

Planner Alex Krieger places some cautionary signposts on the road to New Urbanism.

## Whose Urbanism?

In September, the leaders of the Congress for the New Urbanism invited a panel of key academicians to a closed debate. Having captured the public's imagination, made allies in the press, and (nearly) won over mainstream organizations such as the Urban Land Institute, and even the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the founders (as the original New Urbanists refer to each other) have turned their attention to the design academy. It appears that the students and faculty of schools of architecture have been slow to adopt the logic—or inevitability, as supporters imply—of New Urbanism. And so, led by the historian Colin Rowe, a group of educators—some disbelievers and others cautiously sympathetic—embarked to Seaside, Florida (above), to learn about and offer perspective on the New Urbanism movement. (A second, public debate will be held next March at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.)

The founders are acutely aware of the reservations being raised about New Urbanism. As is the norm among those who believe that they have uncovered a truth and intend to get others to agree, a combination of hubris and insecurity emerged at the debate. One internal struggle between resolute convictions and openness to options; between the use of traditional architectural imagery as

polemical device, or viewing it as a necessary esthetic for evoking community; whether to achieve principles through influence or regulation; whether the encouragement of design excellence should be a priority. There are deeper rifts, for example, as to whether Portland, Oregon, and its growth boundary, or Orange County, California's maturing suburban lattice is the destiny of American urbanization.

New Urbanism supporters used considerable effort up front to blunt the expected critiques: that New Urbanism is, in application, a form of new suburbanism, that its primary appeal is through nostalgia, that it advances a rear-guard architectural esthetic, and that there is nothing new, or even urban, about it. Setting the stage for the criticisms was the author's address to the assembled founders and educators, an edited version of which follows. Architecture has invited the New Urbanist patriarch Andres Duany to respond in our December issue.

The New Urbanism movement is impressive, powerful, growing, and great, but perhaps not quite as great as you, its founders, claim it to be. Lighten up. Enough self-congratulatory testimonials. You are practically the establishment now. One of

settlements. Minimizing redundancy is the first step towards sustainability and good urbanism.

Some nut on a recent *Nightline* review of New Urbanism argued that the movement must be the city's revenge on the suburb, in order to make the suburb as congested, polluted, and crime-ridden as the city. My own worry is the opposite. I do not want New Urbanism to be the suburbs' revenge upon the city, at a point when American cities are trying to make one of their halting comebacks.

Public opinion is changing, and the role of New Urbanism has been invaluable. There are, regularly, good stories about cities in the popular press. A recent *Boston Globe* article actually referred to the cachet of a city zip code. This is remarkable given several generations of the portrayal of the American city—and especially of the inner city—in terms of crisis, demise, pathology, blight, alienation, and ongoing disinvestment.

Despite this legacy, there appear to be a broad set of economic, social, and cultural forces now, again, aligned on behalf of urban life. These include: the exposure of the disadvantages of sprawl; the sheer boredom with suburbia expressed by the now-adult children of suburban-aspiring baby boomers; the saturation of some suburban markets and the uncovering of untapped markets (and disposable income) among urban dwellers, including those in disadvantaged neighborhoods; the reappearance of expressed ethnicity, for example, street life in some neighborhoods of LA;

the changing nature of employment opportunities—in the areas of high technology, services and management, new media, biomedical research, international trade, hospitality, and entertainment—many of which are attracted to urban locations; the acknowledgment of more than one type of family structure, and different dwelling preferences across longer lives; a better-educated population seeking diversity and stimulation; the rise of an ethic of conservation; the search for community and place as a reaction to suburban alienation, as well as a new kind of isolation caused by the ubiquity of electronic communication.

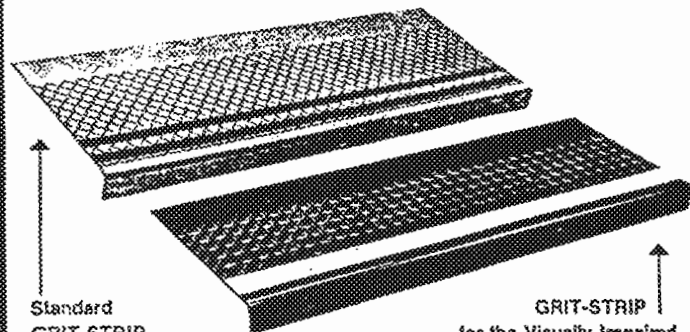
Even if New Urbanism is responsible for these enlightenments you may fail to see the full potential of this generational recalibration. This is my two (urban) ships passing in the night nightmare: the popularity of a new urbanism impeding the rebounding of some old urbanism—old not in appearance, but in location.

America, one hopes, may at the turn of this century be ready for a less singular model of the "good life," at least as that life is situated in settings advertised as desirable. Jump onto this large bandwagon. But do not at this propitious moment constrict the possibilities of what constitutes urbanism. *Alex Krieger*

*Alex Krieger is Chairman of the Department of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, and Principal of Chan Krieger & Associates.*

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