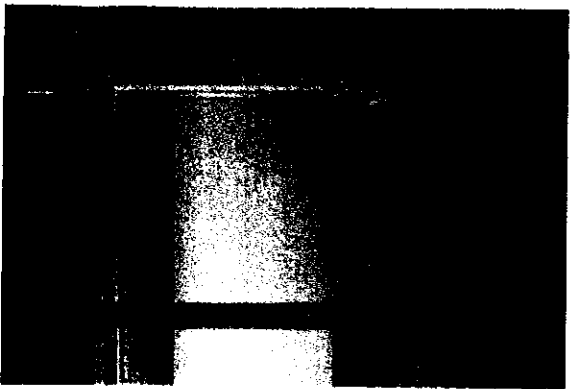


# SEA SIDE

Text and photography by

STEVEN BROOKE



PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY

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called Serendipity in an area considered inhospitable to upper-middle-income housing. Carefully arranged so as not to destroy the heavily wooded site, the two-story town houses were designed to complement the existing, low-scaled architecture of the Grove, and offered more amenities and better space planning than comparably priced units. Serendipity was both a financial and critical success, and became a model of innovative planning for other local developers.

Davis's next project was a Bauhaus- and De Stijl-inspired, ten-unit town-house complex, also in Coconut Grove, called Apogee. He built it despite warnings that no market existed for austere, three-story town houses with completely open, interconnected rooms and stained, bare concrete floors. Out of respect for the village-like ambience of the Grove, Davis sited and landscaped the town houses so that their decidedly modern profiles were not visible from the street. To promote Apogee, Davis used his own town house as a gallery for local artists, such as tropical-realist painter Jean Welch, sculptor Val Carroll, and photographer Steven Brooke. Like Serendipity, Apogee was financially successful, widely publicized, and received numerous awards, including an American Institute of Architects' Award of Excellence.

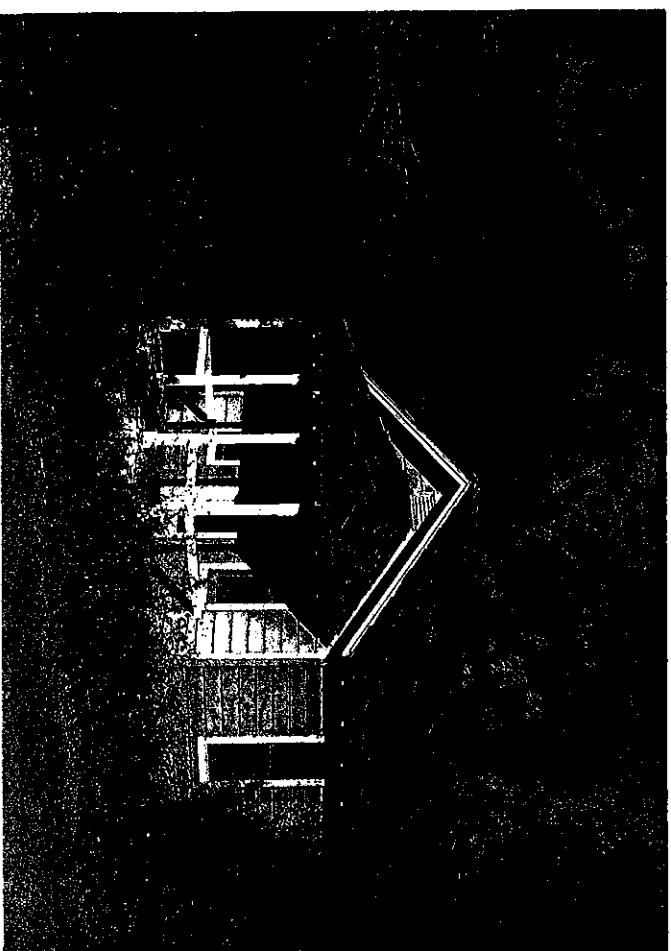
## BIRTH OF AN IDEA

In 1978, more than thirty years after his first childhood visits to the Gulf Coast, Robert Davis inherited J. S. Smolian's eighty acres of "worthless sand and scrub." While contemplating his options for use of the land, he often reminisced about his idyllic summer vacations and the time his family enjoyed in the small, beachfront cottages. "When I closed my eyes and let my mind wander, I could almost feel the sea breezes evaporating the moisture on my skin. I could recall the special pleasure of relaxing on a porch rocker after a shower at the end of a day on the beach."

Inspired by his memories, Davis began with the simple notion of developing his property with wood-frame cottages similar to those of his childhood. Unpretentious and inviting, they were built of wood with deep roof overhangs, generous porches, ample windows, and cross ventilation in every room. Constructed two feet off the ground, the breezes could flow under as well as through the houses. With reasonable maintenance, these cottages lasted for generations. "They were beautifully adapted to the climate and quietly enhanced the sensual pleasure of life by the sea, where porch sitting and strolling were at least as important as swimming and sunbathing."

An unusually patient and thoughtful man, Davis allowed his ideas to evolve slowly. He studied town planning, vernacular architecture, and the histories of ancient and modern cities.

*A typical Panhandle cottage.*



Among his readings were articles by Leon Krier, the London-based architectural theoretician and urban designer with whom he was later to consult. (The Prince of Wales' outspoken criticism of modern architecture and his support of neoclassicism were based, in part, on Krier's theories.)

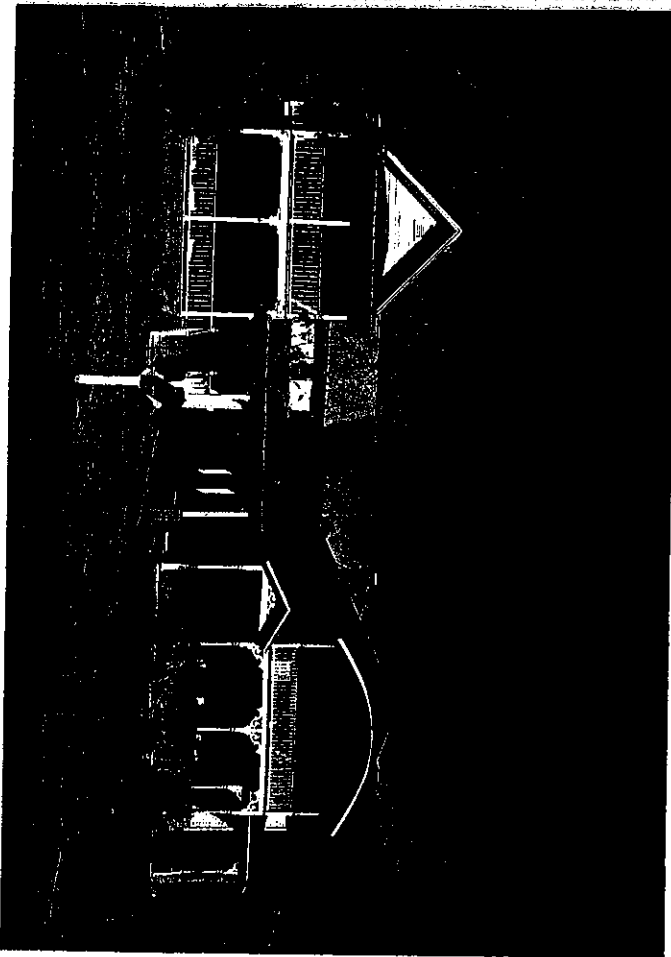
Krier writes eloquently about the restoration of the traditional city. He believes that eighty acres—the area encompassed within a quarter-mile radius—is the distance a person would comfortably walk on a daily basis to go to work, to shop, or to a café or restaurant. One might have to use mechanical transportation to go to a concert or a ball game, but not just to buy a quart of milk.

To Krier, eighty acres was the *ideal* parcel of land for a sensibly designed town, one with all of the necessities and pleasures of daily life within walking distance. After examining many development

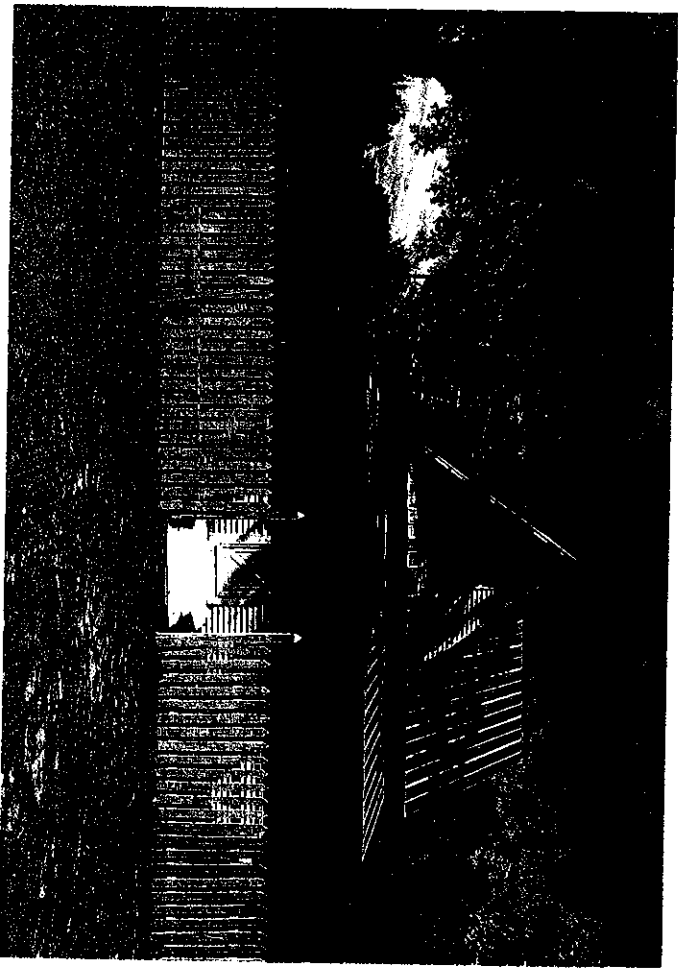
options, Davis decided to build just that: neither a conference center nor groups of cottages, but a town, his own town—the town of Seaside.

"Part of my intention," Davis explains, "was to construct a demonstrable and overdue antidote to the well-intentioned idea that took hold at the beginning of this century, the idea that social ills could be ameliorated by the separation of housing from workplaces. Certainly the desirability of living at some distance from steel mills or slaughterhouses was obvious. But this idea, like many, was distorted into the current practice of rigidly separating all land uses from each other and, thus, requiring that we spend inordinate portions of each day encapsulated in automobiles, leaving behind, at the end of the day, lifeless downtown areas. More importantly, civic intimacy was vanishing."

*Vernacular cottages in DeFuniak Springs, Florida.*



*A cottage in DeFuniak Springs, Florida.*



# PLANNING THE NEW TOWN

Although Davis had been successful with his housing ventures in Miami, he was in no rush to formulate the future of his grandfather's legacy. Before deciding upon the precise architectural nature of Seaside, he and his wife, Daryl, spent two years touring the South in their 1975, red convertible Pontiac "Land Yacht," taking inventory of the architectural features that give the region's small towns their distinct character.

"We'd see an interesting house, knock on the door, and almost always be invited in," recalls Daryl. "The trips were a wonderful education and confirmed our desire to develop a real Florida architecture for Seaside."

"Why seal yourself up in an air-conditioned 'refrigerator,'" Davis asks, "when you live in a wonderful place with a climate that is benign most of the year?" Davis's leisurely survey convinced him to seek building types "in which you can truly enjoy the indolence of the tropics." He wanted buildings that would be comfortable even in the most humid weather. "I find it delightful to sit under a ceiling fan on a hot afternoon and just talk to passing neighbors." He was certain others would savor the experience equally.

During this period of investigation, Davis met Miami architects



Daryl, Robert, and Micah Davis.

Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, then of the newly established firm Arquitectonica. They led Davis to think concretely about building a town designed in keeping with the native architecture.

At first Davis wanted to reinterpret the local vernacular architecture and had Arquitectonica propose several schemes. Though the firm's principals studied at Harvard, Columbia, Yale, and Princeton, they had never worked at length with anything like the Florida Panhandle's indigenous style. Their first designs—diagrammatic, cartoonlike buildings—resembled postmodern crack-er houses. It seemed that nothing in the Ivy League curriculum had taught architecture students how to revive a building tradition.

"The schemes looked vernacular, but they were modernist in detailing," says Davis. "There were sliding-glass doors that opened into open-air pavilions; with this configuration, you lost the sense of enclosure, the feeling of a room. But I wanted rooms that felt like *rooms* and porches that felt like *porches*. In fact, the more enamored of vernacular I became, the more I wanted the design to be very straight, not reinvented or updated in any way."

In response, Duany and Plater-Zyberk began taking data-gathering journeys of their own. They traveled throughout the South, and intensively through Florida—with cameras, sketch pads, and tape measures. Eventually they and Davis felt confident about the basic rules for designing Southern vernacular, residential architecture.

The architects had been diligent about studying the buildings not in isolation, but in the context of *small towns*. They concluded that the small town *itself* was the best model for designing streets and for locating the principal elements of the community.

The result, in time, was an exhaustive compilation of fundamental architectural qualities and features. It included picket

AT LEFT:  
Robert and Daryl Davis touring Grayton Beach in their 1975 Pontiac, to study the vernacular architecture of the Florida Panhandle.

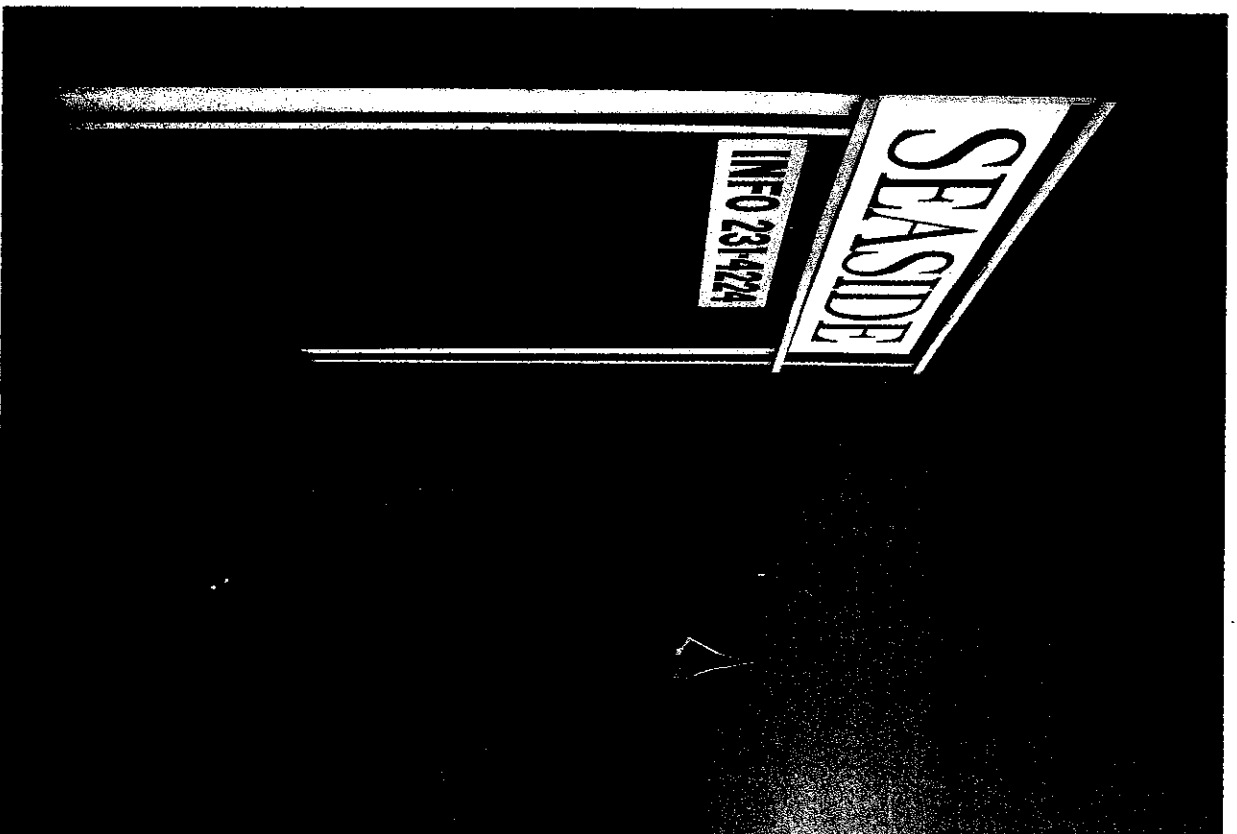
fences of varying design standing approximately sixteen feet from the street; galvanized metal roofs; exteriors of wooden clapboard, board-and-batten, or shingle; screen porches with generous overhangs; and vertical window patterns with real and operable window shutters.

With this inventory in hand, Duany and Plater-Zyberk, who had by this time formed their own firm, set about developing a Building Code for Seaside. It was so literal that its effect was as liberating as it was restrictive. The Code's stipulations—covering everything from building materials to roof pitch—were so precise that they ensured the stylistic harmony of the overall development while granting great freedom to Seaside landowners as to whom they could choose to design their houses. "You could hire almost anyone to design a house here," affirms Davis, "as long as they adhered to the Code. Its compliance ensured that any building would conform to the architectural atmosphere."

In 1980, Davis finally met Leon Krier. He offered the architect-architect a building plot in exchange for consultation on Seaside's Master Plan. Krier advised on such aspects as refining the pedestrian scale of the streets, ensuring that the Town Center was situated within optimum walking distance of the houses, and the siting of the recreational areas.

The fundamental concept around which Seaside was developed is that people *would* walk if walking were convenient and pleasant, and if the range of life's daily requirements were close at hand. Davis's aspiration was to create "an environment that would draw people out of their houses and onto their porches." He wanted safe streets, generous boulevards, comfortably scaled buildings, indigent landscape, and "an atmosphere of neighborliness . . . a familiarity that promotes even the practice of cutting through backyards."

By the fall of 1980, Davis was ready to begin. He and Daryl moved permanently from cosmopolitan Miami to the Florida Gulf Coast, known locally as "The Redneck Riviera."



*The first Seaside sales sign.*

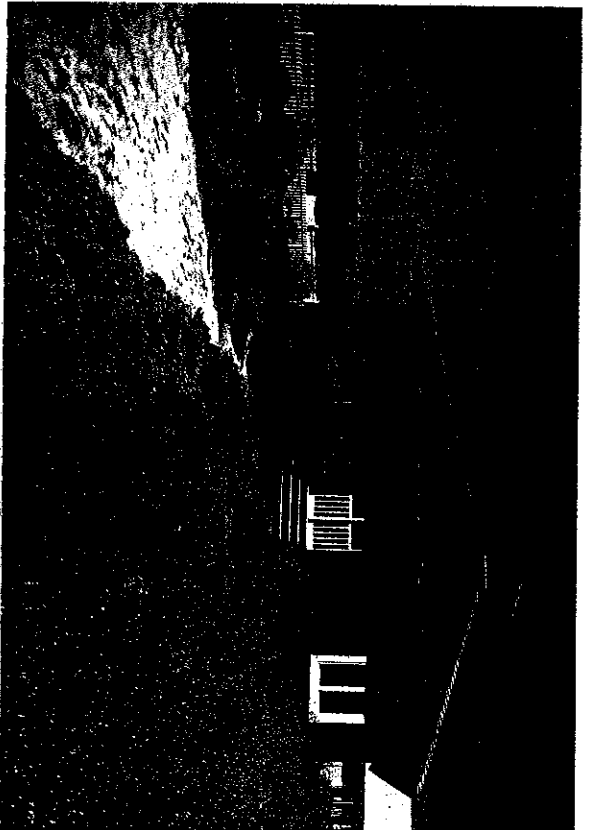
## BUILDING THE NEW TOWN

Even before the Seaside Master Plan had developed far beyond the conceptual stage, Davis built his first two houses in Seaside. He felt it was important to test the marketplace to determine whether a house that *shared* the beach at the *end* of a street could be sold for a price nearly equal to that of a beachfront condominium. The conventional wisdom of the time was that this was unfeasible, and that the strict architectural controls on construction would further deter sales. The conventional wisdom was quickly proved wrong.

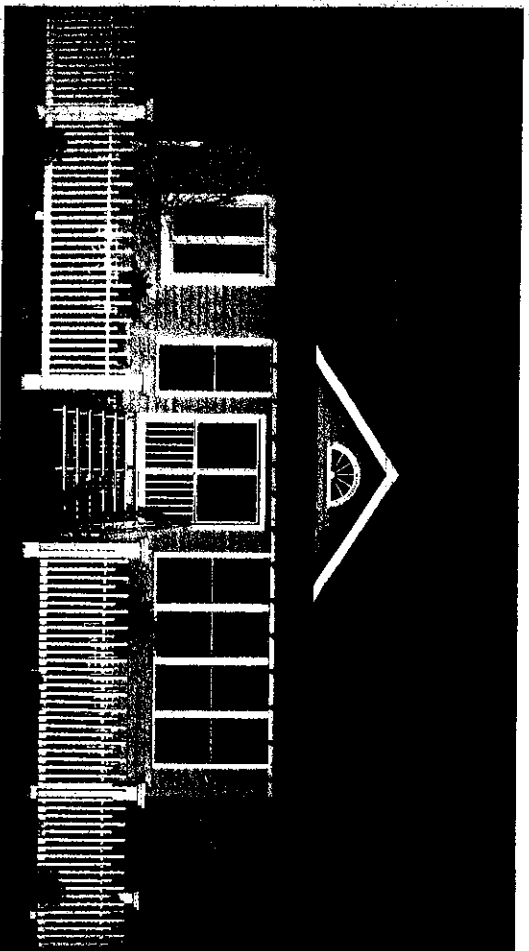
"It seems so easy *now* to design a building for Seaside," Davis recalls, "but it took a long time and a lot of work to develop a design for the first two houses that felt truly right. Part of the problem was Daryl and I were designing a house for ourselves that would also have to serve as the 'typical' Seaside house." While still struggling with the concept, Davis happened to glimpse a sketch of a three-bay house in Andres Duany's office. The center bay of the house had a fairly steeply pitched and gabled roof, and the side bays had a shallow-pitched hip roof. A large room was located in the center with auxiliary rooms around the perimeter. "I immediately realized that this was one of the typical house forms I had noted around the Panhandle."

Both the Red House and the Yellow House are variations on this theme. The square Red House, which became the first Seaside Sales Office, has a pyramid-shaped roof. The Yellow House, into which Robert and Daryl Davis moved, has a roof shape identical to that of the old Washaway Hotel in Grayton Beach. The roof pitches were actually measured from that older building.

By 1983, the Seaside Building Code was complete and put into practice for the first neighborhood—Tupelo Street. The Code mandated that houses had to be low and freestanding, of wood-frame



*The Red House, one of Seaside's first two houses, became the first Seaside Sales Office.*



*The Yellow House, Robert and Daryl Davis's first house.*

construction, and have exposed rafters, deep front porches oriented toward the prevailing warm-weather breezes, and gentle roof pitches with deep roof overhangs. The cottages were to be built off the ground, to allow air to circulate under them; in short, they were to be naturally ventilated, passive solar houses.

The Code also required that houses be painted in pastel colors with approved contrasting trim. Windows had to be square or vertical; shutters had to be real and operable; roofs had to be metal or wood shake. Landscaping of the mandatory yards had to be of sand and native scrub, not grass. Each house had to have its own white picket fence, with no pattern repeated on any one street.

To demonstrate Seaside's commitment to the public domain, a Gazebo was built at the end of the first block on Tupelo Street. Visible from the main county road, this graceful and unpretentious structure in large measure established the scale of Seaside's first street.

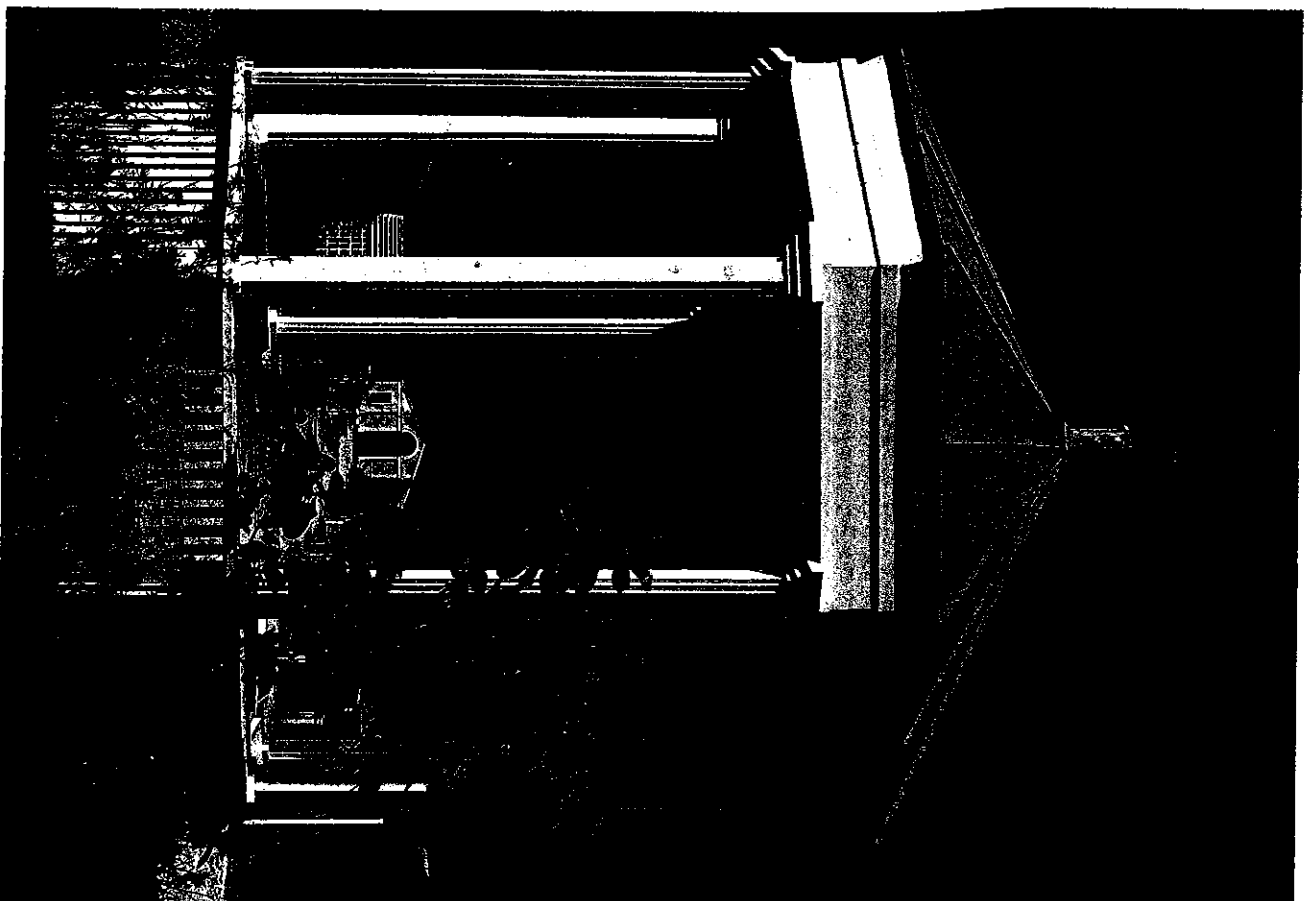
Shortly thereafter, the Tupelo Street Beach Pavilion was built as a symbolic gateway to the sea, an invitation to *share* the beach—a stark contrast to the high-rise condominiums that block the view and access to the sea. The Tupelo Street Beach Pavilion became not just an icon for Seaside but also a widely used symbol for Florida's remaining unspoiled beaches and the growing commitment to preserve them.

These simple landmark structures (usually absent from most planned developments, except, perhaps, for a solitary guardhouse) transformed Tupelo Street—with less than a dozen houses—into a real neighborhood, and made it possible to perceive at a glance the basic urban concept of Seaside.

Initial sales in 1982 were better than anticipated, helped by an early recognition in both the architectural and popular press that the Seaside plan might very well become a model for changing the patterns of urban and suburban growth.

AT LEFT:

*Early Tupelo Street with the Tupelo Street Beach Pavilion. Even with so few structures, the planning behind Seaside was evident.*



*The Tupelo Street Gazebo with the Tupelo Street Beach Pavilion in the background.*

# THE SEASIDE CODE

The Master Plan and Seaside Urban Code were drafted in the summer of 1982. While they continually evolve, they are still based upon their original simple, cogent concepts. Both the Plan and Code are graphic documents, easily understood by the citizen-buyer.

As few rules as necessary are incorporated into the Code in order to ensure that each Seaside house will continue the regional building tradition and will contribute to giving Seaside's neighborhoods the cohesion and strong sense of place that characterize such American towns as Charleston, Savannah, Nantucket, and Cape May. Seaside's houses share a common vocabulary of building forms and materials, but great variety and heterogeneity exist and are encouraged.

The Code, which reads like an outline for a nineteenth-century town, is coordinated with the Master Plan to produce streets that are physically comfortable and visually delightful for pedestrians. Although they are designed to accommodate cars and parking, they also encourage walking over driving.

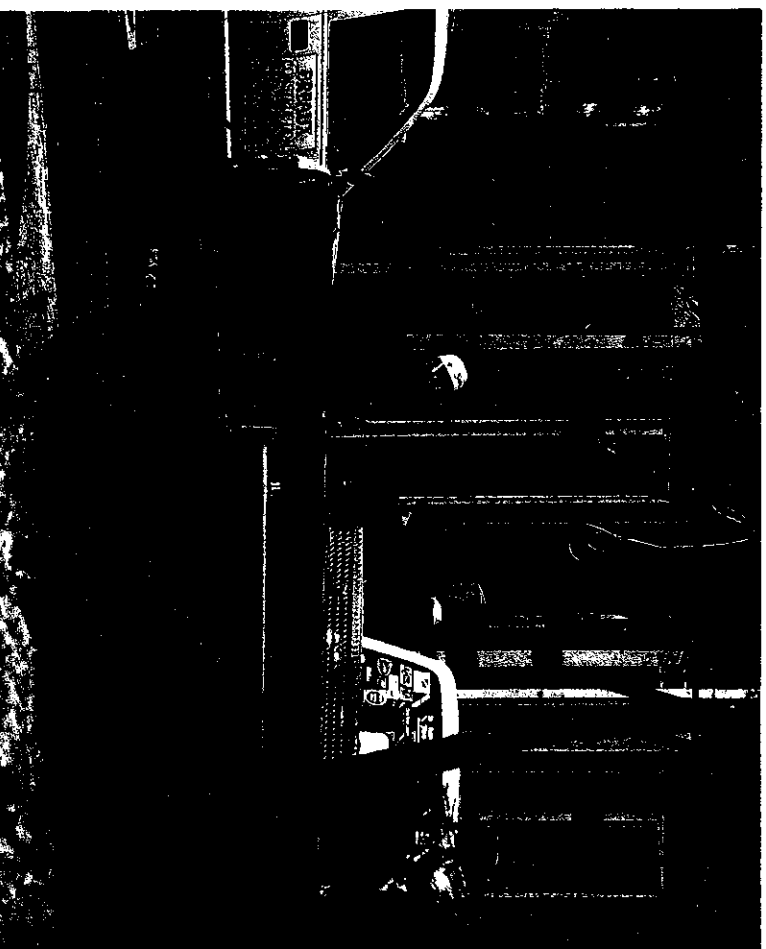
The guidelines are explicit enough to allow purchasers who do not wish to hire architects to work directly with contractors and builders.

In Seaside's early years, Davis enforced the Code virtually single-handedly and presided over nearly every aspect of the town's development, from the stationery type styles to the entrées for the restaurant. Architects working at Seaside often referred to Davis as "the duke." It is, in fact, his sweeping personal commitment that facilitates the quality control unique in a speculative project of this type.

Many architects have found the Seaside Code restrictive. Some prominent designers tried unsuccessfully to circumvent its constraints, and their designs were rejected. Others simply refused

even to attempt to design within its rules. New York architect Deborah Berke, on the other hand, who has an outspoken disdain for architectural melodrama, found room enough in the Code to produce more than a dozen elegant and unembellished, yet stylistically distinctive houses. Designs by architects Walter Chatham, Rafael Pelli, Alex Gorlin, Victoria Casasco, and Carey McWhorter all demonstrate the real flexibility inherent in the Code. These houses are featured in "A Walk Through Seaside," later in this book.

*Homeowners and their builder confer on construction of their new house.*





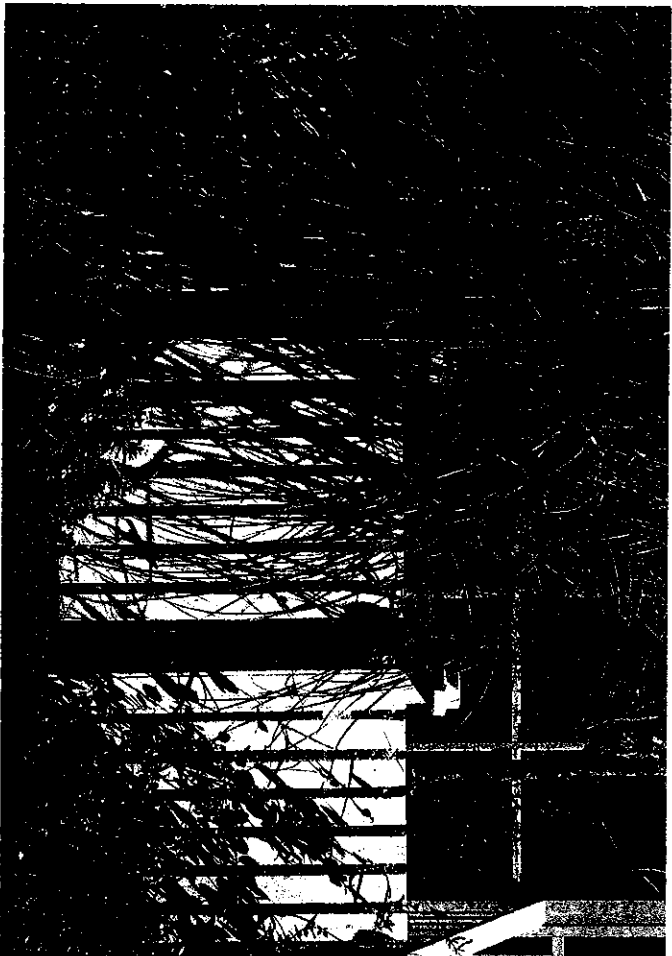
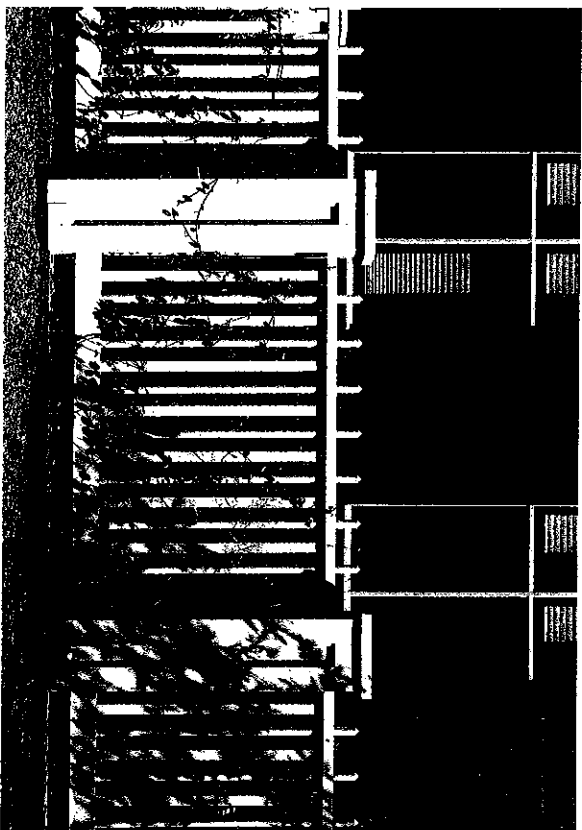
## Picket Fences

Picket fences were required not only for their evocative appeal, but also because they serve the critical role of defining the edge and maintaining the scale of the street. In Duany and Plater-Zyberk's words, "... [they] project the human presence within the house to those passing on the street." The effect, ultimately, encourages pedestrian traffic.

Seaside's white picket fences are true vernacular forms and are as individual as regional accents in speech. This expression of background and taste prevents the dulling homogeneity of overly planned developments such as those in Boca Raton, Florida, or Miami's Fisher Island. These projects, unlike Seaside, are usually the result of one designer using the same motifs with numbing regularity and no authentic variety.

With the exception of the larger-scaled Town Center buildings and the Lyceum, the Code requires white painted, wood picket fences at the street-front and path-front property lines. Seaside Avenue lots require picket fences at the front setback lines. Individual fence patterns may not replicate each other on the same street. A gateway and entrance from all streets and footpaths must be provided.

*Picket fences along Savannah Street.*



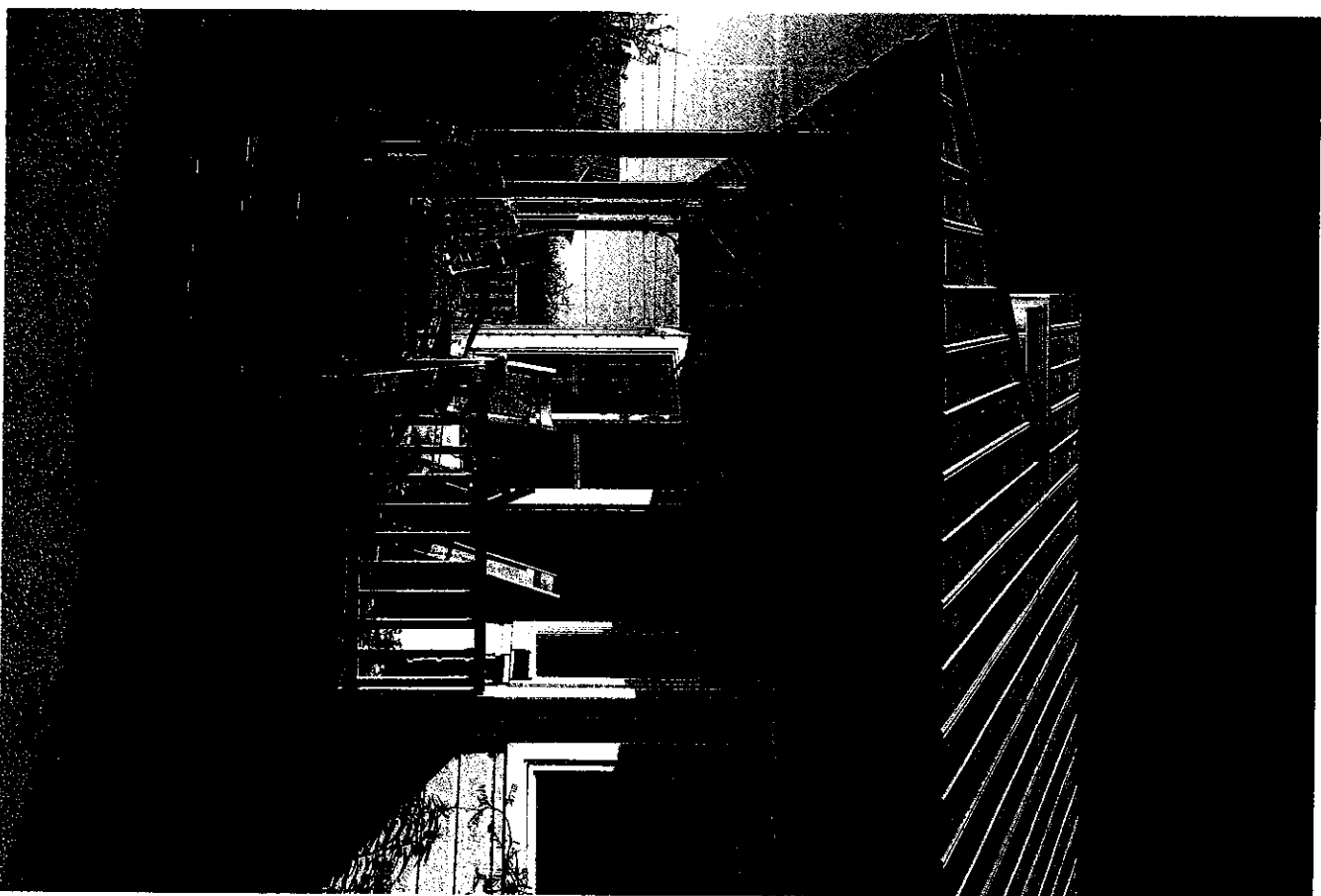
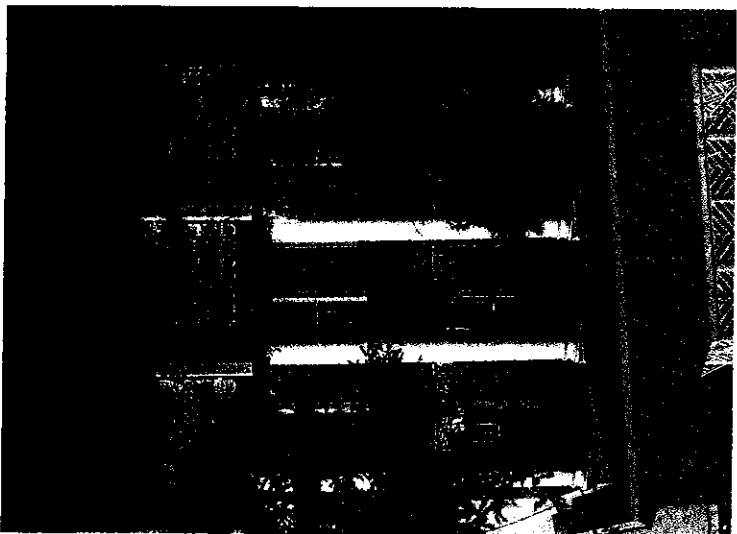
## Porches

Every house at Seaside is required to have a front porch. The distance from the front porch to the picket fence was calculated to accommodate neighborly chats. While picket fences promote short exchanges, porches encourage longer conversations. They are a gentle transition between the completely private life within and the public life of the street. Even intensely private people have shown surprising gregariousness under the spell of a front porch.

Many Seaside cottages also have side and back porches. These offer the advantages of ventilation and contact with the sights, sounds, and smells of the environment but with more privacy than a front porch. While the front porch offers an inviting site for afternoon tea, a side porch facing an inner courtyard is ideal for a midday nap or an intimate dinner.

AT LEFT:  
*Watching the sunset from  
the porch of Josephine's  
Bed & Breakfast.*

AT RIGHT:  
*The porch of the Dreamside Cottage,  
designed by Orr and Taylor.*



## Roofs

The profile of a roof is among the most defining characteristics of a house. The peaked roof, for example, appears almost universally in children's drawings of "a house." The Code carefully specifies rooflines and roof details typical of the Gulf region. The high-pitched roof (eight in twelve) with deep overhangs was chosen for the ventilation and sun protection it affords and for its ease of waterproofing as much as for aesthetics.

In keeping with traditional design, Seaside roofs must have symmetrical peaks and soffits are not permitted. Fascias may not completely cover rafter tails, and roof cladding materials must be either wood shake, metal shingle, corrugated metal sheet, V-crimp metal sheet, or standing seam metal sheet. Metal roofs may not be painted. Flat roofs are permitted only when accessible from an adjacent enclosed space.

In keeping with the local vernacular, one of the first houses built at Seaside was given a tin roof. Tin roofs are easy to fabricate and are highly affordable. Some area residents who thought the material "cheap looking" wrote bitter (even threatening) complaints to Davis that he was making the community look like "Tobacco Road."

Local developers predicted the choice was a guarantee of his failure. This initial resistance only further proved to Davis how far designers, planners, and local residents had distanced themselves from their own local building traditions—which, in fact, *did* include tin roofs.

One of the early Seaside houses used shake shingles on its roof. They did not age as well near the beach, however, and, even though permitted by the Code, were not selected by other homeowners who, despite the early controversy, tended to use tin.



*Peaked tin roofs, one of the traditional vernacular features of Seaside architecture.*

# Windows

Like the roofline, windows contribute significantly to the overall character of both the individual house and the neighborhood. Vertical windows subtly echo the standing human form and small square windows mirror the human face.

Vertical window forms found throughout the country contrast sharply with the large, unsegmented, horizontal or "picture" windows typical of postwar ranch houses. Some design theorists have criticized picture windows as defeating the very notion of shelter and reducing views of the landscape to a large, static mural or TV screen. In his book *Architectural Compositions*, Rob Krier writes, "Our awareness of the outside world is intensified by . . . windows with structuring bars . . . and becomes weaker the bigger the window opening is." (Leonardo da Vinci himself advises that small rooms strengthen the mind while larger ones weaken it.)

The Seaside Code specifies the traditional window types that harmoniously work with the other vernacular elements. Windows are specified as casement, awning, or double hung. Individual windows and porch openings must be square or, when rectangular, of a vertical proportion not less than 1:1.5. They are required to be constructed of wood, or wood with metal or plastic cladding. Only true di-

vided lights are permitted rather than the very common, artificial "snap-ins." Shutters, too, must be real and operable. Horizontal awning-type windows are allowed only at clerestories.

Windows are considered so important to the overall ambience and scale of Seaside that proposals for any other window types—fan windows, circle windows, stained glass, or fixed glass—must be submitted for approval to the Seaside Architectural Review Committee to ensure their compatibility.

*The vertical or square window typical of houses in most Southern towns is required at Seaside.*

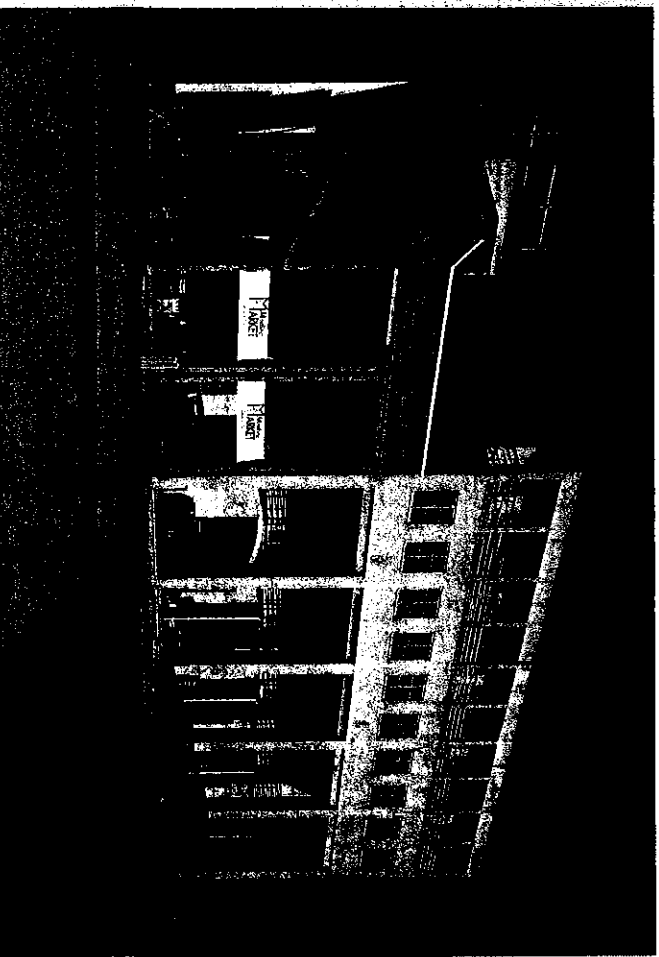


# HOUSE AND BUILDING TYPES

The Seaside Code defines eight specific building types and their particular space requirements.

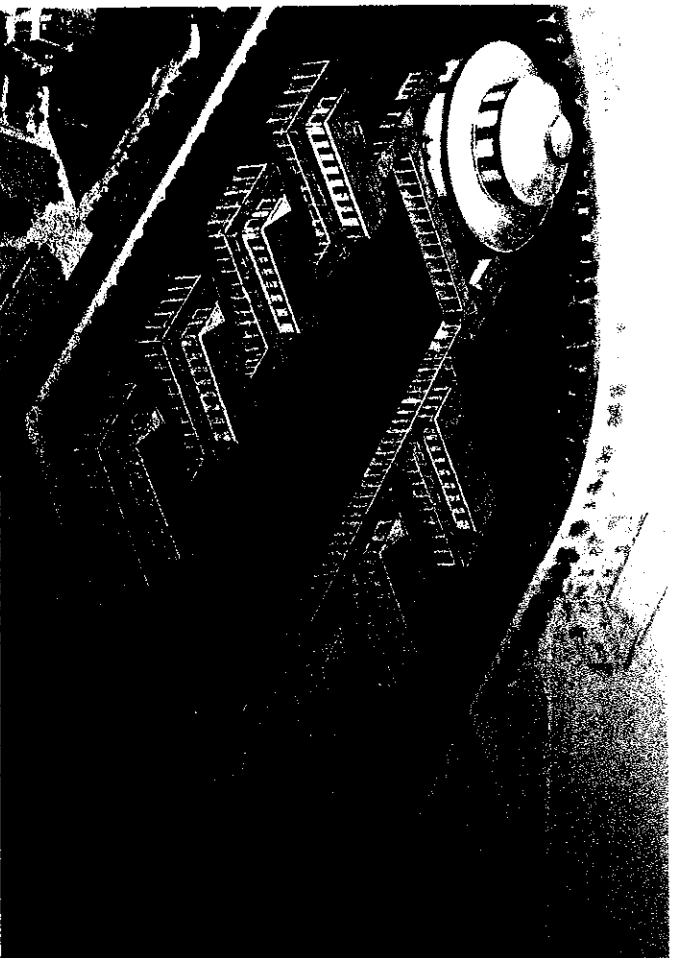
## Type I

These lots define the large Central Square that runs along Courty Route C-30A. The zoning is intended for retail on the ground floors and residential above. Type I buildings are Seaside's tallest at a maximum of five stories in height. They have party walls with no front setbacks, and they require a large arcade. Their prototype is found on main streets throughout the South. One such example is the Charleston Battery.



## Type II

These lots define the small pedestrian square at the front of the town hall. Zoning is intended primarily for office use, although there is provision for apartments and retail establishments. The Code dictates four-story buildings with courtyards and smaller buildings at the rear. Only minimum variety in arcades and silhouettes is allowed. This square is intended to have a decidedly more sedate and dignified appearance than the Central Square. Its prototype is found in the Vieux Carré of New Orleans.



*The Lycium, designed by Walter Chatham, is a Type II building.*

AT LEFT:

*The Modica Market, designed by Deborah Berke, and Dreamland Heights, designed by Steven Holl, are examples of a Type I building.*

## Type III

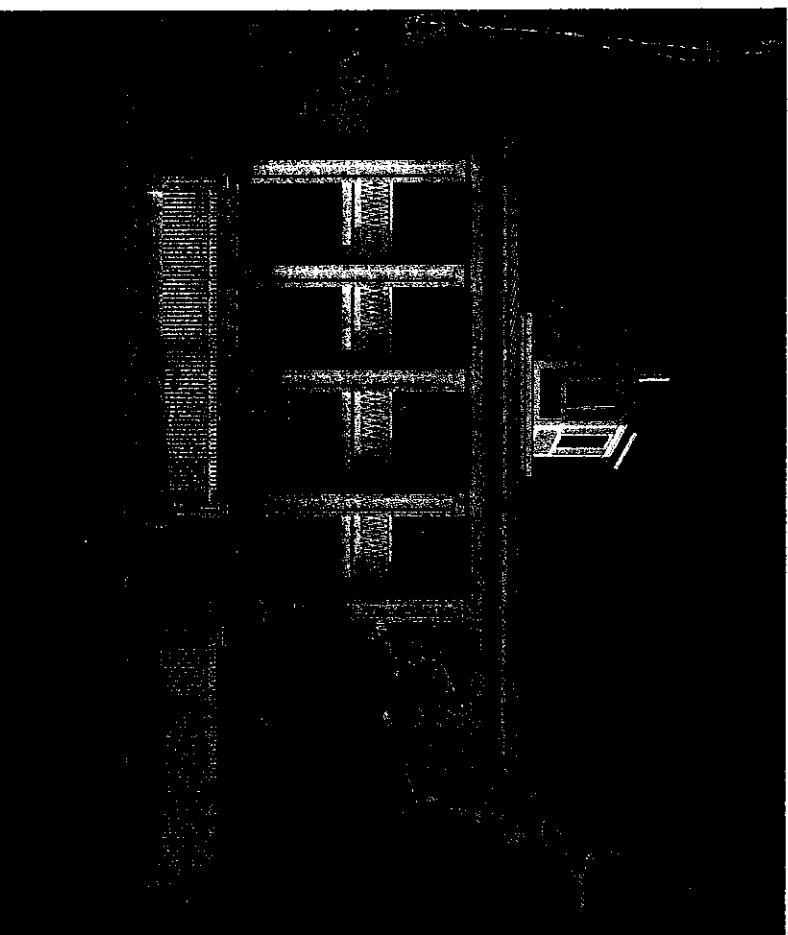
These buildings have two uses, which are ultimately determined by lot size and location. Large lots face the service street at the rear of the Central Square. Warehouses for storage and workshops will occupy them. Small lots occur along the north-south pedestrian route and connect what will be the church with the Central Square. These are for small shops. Type III buildings are party-wall buildings with few restrictions other than a limit on height. Their prototype is Jackson Square in New Orleans.



*The town houses at Ruskin Place, Type III buildings.*

## Type IV

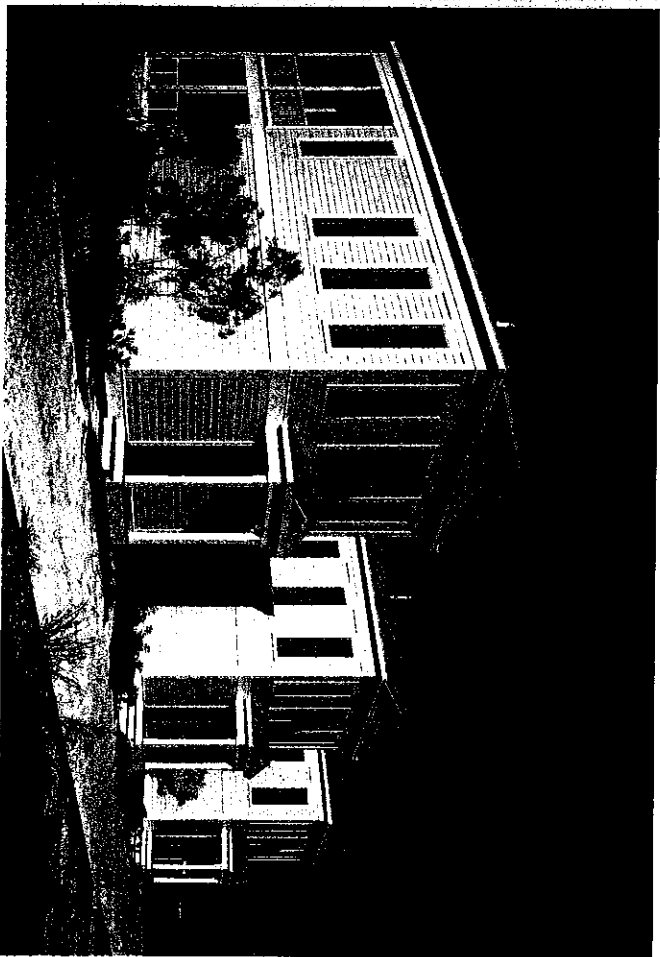
These are the large lots that line Seaside Avenue, which connects the Central Square to the tennis and pool areas. Type IV buildings are large, freestanding buildings with substantial outbuildings at the rear. This type includes private houses, small apartment buildings, or bed-and-breakfast inns. The setbacks on all sides, together with a continuous porch mandated for the street front, generate a look of grandeur. Their prototype is the Greek Revival mansion of the antebellum South.



*203 Seaside Avenue, designed by architect Don Cooper, is a Type IV building.*

## Type V

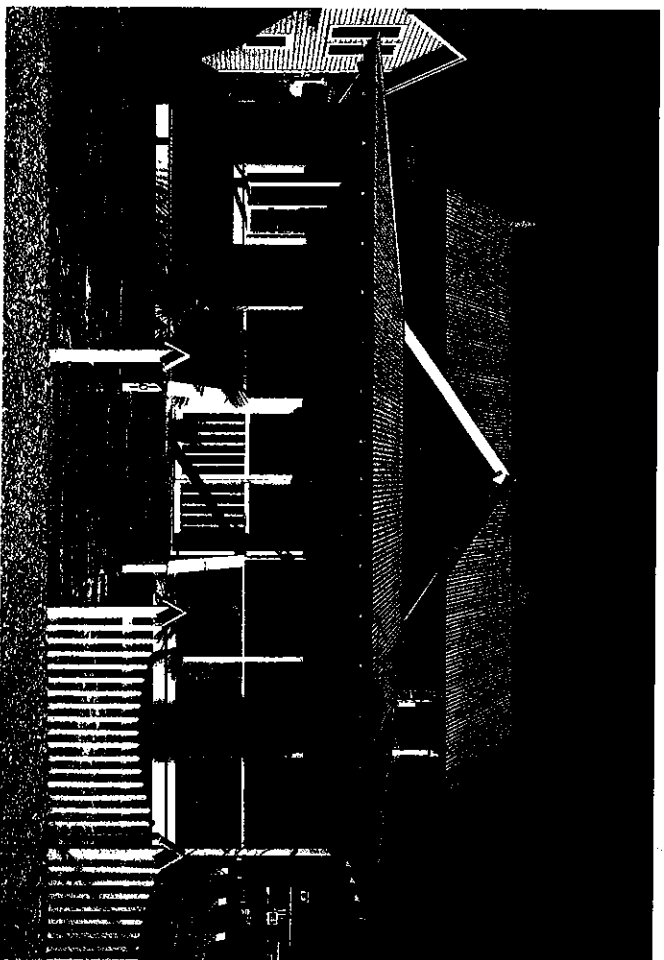
This is a special category for large lots that can contain several buildings. The lots must be planned as coherent groupings.



*The Honeymoon Cottages, designed by architect Scott Merrill, are Type V buildings.*

## Type VI

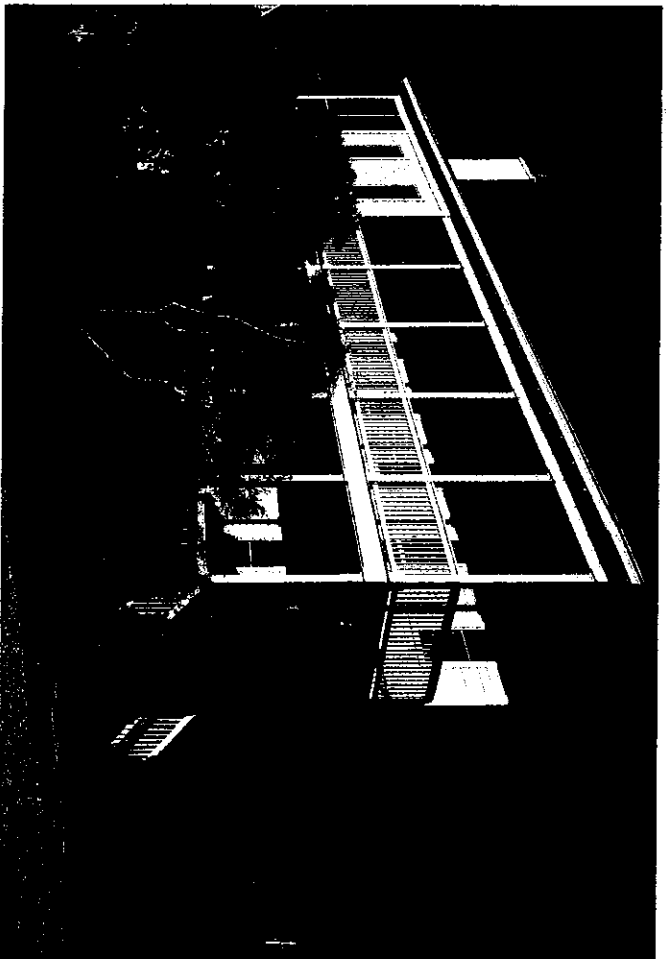
These lots constitute the suburban section of Seaside. They occur on the north-south streets with views of the sea. Lots become slightly smaller toward the center to promote increased density. Type VI buildings are freestanding houses for which the construction of small outbuildings at the rear for use as guesthouses and rental units are encouraged. Requirements for substantial-sized front yards secure the view of the sea for inland units. The picket fences help to maintain the street edge. The prototype is found throughout the suburban and rural South.



*101 Savannah Street, designed by architect Deborah Berke, is a Type VI building.*

## Type VII

This building type occurs along the east-west streets where no view of the sea is possible. Lots are smaller and less expensive. Since a view corridor is unnecessary, the front setbacks are minimal. A zero setback is permitted along one of the side yards. The Type VII prototype is the Charleston single house with a side yard.



*103 Grayton, designed by Scott Merrill, is a Type VII building.*

AT RIGHT:

*The Krier Cottage, designed by theorist-architect Leon Krier at 115 Tupelo Street, is a Type VIII building.*

## Type VIII

These buildings are found throughout the residential areas of town on sites that function as gateways or focal points. The Code provisions are more liberal than those of Type VI and Type VII, permitting slightly greater height and freedom of placement on the lot. This flexibility allows for greater variety within the residential districts.

