

Earth and Sky

A New Urbanism development in Florida blends traditional southern architecture and agrarian life with big-city conveniences. **TEXT BY NIGEL MAYNARD**



The New Urbanism of Sky in Florida will embrace bold ideas on design for the twenty-first century. Opposite: Renderings of Sky's timeless architectural style.

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It's been almost 30 years since the Miami-based firm Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ) redefined land planning with the resort community of Seaside. Viewed as a pioneering achievement, Seaside is considered the first development to demonstrate New Urbanism principles, and it marks the moment traditional neighborhood development (TND) seeped into land-planning discourse.

Seaside's success spawned hundreds of communities designed in the same spirit. But just when it seemed that there wasn't another concept around which to develop a TND, along comes an idea so crazy that it just might work.

The development is called Sky, and it features all the typical New Urbanism prerequisites such as pedestrian-friendly

planning, narrow streets, and centrally located amenities. But unlike other projects, Sky attempts to fuse the amenities of rural life with the conveniences and vibrancy of urban living.

"There are two key aspects to Sky," says designer Julia Starr Sanford, principal of Starr Sanford Design Associates and half of White Starr, Inc., the town's founders, based in Amelia Island, Florida. "The community is integrated into gardening and agriculture. The entire place is based on an Old World model of an Italian market village, where on the edge of the town you see the farmland and gardens. At Sky, it's woven throughout the development in a number of ways." The other focus of Sky is conservation—of land, water, and energy.

"Master planned" by DPZ and Starr

Sanford Design, Sky is located 45 miles west of Tallahassee, Florida, on an old flower farm that was purchased by real estate investor Bruce White, the other principal of White Starr. Its plan calls for 624 homes spread across 571 acres of longleaf pine forests and cypress wetlands. Almost 105 acres will be preserved as open space, and another 154 acres will be dedicated to community-supported organic agriculture.

In addition to the gardens and farms, Sky will include stables, an equestrian complex, and riding trails; a weekly farmer's market; a gourmet grocery, retail shops, and restaurants; meditation and yoga loggias; three dog parks; hiking trails; a lake and spring-fed pools; a village composting center and native-plant nursery; and an interfaith sanctuary.



The homes of Sky will range from 400 square feet to 2,500 square feet and will be dispersed among hamlets: a Garden district for bungalows, garden villas, and cottages; an Estate district for country estates and compound houses; and an Eco district of small carbon footprint homes. Town houses and attached courtyard homes and live/work units will occupy the town center, but single-family units will dominate in the areas outside of town.

Because of Sky's horticultural focus, some of its lots are roughly three times the size of typical New Urbanism parcels, which can be 35 feet by 85 feet or 50 by 100. By contrast, some of Sky's lots measure up to 200 feet by 200 feet. Lot prices in the limited first release will range from \$29,000 to \$59,000, the developers say.

To help realize Sky's architectural philosophy, White Starr enlisted a notable collection of architects and designers that specialize in creating fine traditional homes. The list includes such firms as Ike Kligerman Barkley Architects in New York City; Dungan Nequette Architects in Birmingham, Alabama; and Rock Maple Studio in Sunapee, New Hampshire. Each firm designed a house type (10 in all) that holds to southern vernacular style, with high ceilings, deep verandas and overhangs, loggias, and porches.

"We're trying to build for the long term," says Sanford, "so construction will be predominantly masonry to weather the storms." Walls will be built of energy efficient compressed-earth block; exterior architectural details will

be constructed of a glass-infused wood alternative to pressure-treated lumber; and roofs will be metal, stone, or cedar.

"Rooted in the tradition of the region, Sky is distinctly sustainable," Sanford explains. "The homes that dot the fields will seem to belong. Their walls of coral stone, weathered board, shingle, and louvers suit the natural setting, and a comfortable palette of shapes, materials, and colors will blend with the native trees and wild wetland hammocks."

On top of all the other amenities, Sky has a bold plan to be off the grid for a portion of the day, which will result in net-zero energy for the entire neighborhood. The primary method for doing this is with tried-and-true architectural techniques such as site orientation and



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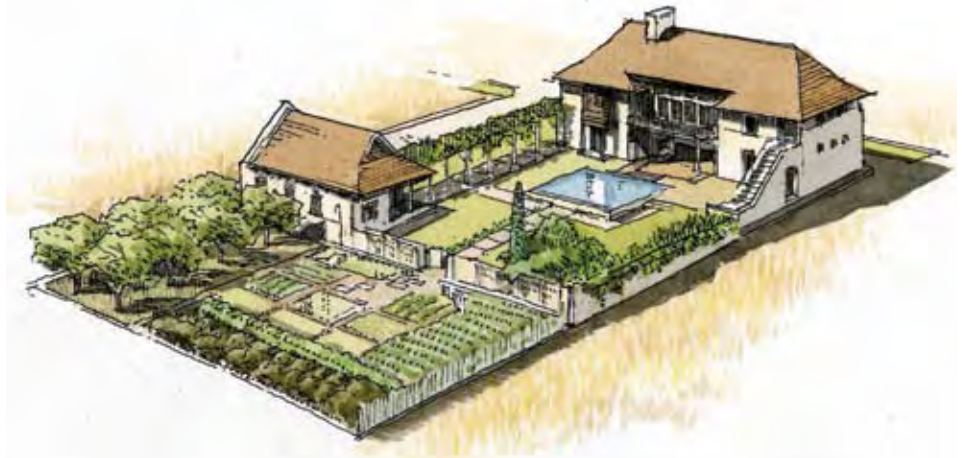
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Sky offers home sites that include land for agriculture. Shown above is Sky's farm plan.

passive solar principles. It also involves whiz-bang technologies that will be undertaken by the University of Florida; Florida State University's Center for Advanced Power Systems (CAPS); and the Sky Institute for the Future, a non-profit teaching, research, and conference center to be located on-site. The institute will sponsor an energy summit that will bring together engineers, planners, and architects to work with a scientist to design case study homes.

"It's exciting to have the opportunity to use our expertise in renewable and sustainable energy technologies in creating such a unique development," David Cartes, an assistant professor of mechanical engineering in the Florida A&M University-Florida State University College of Engineering, told *ScienceDaily*. "This project has the potential to serve as a model for future developments throughout the United States."

CAPS is one of eight teams that received \$1.8 million from Florida's Renewable Energy Technologies Grant Program to apply these technologies to Sky. It will be installing and analyzing a geothermal hot water system that uses the earth to circulate water to all of the homes, as well as solar collectors, fuel cells, and biomass systems to generate power over electric micro-grids.

"The plan is to build 25 homes that utilize these technologies, collect and analyze the data to see how well they perform, and then use that informa-

tion to optimize the technology used in future build-out phases," Cartes told *ScienceDaily*. In essence, the information learned from one set of houses in a hamlet will be applied to the next set.

White and Sanford are not strangers to New Urbanism, so it's likely the two didn't hatch Sky out of thin air. White lives in Rosemary Beach, another successful New Urbanism town in the Florida Panhandle, and Sanford designed 18 of its homes. She also designed homes in Alys Beach, another cutting-edge TND.

"I think the thing that distinguishes Sky from a lot of other sustainable developments is that the architecture is very traditional and integrates the new technology in a way that's attractive," Sanford says.

"Like Seaside, Sky is innovative and will be a very influential project," explains Galina Tahchieva, director of town planning at DPZ. "We now have two decades of sustainable urbanism from which to build, but Sky sets an entirely new standard. The environmentalism of Seaside was more intuitive; it was common-sense environmental thinking. Sky is one of the first developments in the country to try to be minimally dependent on municipal services within a rural context. Here we are combining what we've learned about traditional urbanism with technological advancements." **NOH**

Nigel Maynard is a freelance writer living in Washington, D.C.