

URBAN DESIGN

The Intersection of Art and Urbanism

SEASIDE is a great location for art, even in some unlikely places

By Mark Schnell



Over the course of giving many walking tours of Seaside, I've been asked one question again and again: "Why is that wall purple?"

The wall in question is the south end of 25 Central Square, often known as the Machado and Silveti building after the architects. It's big and mostly blank because, at some point, another building will be constructed right up against it. Seaside has been developed incrementally over many years, and it's not technically built-out. That undeveloped parcel has allowed the big blank purple wall to enjoy many years of sunshine.

Until recently, I didn't have a very good answer about the color of the

wall. The official answer, I only recently learned, was that the architects wanted a bright Caribbean color scheme, and they selected that purple.

The question was usually asked in a tone that suggested their real question: "Why on earth would anyone paint that wall purple?" That kind of tone comes with the territory. In my experience, purple is a very polarizing color. There are a few people who absolutely love purple. Many more really dislike it. In one of my projects in Texas, I serve as the director of design. I allowed a house to be painted a very light and muted lavender, and the backlash from other homeowners was fierce. In some very concerned emails, they claimed I had destroyed the community and their property values by allowing such a terrible color.

The south wall of 25 Central Square is still purple (although a little

lighter), but now there's a new mural by the street artist Gaia painted over it. Now I'm expecting a new question: "Who's that guy painted on the purple wall?"

This one is easier for me to answer. It's Vincent Scully, the famous architectural historian and professor who recently passed away. Architect Philip Johnson once described Scully as "the most influential architectural teacher ever." The designers of Seaside's plan and code, Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, studied under Scully at Yale and were strongly influenced by his teachings.

And I'm a testament to his influence, although in a different way. A column he wrote changed my life. (Who knew that a column about urban design and architecture could change the way you think about the world?)

Early in 1991, during my final semester of high school, a family friend

named Diane sent me a column from the New York Times. (And when I say sent, I don't mean via email. This was back in the days of clipping newspaper articles and sending them via U.S. Mail.)

One question that any college-bound kid will hear is, "What do you plan to study?" I wasn't sure at that point, but I knew I was interested in writing and cities (possibly pursuing an urban studies minor). I was heading to college in Evanston, Ill., in the fall, and I was looking forward to exploring neighboring Chicago. I imagine that's why Diane sent me that column.

In his Architecture View column published on January 27, 1991, Vincent Scully wrote:

At a moment of supreme silliness in too much of the profession, Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk are by far the most interesting young architects practicing today. Their work neither deconstructs nor self-destructs. It makes sense. Working together out of Miami, Duany and Plater-Zyberk are coming close to bringing to fruition the most important contemporary movement in architecture. That movement is, of course, the revival of the vernacular and classical traditions and their reintegration into the mainstream of modern architecture in its fundamental aspect: the structure of communities, the building of towns.

Later in the column, Scully talked about Seaside. This was the first I heard about the place, as well as the work of Duany and Plater-Zyberk. His words stayed somewhere in the back of my mind, and I later transferred in order to study urban design, planning and architecture. I wanted to not only study and write about cities, but to shape them as well.

His critique resonated with me. I looked around at the sprawling and faceless places being built and couldn't help but agree that it's "a

Urban Design cont. page 20



The south wall of 25 Central Square is the backdrop for the latest artwork in town, a mural in memory of influential architectural teacher Vincent Scully. Photo by Isacks Imagery

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SEASIDE, FLORIDA

THE REP

Children's Theater Isn't Just for Kids

Fairytales and storybooks go beyond entertaining youth

By Erinn M. Stranko
Director of Marketing
and Sponsorship, The REP Theatre

Each year, The REP provides a multitude of entertainment options geared toward children and families. These performances are more than a sideshow, a break from the beach or temporary distraction. Performance art inspires creativity in all ages and brings communities together at a central space: the stage. An elementary bedtime story or fairytale springs to life and makes something unreal, real.

Audiences of all ages can learn from the arts. Performance art allows patrons to sense different perspectives and even gather a sense of good judgment as protagonist and antagonist characters develop. The arts make us dig deeper to find words that convey emotion felt through vivid imagery. They make us truly feel and construct a sense of belonging amongst spectators. Reminisce on an audience clapping along to a song. That is a cohesive action brought on by group participation in performance and it feels good! Society needs more moments like this. It fuels the need to exist as humans together, and public art crosses all bounds.

This wonderful community recognizes the need for connection in shared spaces. Visitors and locals should all be so lucky to be a part of it. As The REP enters into its 18th year of performance in Seaside, cast members seek out new ways to engage young and old. From a Shakespeare themed rap over Snoop Dogg's "Drop it Like it's Hot" to King Arthur's "Fair and Gracious

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Guinevere" to the tune of the Backstreet Boys "I Want It That Way," it might all seem silly on first glance. But many do a double take. Infusing familiar tunes and pop culture references are fun song and dance for the kids, but they grasp adult attention. Suddenly they think, "What just happened? Did I really just hear them rap about Othello and Jello?" Now, they are into it and following the story for the remainder of the show, bringing their children up for autographs from the cast, tacking a sticker on their white linen shirt. Sure, it is for the kids, but theater is much more.

This spring you can catch The REP's professional cast as they stage free performances in public spaces throughout Seaside — Mondays at 6 p.m., "The Prince & The Pauper" on the Seaside Amphitheater stage; Mondays through Fridays at 3:30 p.m., Stories by the Sea storytelling sessions with audience participation for all ages at 45 Central Square (Solomon Square). Be a part of the silly fun at The REP's infamous Improv Boot Camp for Kids each Tuesday & Thursday at 2 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. (drop off) for ages 5 to 14, \$25.

For a full schedule of events, tickets or more information visit LoveTheREP.com or call (850) 231-0733. ●

Urban Design

Cont. from page 5

moment of supreme silliness in too much of the profession." I was inspired by the work of Duany and Plater-Zyberk. Their work "made sense" to me as well. And I have spent my career working on "the structure of communities, the building of towns."

So thank you, Diane, for sending me that column. And thank you, Vincent Scully. Your words made a difference for me and many others.

The mural is just one of several exciting changes happening in Seaside. And it's a sign of how the arts continue to flourish in this remarkable place. The Lyceum stage is under construction. It will add a new venue for the arts. And there's more to come as Seaside continues to evolve.

I have my own modest suggestion for a new layer of art in Seaside. In

the network of mid-block pedestrian paths, there are some points where the path gets wider, typically where paths intersect. Many are triangular in shape. I'd like to see all of these intersections marked with sculptures or architectural follies. It would essentially be a town-wide sculpture garden, and would make use of these underutilized spaces.

Does a wide spot in a path sound like a crazy place for art? In a town where a big blank purple wall can be turned into a work of art, I'd say that anything is possible. ●

Mark Schnell is an urban designer based in Seagrove Beach. Among his most prominent projects are three New Urban beach communities on the Texas coast: Cinnamon Shore, Palmilla Beach, and Sunflower Beach. Learn more about his firm Schnell Urban Design at SchnellUrbanDesign.com.



Architect Dhuru Thadani discusses the Scully Mural as it is being painted. Photo by Isacks Imagery

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