

## places

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Corona Del Mar  
Project Improves  
On Duany's Original**Much of the history of architecture**

consists of architects making copies of notable buildings, and planners making copies of town plans, all while altering the originals to fit the situation at hand. Thus, Roman temples become Midwestern banks, the Palladian villas of Vicenza, Italy, become the Colonial buildings of the Eastern Seaboard, and a French monastery designed by Le Corbusier becomes the Sunkist building in the San Fernando Valley. It goes without saying, perhaps, that the copy is not always an improvement on the original.

A particularly striking example of architectural transformation – and one in which something is definitely gained – is Sailhouse, a 90-unit residential infill project in Corona del Mar, an upscale neighborhood in the Orange County city of Newport Beach. The developer is Laing Homes. The acknowledged basis of this design is the well-known Rosemary Beach, a residential community in the Florida panhandle designed by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk.

Far from a literal copy of Rosemary Beach, architect Mark Scheurer of Schemer Architects actually borrowed only the basic arrangement of the block: the fronts of the homes face a pedestrians-only walkway, while the houses back onto a service alley for parking, deliveries and trash collection (although the architects are quick to point out that they designed the alleys to be usable open space, as well). The architects also borrowed the St. Augustine style of housing found at Rosemary Beach, which consists of updated versions of the historic, 17th century stucco houses built by Spanish settlers, which were later taken over and enlarged with wooden second stories by English settlers.

What is notable, however, is what the designers did not borrow from Duany and Plater-Zyberk. They did not borrow, fortunately, the convoluted street plan of Rosemary Beach, which was designed to keep through-traffic out of quiet residential streets, many of which end in archetypally suburban cul-de-sacs. (There is little that is traditional in this plan formulated by the self-proclaimed inventors of Traditional Neighborhood Design, but let it pass.) Unlike Rosemary Beach, which is “leapfrog” development, the Corona del Mar project is essentially urban infill, in which the short streets in the northern (upper) portion of the plan line up with the existing pattern of surrounding residential streets. The short streets consist of small-lot, single-family homes, while the larger units on the curving, east-west street are triplexes designed to look like single-family dwellings.

Sailhouse, therefore, gets better marks in both urban design and sustainability than Rosemary Beach.

Beyond those elements in the Floridian project that Shoreline did not include, the project introduces its own new ideas, which actually make it quite different from the Duany original: Unlike Rosemary Beach, where the housing stands at street level, the houses at Sailhouse sit atop eight-foot “podiums.” The decision to elevate the housing partly reflected both the land economics of

this small-lot site plan, and partly the developer’s desire to preserve the views of homeowners on a sloping site. In essence, the developer and the architect have created a two-level way of life, with housing (and much of domestic life) on elevated pedestrian “paseos” while cars and garages trash at street level, eight feet lower than the paseos. In this transformation, the pedestrian paseo, which was already a pleasant public space, becomes something like a linear courtyard, where children can move freely without fear of wandering into traffic.

As in Rosemary Beach, each of the single-family streets ends in a cul-de-sac. The difference at Sailhouse, however, is that the cul-de-sac is designed as a small courtyard or outdoor room. (Each of these courtyards, block after block, has a unique design.) It is easy to imagine block parties, with a barbecue in one yard and an inflatable swimming pool in another. With their front yards and living rooms facing the paseo, people can expand the square-footage of the party simply by opening their front gate, which makes the front yard temporarily into a public space. Or they can maintain privacy by keeping the front yard gate closed.

Sailhouse is not gated, and visitors can climb a set of stairs to enter the elevated blocks freely, which is desirable. (If the same scheme



Sailhouse

Source: The Collaborative West



Source: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company

Site Plan for Rosemary Beach, Florida

were to be built in a more urban area, conceivably a key-card system or some other type of security arrangement could protect the housing, even if such a scheme would involve a loss of sociability.)

The alleys are also cul-de-sacs. Because they are narrow and blocked at the end turning around a vehicle is difficult, unless you can head the car into an open garage first. This is a smart security measure, but it probably complicates deliveries and trash collection; those vehicles are obliged to back out the full length of the block.

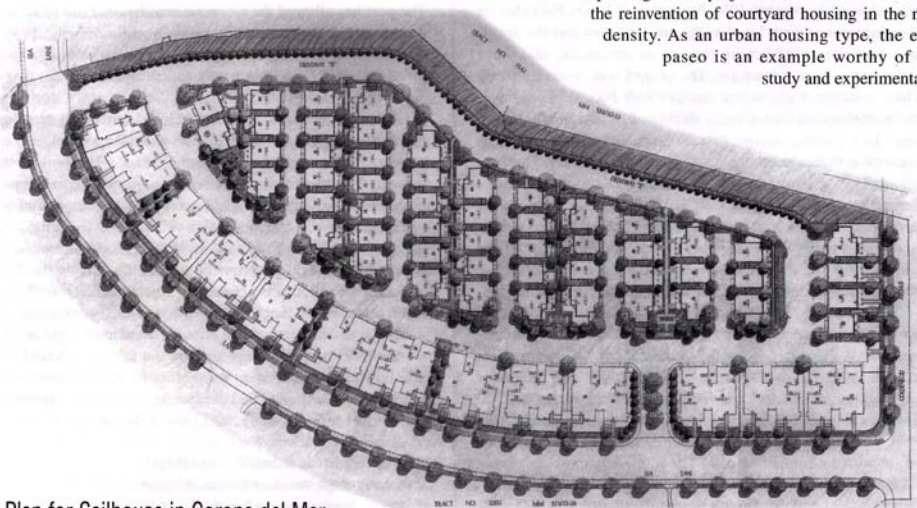
My concerns about Shoreline primarily regard the elevation of the housing. The question here, and I do not think it is entirely academic, is whether this is the best possible urbanism. A narrow, didactic type of theorist might hold that removing housing, and, hence, some pedestrian activity from the street, subtracts from the vitality of the street. I wonder if the streets might not feel a little lonely when residents lack the ability to glance over a fence to see somebody watering their lawn, scolding their husband or carrying papers to the trash.

For better or for worse, however, if we try to alter the scheme, we lose its advantages. We could lower the elevated courtyard until it was only a few feet above the sidewalk, and hence more "transparent" to passers-by, but then the parking would have to be underground, and the street-level front facades of the housing would become a row of ugly tunnels leading into subterranean darkness.

And, although the paseos encourage walking, I wonder how pedestrian-friendly the streets will be.

Maybe the presence of shopping one block away from Sailhouse will encourage people to walk and bicycle on the public streets.

Those questions aside, Sailhouse is an example of a designer choosing a good model and actually improving it. The project is the most recent example of the reinvention of courtyard housing in the name of density. As an urban housing type, the elevated paseo is an example worthy of further study and experimentation. ■



Site Plan for Sailhouse in Corona del Mar

Source: The Collaborative Firm