

Winter in Rocky Mountain National Park

Mountain LivingTM

HOLIDAY 1997

A WIESNER PUBLICATION \$3.95

Merry & Bright

Rustic Ranch Retreats

Mouthwatering Mountain Cookie Recipes

Enchanting Holiday Homes

**CHRISTMAS
VILLAGES**

7 Festive
Destinations

Display until January 8





Home Town

The planners who pioneered the new urbanism movement set their sights on the mountains. In North Carolina, a breakthrough community emerges.



Cottages designed using vernacular influences, such as the Arts and Crafts and Adirondack styles, include front porches and are grouped around a center green to foster a sense of community at Trillium, a new development in Cashiers, North Carolina.

As architecture students at Yale in the 1970s, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk led a cadre of fellow scholars into the turn-of-the-century vernacular neighborhoods of New Haven, Connecticut, pointing out how the buildings related to each other, the front porches related to the street and the sidewalks bound the whole fabric together. It was an example, they argued, of how neighborhoods used to promote neighborliness: A couple pushing their baby carriage could stop to chat with an elderly porch sitter; the Johnsons could keep an easy eye on the Smiths' place while they were away. The streets, even after nearly a century, were alive with community.

Community. That word is bantered about with regularity in mountain towns these days. Some suggest a crisis

stemming from resort areas' lack of it; others simply lament its passing. But most—like their brethren in the low country—can't help but note a certain hollowness, a sense that neighborhoods aren't what they used to be, a desire for a deeper sense of connectedness than they find at the country club.

In the 1980s, a movement led by Duany and Plater-Zyberk's Miami-based architecture and town-planning firm (known as DPZ) began to address the ills of sprawl development and its effect on an increasingly alienated population through a movement known as new urbanism. This calls for a return to the compact, close-knit communities of old. Borrowing heavily from traditional city-planning concepts that formed the great neighborhoods of the early 20th century, and with roots reaching back

to Renaissance and Classical cities of Europe, new urbanism promotes neighborhoods that encourage residents to be less insular. Working on the premise that design affects behavior, DPZ established principles that define the movement: Each neighborhood should have an edge and a center that is always a public space; residents should be able to walk from the neighborhood's center to its edge in five minutes; the neighborhood should provide a balanced mix of structures, including mixed-income dwellings, shops, schools, recreational facilities and places of worship; traffic should follow a gridlike network of interconnecting streets, which slows automobiles, increases pedestrian activity and encourages the casual meetings that form the bonds of community; and finally, priority should be given to public space, with public buildings given important sites overlooking squares or terminating street vistas. Front porches and alleyways are encouraged; large, yawning garages facing the street are verboten.

The movement has its critics, of course. Some suggest that DPZ's master plans emphasize visual style over substance, and others contend that the firm's master-planned communities are nothing more than cosmetically altered sprawl. Yet Yale architecture professor Vincent Scully, who nurtured Duany and Plater-Zyberk's vision, writes that the husband-wife team's work "reclaims for architecture, and for architects, a whole realm of environmental shaping that has been usurped in recent generations by hosts of supposed experts, many of whom, like those of the truly sinister Departments of Transportation everywhere, have played major roles in tearing the environment to bits and encouraging its most cancerous aberrations."

Certainly those aberrations have reached their tentacles into mountain towns. It's tough to be neighborly when that requires a 20-minute car ride—and when the second homeowners might not even be there. Skyrocketing high-country real estate hardly encourages

the inclusion of lower-income residents, and many developers are loath to cede valuable turf for public greens or civic buildings. The vistas are rife with pavement, Super Wal-Marts and cookie-cutter housing.

Until recently, high-country sprawl seemed the inevitable way of things. New urbanism was fine for urban folks, but prevailing wisdom seemed to be that it just wouldn't work in the mountains, where extreme topography makes gridlike street patterns and alleys nearly impossible and where there has been an influx of second homeowners seeking to get away from it all, usually in gated communities.

Rusty Culbreth and his partners, Dan Rice and Morris Hatalsky, are among a handful of high-country developers who have asked DPZ to help them buck this trend. As the three began planning Trillium, a 700-acre golf course and village overlooking Lake Glenville in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, they felt compelled to create an alternative to the prohibitively expensive country-club-centered resorts that dot the affluent towns of Cashiers and Highlands. "We wanted to create a lifestyle, a sense of community in which people are more important than the product," Culbreth says. "We looked around, and it seemed the traditional neighborhood concept was very similar to what we were looking for."

Culbreth attended a weeklong session at the Seaside Institute, based on DPZ's award-winning 80-acre resort town in Windsor, Florida, which helped launch the new urbanism movement in 1981. Created around accessible public spaces with a compact layout following the five-minute walk principle, Seaside originally was designed to accommodate Sunday school teachers and artists, most of whom have since sold their modest \$18,000 houses to Atlanta professionals, who are sweeping them up for \$200,000 and more. DPZ has created master plans for some 130 towns and neighborhoods since Seaside, says Tom Low, director of the firm's Charlotte

office. "We've kind of honed our skills over the years," he says, "and now we're applying those to Trillium."

DPZ had some experience with mountain geography in planning Bamberton, a town on a sloping stretch of coastline in British Columbia, and Blunt Springs, a village being developed on a mountaintop at the tail end of the Appalachians. With Trillium and Wolf Mountain, a project in the planning stages in Telluride, Colorado, DPZ is more firmly establishing its foothold in the mountains. "The topography makes new urbanism in the mountains more challenging," Low says. "Therefore, there's less of it."

In planning Trillium, the DPZ team visited the great old communities of Asheville, North Carolina, and the surrounding mountains. They took inspiration from Biltmore Village, a self-sustaining cluster of shops and Arts and Crafts villas built to house employees of the Biltmore mansion, and Asheville's Albermarle Park, where 20 houses and a communal main lodge surround an oval village green. Unable to follow the continuous-grid streetscape, DPZ instead created small groupings of houses surrounding focal points such as a public green, a chapel and a community center, connected by corridors that offer larger custom lots for those who want more conventional mountain homes. "We took our inspiration from ancient European cities like Rome, where every five minutes you happen upon a little plaza or special place," Low says. Trillium's master plan calls for a trolley to connect the entire village, eliminating the need for car travel within its limits and allowing children more freedom.

Children are at the heart of Trillium's target market. "We want Trillium to be the neighborhood of our childhood, to bring back the feeling of community that existed in this area when we visited as children," Culbreth says. "Our goal for this village is to create a haven where families can enjoy the important things in life: family, neighbors, community."

To that end, Trillium's founders are attempting to keep home prices as low as possible. Families can get into a two-bedroom Adirondack-style cabin for around \$200,000—a relative bargain in an area where homes start around \$350,000. Residents receive priority selection of tee times and reduced green fees at Trillium Links, but they will not be required to ante up membership fees, which can add \$15,000 to \$30,000 to a home's cost.

A newsletter will let residents know who lives where and the ages of their children, and a central post office will provide a gathering place where people can check out who's in town. But Culbreth says the most important factor in fostering community will be the front porches built onto each home. "If you see Joe and Mary on their porch, you can stop and say hello," he says.

During a gala weekend to promote



PHOTO BY TOM LOW

Trillium's Arts and Crafts homes feature natural feather-edge white-pine siding and stone hearths.

Trillium in August, Culbreth and his team sold 30 properties, bringing the number of buyers to around 50 in two months of selling. "People are really hungry for a traditional town and traditional neighborhood," Low explains. "If you think about the average suburban dweller in, say, Atlanta, they live in a

subdivision, on a cul-de-sac; they have a nice car and a lot of square footage. When they buy a second home, they're looking for the opposite—what they're lacking in their daily routine. That's one of the reasons I think Seaside has been such a phenomenal success; people are looking for a sense of community they don't have in their daily lives. It almost plays on people's alter egos. Second houses are a place of escaping everyday reality, and this gives them that." ▲

Trillium Links and Village

975 New Trillium Way

P.O. Box 2724

Cashiers, NC 28717

888-464-3800 or 828-743-6161
www.trilliumnc.com