constantine did market-preference surveys for a new town near Austin, Tex., that Looney's firm is designing. The surveys helped determine which types of houses and what elements of the town would be built first. Says Looney, "We've got to make sure we look at the reality. You've got to take what is good philosophically and make it apply. But if you don't get it built it's just a book."

Stylistically, this generation is a divergent group consisting of some diehard Modernists and some entrenched Classicists—with most falling into a historicist category somewhere in between. All of them, with no exceptions, express a debt to their mentors—particularly Duany and Plater-Zyberk and Calthorpe.

Though the call for traditional town planning expertise comes from all five continents, the younger New Urbanists also find work in their own backyards. Dover, Kohl, for example, has done a massive two-part "Hometown" plan for the town of South Miami, which includes a strategy for the incremental replacement of old-style public housing with a variety of lower-income dwellings, public and private. In true practice-what-you-preach fashion, the firm's office is over a shop on the town's main street. Similarly, Archive D.S. is at work on a series of new urban housing projects near the firm's office, a 1909 Daniel Burnham building in downtown Detroit.

Having laid out the precepts of traditional town planning with some specificity in the Ahwahnee Principles, the movement has taken on the ways of a formal organization with the founding in 1993 of the Congress for the New Urbanism, chaired by Plater-Zyberk and run by designer/author Peter Katz.

For sake of definition, one might group as "first generation" New Urbanists such architects as Stephanos Polyzoïdes and Elizabeth Moule of Los Angeles, Dan Solomon of Berkeley, Ray Gindroz of UDA Architects, Robert A.M. Stern, FAIA, of New York City, and Jaquelin Robertson, FAIA, of New York City, almost all of whom have been involved in one or more aspects of traditional planning since the mid 1980s.

Working with, rather than against, each other

A mark of the movement, however, is its collegiality. "We constantly work with each other. This whole thing is a big soup," says Duany. And indeed it is. DPZ, for example, worked on the initial planning phases of Celebration, the Walt Disney Co.'s new town near Orlando that was eventually planned by Stern and Robertson. Gindroz, however, wrote Celebration's Pattern Book, which offers the town's architectural code, and Looney is designing dozens of houses for Celebration using the Stern/Robertson plan and the Gindroz pattern book. Dover, Kohl and



Correa Valle Valle from Miami worked with Mark Schimmenti and town planner R. Geoffrey Ferrell, both DPZ alumni, to do a plan for Riviera Beach in Palm Beach County, Fla.

It is a missionary movement, in many ways. The list of believers includes such mayors as Joseph Reilly of Charleston, S.C., Jon Norquist of Minneapolis, and Dennis Archer of Detroit, and countless zoning and planning officials from all over the country, most of whom avidly spread the word at conferences, in lectures, and even on the Internet. One such example is Demitri Baches of Belmont, N.C., who has put his town's entire zoning code (a Traditional Neighborhood Development code) onto the Internet (<http://www.sips.state.nc.us/Belmont/planning.htm>) to be downloaded free by anyone who has Microsoft Word for Windows and enough computer capacity. A number of municipalities also have Websites from which town plans can be downloaded or printed out: two such places are the new town of Fairview Village in Portland, Ore., (<http://www.fairviewvillage.com>) and the existing community of Mercer Island near Seattle (<http://www.halcyon.com/mmatt//mihome.htm>), both designed by Lennertz Coyle.

"People who have problems with the whole New Urbanist movement have the feeling that it's incredibly one-dimensional, and when you look at the pictures, they can seem one-dimensional and suburban," says Williams. "People will say the problem is that it hasn't been inclusive enough, that it doesn't include, for example, low-income housing. But in fact, it does. We just have to enrich the vocabulary."

The "second generation," if you will, includes architects who may have been at work in the 1980s but usually for other architects, learning at the side of Calthorpe or Duany and Plater-Zyberk. Indeed, charting the growth of even this young a movement (Seaside was born in the late 1970s, but the term New Urbanism wasn't coined for another decade) takes the skills of a genealogist.

Victor Dover and Joe Kohl, for example, came to the University of Miami in 1985, then founded a firm that does graphic imaging on computers ("We thought if we could get people to visualize, they'd stop making such bad decisions," said Kohl). Eventually, they went back

to the University of Miami and were among the first graduates of the school's Suburb and Town Planning Program (founded by Plater-Zyberk and Duany), then opened their own firm.

That firm was initially a four-way partnership with Jaime Correa and Erick Valle who now, along with Estela Valle, have their own firm. Correa had come to Miami in 1979 as a young architecture graduate seeking work with Arquitectonica; but when he got there with a portfolio full of urban design work, he was dispatched to the newly founded DPZ (Duany and Plater-Zyberk had just split off from Arquitectonica) where he was put to work on a project called Seaside.

Erick Valle, who was born in Costa Rica, is a University of Miami graduate with degrees in architecture and suburb and town planning. Estela Valle is a Cuban refugee who came to Miami in the Mariel boatlift; she worked for DPZ for eight years before joining her husband and Correa.

Lennertz of Lennertz Coyle of Portland, had Duany as his Harvard thesis advisor then eventually went to work for DPZ. Ultimately, he moved to Portland, where he linked up with Steve Coyle.

Rick Williams, whose firm is Van Meter Williams Pollack in San Francisco, took a course taught by Calthorpe at the University of California at Berkeley, and then went on to work for him.

But if many of the new New Urbanist firms have not fallen very far from the family tree, others came into it all on their own. The partners in Archive D.S.—Mark Nickita, Dorian Moore, and Kevin Borsay—and Carson Looney in Memphis, for example, looked at cities and places they loved, figured out what made them great, and incorporated those ideas into their own designs. Only later did they discover there were planners and architects around the country working the same vein.

At a time when many architects are still struggling to get work, most of the New Urbanists—of both generations—are quite busy. With government agencies from local planning offices to HUD increasingly receptive to New Urbanist principles and clients in foreign countries as far away as India and Japan, demand remains strong for the services of New Urbanist planners—perhaps strong enough to launch a third generation. ■

