

URBAN DESIGN

SEASIDE®, The City of Ideas

This idyllic town is perfect for a destination

By Mark Schnell



I'm honored to give the introduction and provide commentary for a new documentary titled "Seaside, The City of Ideas." I hope you'll take 15 minutes out of your day and watch it on YouTube (American Makeover Episode 2). The film is part of the excellent American Makeover series by First + Main Media.

I've spent the last 20-plus years of my life exploring, using, and building on the ideas you'll see in the film. I became an urban designer in large part because of Seaside and the work of Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. The filmmakers appropriately devote the other 13 minutes of the documentary to an interview and walking tour with Duany. I'm just happy to provide the introduction.

The film presents several of the ideas that make Seaside a true "city of ideas." I won't spoil it for you, but here is the list of ideas described in the film:

- 1: Create a Town
- 2: Incremental Urbanism
- 3: Versatile Infrastructure
- 4: Limit the Lawns
- 5: Incubator Retail
- 6: Progressive Retail
- 7: Mixed Use
- 8: Live/Work Units
- 9: Agnostic to Style
- 10: Celebrate Civic Buildings
- 11: Amenities are for Everyone
- 12: Good Street Geometry equals Free Range Kids
- 13: Recover Trusty Traditions
- 14: Work with Nature
- 15: Pervious Streets
- 16: Original Green — Less is More

That's a valuable list, but below are three additional, important ideas that were unable to be incorporated into the film:

17: Human Scale

Duany spoke about the scale of the streets and the incubator retail buildings, but I think there is even more to say about the importance of scale. Americans love to build everything big — we build huge houses, tall buildings, wide streets and sprawling suburbs. Just about everything in Seaside is small — cottages instead of high-rise condos. You can walk to the center of town in five minutes or fewer. It only takes a short walk through Seaside to perceive the power of this smaller, more human scale.

18: Parking on Streets

Parking is a necessity in this day and age, but the giant parking lots that dominate our communities are not. Parking lots tend to be eyesores and bad neighbors, create un-walkable distances, and generally suck the life out of a place. Seaside presents an alternative — mitigate the negative effects of parking by spreading it out and placing it on the streets. The head-in parking spaces on Central Square and Smolian Circle are much more in the tradition of a street than a parking lot. The grid of residential streets features parallel parking, which provides the only parking for many of the cottages. There's even parallel parking along Scenic Highway 30A, which improves the pedestrian environment by creating a buffer zone and slowing down traffic.

19: A Variety of Building and Street Types

In far too many suburban subdivisions, there is only one building type — the single family detached house — and only one street type. With so little hierarchy in those subdivisions, it's no wonder the houses and streets all look the same. Seaside has a finer grain of urban design. For an important street like Seaside Avenue, which connects two parks, there is a more formal street design than the rest of the street grid. The houses along it are of a particular building type, are coded to be larger and more monumental, and are only found on that street. The result is a street that is easily identified as a special place in the community.

Another idea Seaside has always subscribed to in all it does — relationships. So, tell us. What other ideas can you identify in Seaside? Which are your favorite ideas? We'd love to hear from you. Email mark@seasidewalkingtours.com.

Mark Schnell is an urban designer based in Seagrave Beach. His firm Schnell Urban Design (schnellurbanbandesign.com) offers a wide range of services, from designs for entire communities to parks to houses. He also offers walking tours of Seaside by appointment. To schedule a tour, contact Mark at (850) 419-2397 or mark@seasidewalkingtours.com. Tours cost \$20 per person (cash only), start at the front porch of Sundog Books, and last approximately two hours. Tours are given in conjunction with the Seaside Institute.

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