

design matters

A VISUAL GUIDE INTO THE LIFE OF **EDSA**

_AESTHETICS OF DENSITY
HOW IT FEELS, NOT JUST HOW IT FITS

_DESIGN DIVIDENDS
THE RETURN ON RESTRAINT

_COMPOSING PLACE
IMPACT COMES FROM INTENTION

_HOSPITALITY EVERYWHERE
THE EXPERIENCE STANDARD

The most enduring places
are shaped by those who see
beyond the project to the
possibilities it creates.



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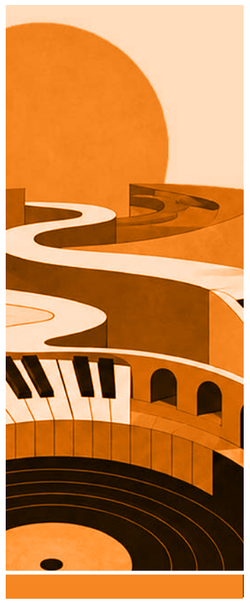
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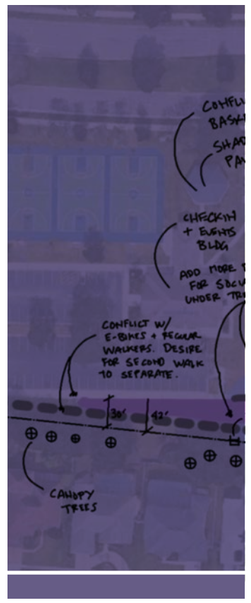







TABLE OF CONTENTS

05 LETTER FROM THE CEO

07 AESTHETICS OF DENSITY

15 COMPOSING PLACE

23 DESIGN DIVIDENDS

31 HOSPITALITY EVERYWHERE

39 PLANNING FOR THE LONG GAME

47 EDSA ECONOMICS

55 STAYING POWER

63 RETREAT, RESIST, RESPOND

71 DESIGNERS' LUNCH GUIDE



Experience Matters.

Growing up, the things we worked hardest to learn, the things we had to earn, were the things that mattered most. There was more meaning in earning something than simply being given it. The process mattered and there was real value in the experience gained along the way.

And experience accumulates. It builds over time. Through the good and the bad, meaningful relationships and even hard lessons. All are moments that stay with us. Giving us perspective and ultimately shaping our judgment.

For me, much of that awareness came from seeing the world. I am lucky enough to have spent a good part of my career traveling, interacting with people from many different countries and cultures. Those experiences have profoundly influenced how I think and broadened my understanding of the world.

As a parent, I wanted my children to develop that same ability. To look beyond what they knew, form their own views, and find their way in the world. So, we got them on the road early, traveling to places as far from home as China. Those experiences became foundational memories but more importantly, it gave them perspective.

There is a difference between being told something and coming to understand it for yourself. We can gather research and decipher information, but it is experience that gives us context. Over time, that experience becomes perspective; shaping how we think, respond, and make decisions.

The same principle applies to our design craft. What we bring to our work is a reflection of everything we have observed, tested, and learned. It is a culmination of decades of inspiration, projects, travel, successes, failures (and we have had our share), amazing collaborations and client relationships. Together, these experiences inform how we think, the decisions we make, and the way we approach our work. Creativity and vision do not happen by chance. They too are earned.

Whether you have been doing this work for fifty years, fifteen years, or five minutes, you are building experience through curiosity, real-world exposure, and a willingness to keep learning. The places we visit, people we meet, and conversations we have all become part of what we carry forward.

As we embrace the endless possibilities that allow us to work faster, smarter, and become more capable, it is increasingly important that we remain grounded and build on the perspectives that makes each of us distinct and our work meaningful. That cannot be manufactured or automated.

So, yes. Design matters. The work we produce matters. But what gives all of it meaning is the experience and perspective each of us brings. Our experiences shape our perspective. Our perspective informs our judgment. And in today's world, that judgment is becoming more valuable than ever.

As you jump into this year's issue of Design Matters, enjoy sharing in the experiences, ideas, and stories of the people behind our work. They are a reflection of what we have learned, what we carry forward, and how we see the world.

Enjoy.



B. Scott LaMont, PLA, ASLA
Chief Executive Officer



AESTHETICS OF DENSITY

> The most desirable communities are not those with the most space, but those that make the most of what they have. — Mihaela Zaharescu

Density has long been a numbers game – measured by units, building area, and development yield. But as land becomes more constrained and lifestyle expectations evolve, a more nuanced understanding is emerging.

As density becomes less about volume and more about experiences, the quality of how places are organized matters just as much as how much they accommodate. For Mihaela Zaharescu, a Vice President at EDSA, that distinction is evident in the destinations people gravitate toward. “The most desirable communities are not those with the most space, but those that make the most of what they have.”

Yet despite that shift in thinking, density continues to carry baggage. According to EDSA Principal Michael Batts, people often equate density with congestion, infrastructure strain, or loss of community. But successful places can become more vibrant because of it. “Density fuels activation and shared experiences. It generates an energy that allows places to become dynamic and creates conditions for neighborhoods, culture, and community to take root and thrive.”



BEYOND THE NUMBERS

The case for building more compactly is well established. Land costs are rising, housing affordability is tightening, walkable lifestyles are preferred, and cars are optional.

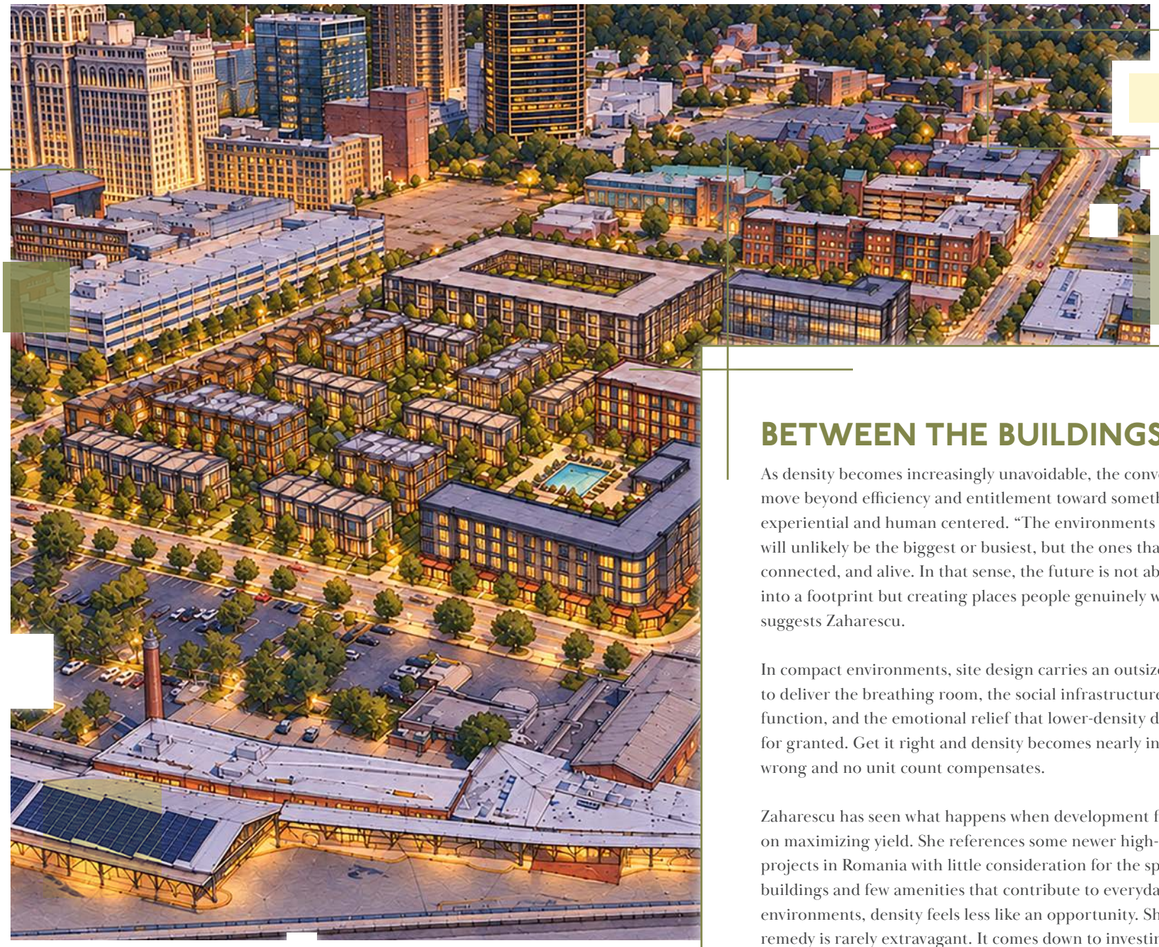
The resistance to density is less about fact and more about perception. But for landscape architects, density is rarely experienced through building height or unit counts. Instead, it is felt through the organization of the public realm – the relationships between uses, rhythms of movement, and balance between activity and retreat.

Batts is seeing this dynamic play out across three urban projects EDSA is currently advancing: revitalization efforts in historic downtown Savannah, Georgia; a mixed-use redevelopment in Greensboro, North Carolina; and the Beale Street District in Memphis, Tennessee. In each case, conversations with stakeholders and constituents rarely center on density. "Nobody comes to a public meeting saying they want more density," he shares. "They talk about wanting a neighborhood they can walk around, places to gather, more housing options, and things to do. Density is the enabler that allows those things to happen."

At its best, density helps create the critical mass that allows community to form. It creates the conditions for everyday interactions, shared routines, and informal relationships that transform a collection of buildings into a neighborhood. The coffee shop visited every morning. The walk home from work. The familiar faces in a park. Here community emerges through repetition and density becomes the catalyst for connection, belonging, and identity.

The challenge is ensuring that density supports those interactions without becoming overwhelming. Cyrus Khan, a Senior Associate at EDSA, refers to a carefully calibrated intensity. "It's deciding where activity is concentrated, how movement, program, and social life flow through a place as an active field, and where moments of pause, reflection, and reconnection unfold over time." In this sense, successful density is less about compression and more about composition – allowing people to engage, relax, explore, and reconnect as they experience a place.

The data reflects a genuine appetite for that. The 2026 PwC/ ULI Emerging Trends in Real Estate Report identifies mixed-use, amenity-rich, experience-driven developments as one of the industry's strongest long-term opportunities. "What's getting funded are the Class A projects," notes Batts. "Those in the right location, with the right amenities, and authentic to locale."



THE NEWS AND RECORD DISTRICT | GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA



BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS

As density becomes increasingly unavoidable, the conversation must move beyond efficiency and entitlement toward something far more experiential and human centered. "The environments that resonate most will unlikely be the biggest or busiest, but the ones that feel intuitive, connected, and alive. In that sense, the future is not about fitting more into a footprint but creating places people genuinely want to be part of," suggests Zaharescu.

In compact environments, site design carries an outsized burden. It has to deliver the breathing room, the social infrastructure, the ecological function, and the emotional relief that lower-density development takes for granted. Get it right and density becomes nearly invisible. Get it wrong and no unit count compensates.

Zaharescu has seen what happens when development focuses exclusively on maximizing yield. She references some newer high-rise residential projects in Romania with little consideration for the spaces between buildings and few amenities that contribute to everyday life. In those environments, density feels less like an opportunity. She remarks, "The remedy is rarely extravagant. It comes down to investing in shared spaces – the arrival sequence, shaded gathering areas, thoughtful planting, or simply somewhere comfortable to linger."

DESIGNING FOR HOW IT FEELS

Successful density makes places feel intuitive and alive.

CALIBRATE INTENSITY



LAYER EXPERIENCES



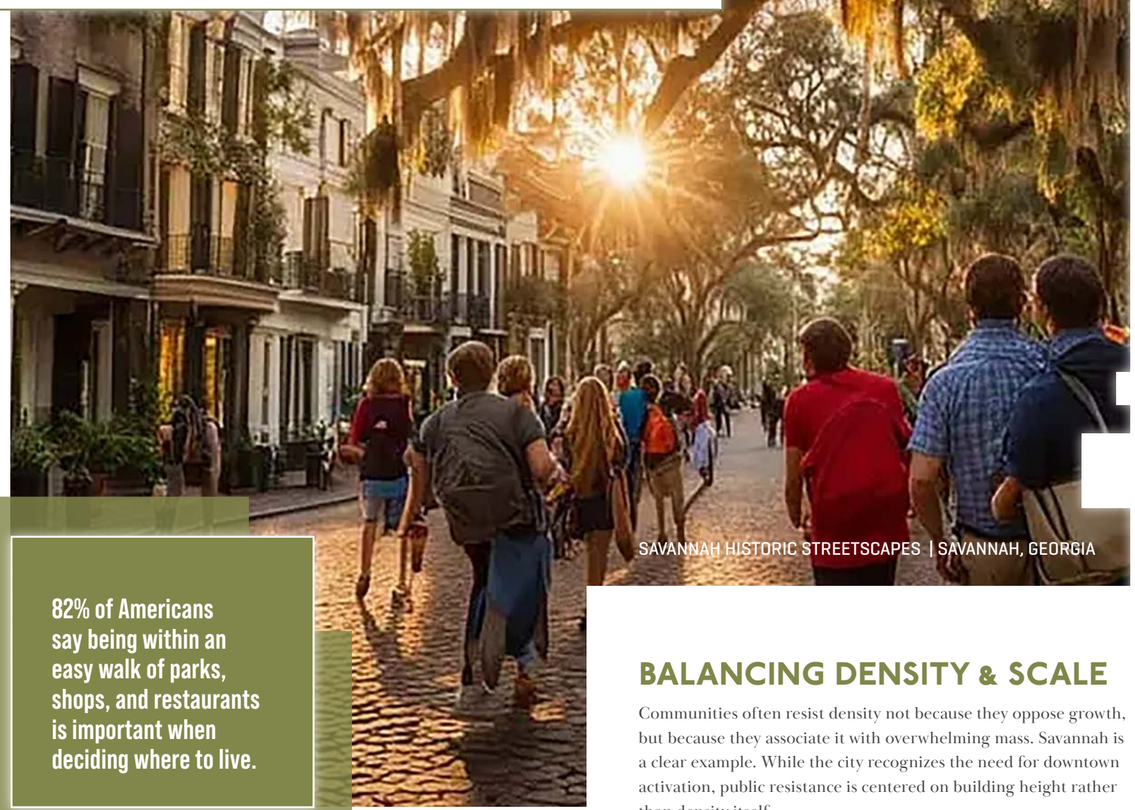
DESIGN THRESHOLDS



PRIORITIZE PEOPLE



> Density is about sequencing – where activity is concentrated, where it disperses, and how people transition between those conditions. — Cyrus Khan



SAVANNAH HISTORIC STREETSCAPES | SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

82% of Americans say being within an easy walk of parks, shops, and restaurants is important when deciding where to live.



JUBAIL ISLAND | ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Adding just 10 street trees to a city block is associated with health improvements comparable to being seven years younger.

These environments are most effective when they are carefully orchestrated. "Density is about sequencing – where activity is concentrated, where it disperses, and how people transition between those conditions," shares Khan. In practice, that means balancing active zones with passive ones or what Khan calls 'zones of reflection'. On large-scale master plans, that orchestration becomes especially important as designers balance growth with the qualities that make a place feel livable.

Projects like Jubail Island in Abu Dhabi show how density can be organized rather than concentrated. A town center serves as the primary activity hub while trail nodes, social spaces, and areas of refuge are dotted throughout the community. Higher-intensity destinations including the beachfront, boardwalk, and historic waterfront act as anchors with the spaces between them providing opportunities to slow down, explore, and reconnect with the landscape. "Rather than having activity everywhere, the plan creates a layered experience that feels varied, comfortable, and intuitive instead of concentrated," explains Khan.

BALANCING DENSITY & SCALE

Communities often resist density not because they oppose growth, but because they associate it with overwhelming mass. Savannah is a clear example. While the city recognizes the need for downtown activation, public resistance is centered on building height rather than density itself.

Batts frames the issue as a balancing act. "Much of what the community wants (more housing, stronger local economy, greater affordability, and a more vibrant public life), depends on accommodating more people within the existing urban fabric. So, we're making sure that growth doesn't negatively impact the character, identity, and place that people are trying to protect."

This is where design is a mediator. People rarely experience a city through calculations. They experience it from the sidewalk. "We often say the first twenty feet matter most," shares Batts. "People rarely focus on what's happening above if the ground plane is successful." When done right, street-level activation, preserved open space, and carefully framed public spaces can direct attention away from the scale of buildings above toward the quality of life unfolding below.

In Savannah, that principle is translating into a restored historic square, streets calibrated to feel genuinely residential, and ground-floor programming that gives people reasons to linger and return. Rather than treating density as a numbers exercise, the plan creates a public realm that feels familiar, walkable, and connected to the city's history. That layering of use and public realm investment is what will make 350 new homes feel like an addition rather than an imposition.

PROTECTING PERSONAL SPACE

One of the greatest misconceptions about density is that people are willing to trade privacy for proximity. In reality, as daily life becomes more interconnected, the ability to regulate one's level of engagement becomes increasingly important. For Zaharescu, "It's about giving people control and creating a range of experiences that allows them to shift naturally between participation and separation."

Hospitality environments demonstrate this particularly well. At Parrot Key Resort in Key West, Florida, four distinct pool environments offer varying levels of exposure and privacy. Rather than concentrating all activity into a single oversized amenity, the experience is distributed across a series of destinations. Some spaces are designed to be social and energetic, while others offer greater seclusion. Dense, tropical planting creates a sense of enclosure between the pools, allowing guests to feel as though they have discovered their own space within the resort. The result is an environment that feels both expansive and personalized despite its compact footprint.

While Parrot Key uses planting to create distinct experiences, Nova Southeastern University relies on a network of shaded pathways, gathering spaces, and landscape corridors to create moments of refuge within a growing campus environment. "The goal is to increase interaction and give people choices in how they participate," says Zaharescu. In both cases, the design helps moderate intensity – giving people opportunities to step away and engage on their own terms.



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY | DAVIE, FLORIDA

STRUCTURING COMPLEXITY

People rarely experience a district all at once. They experience it through a favorite street, a public square, waterfront promenade, or neighborhood gathering place. Successful environments create enough of these touchpoints to make places of any scale feel familiar.

"The larger a development becomes, the more anonymous it can feel. Places need identity and legibility," shares Batts. That often means creating a series of distinct districts or micro-communities. Some are intentionally centered around shared amenities or residential clusters, while others emerge more organically through patterns use and proximity. "The goal is not variety for variety's sake. People are far more likely to embrace complexity when they can understand how a place is organized and where they fit within it."

In many ways, the most successful mixed-use environments are composed of different places, each with their own uniquities yet connected by a larger story. Transitions are often subtle as streets narrow, planting palettes shift and materials respond to context. That thinking informed EDSA's work on the Khanh Hoi District in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where destinations are given their own identity through public space, programming, and design character. Rather than experiencing the district as a single large development, visitors encounter a series of places that feel distinct yet connected.

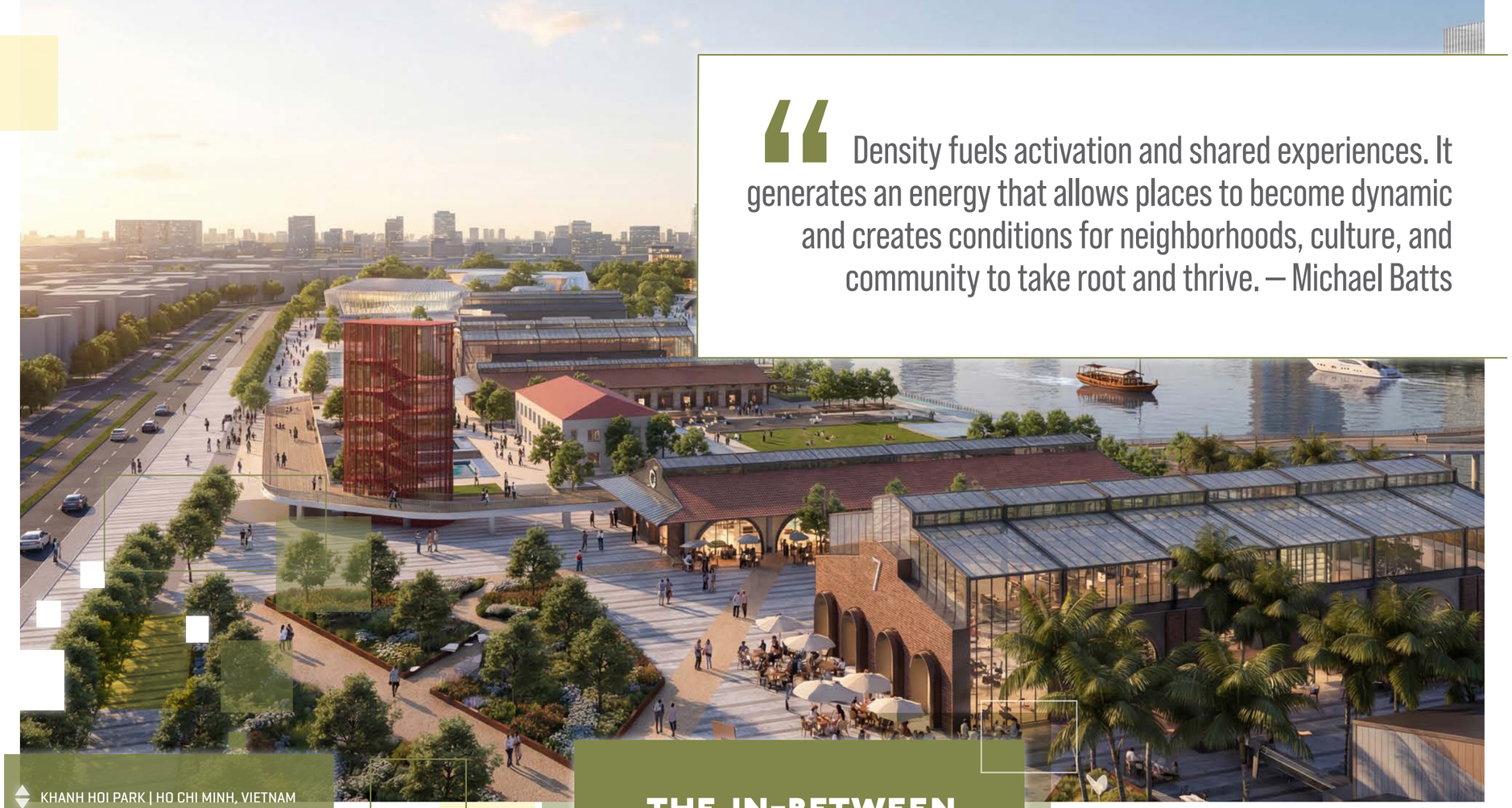
As environments become denser and more layered, the real challenge is not simply fitting more into a site but understanding how different intensities overlap. Housing, mobility, open space, programming, environmental performance, economics, and user experience all operate at once. Each decision has implications for the others – making it increasingly important to understand those relationships before they become fixed.

Technology helps navigate that complexity. Thresholds, Boolean relationships, attractor points, and numerical ranges allow teams to test planting intensity, irrigation demand, circulation, paving patterns, and program distribution across a site. "The value is not in arriving at a single answer. It's in having multiple iterations in our back pocket and understanding how small shifts in the parameters can change how a place performs and feels," says Khan.

AI-assisted scripting builds on that practice. "We have been translating density onto the drawing board through scripting for years," shares Khan. "AI is another way to decode those relationships – helping us build and test more nuanced connections between movement, program, performance, and experience." But Khan cautions that these tools are valuable for expanding the range of possibilities, not for answers. "AI can generate options but designers still determine which relationships matter, how they should be calibrated, the best means to align design intent with the character of place, and how the environment needs to function."

For Khan, the value of technology is not in replacing intuition, but in augmenting it. "The tools may be getting smarter, but successful density still depends on human judgment – understanding how places are experienced, how communities form, and how environments ultimately feel."





KHANH HOI PARK | HO CHI MINH, VIETNAM

> "Density fuels activation and shared experiences. It generates an energy that allows places to become dynamic and creates conditions for neighborhoods, culture, and community to take root and thrive. – Michael Batts

THE IN-BETWEEN

The spaces between buildings are where density is experienced and where value is created.

- **Movement:** Walkable networks, clear wayfinding, and active edges make it easy to move and explore.
- **Retreat:** Intimate settings, quiet corners, and sheltered areas provide a counterpoint to activity.
- **Nature:** Tree canopies, planting, and water features bring comfort, moderate microclimates, and support biodiversity.
- **Gathering:** Flexible spaces for casual encounters and community events build social infrastructure and connections.

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

Compact living is a choice – one that offers convenience, vibrancy, and access. As a result, density is not a constraint to manage, but an opportunity to create more complete and connected places. When approached with intention, it supports more efficient land use, strengthens local economies, reduces reliance on cars, and creates the critical mass needed to sustain culture, commerce, and community.

Ultimately, when density is designed around the human experience, it stops feeling like density and simply becomes a great place to be.

COMPOSING PLACE

YOU TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND OPEN YOUR EYES TO THE HUM OF A DISTANT BEAT. FOR A MOMENT, YOU ARE SOMEWHERE ELSE.

It is not music exactly, but it has rhythm — laughter, footsteps, conversation. The sounds that make a place feel alive. And though the daydream lasts only a moment, it carries you back to something familiar: a destination, a memory, a feeling held close.

Perhaps that is why our favorite places stay with us much like our favorite songs. They have tempo. They build, soften, surprise, and repeat. And just as music can hold a feeling long after the final note fades, design gives memory a place to live. Through movement and pause, shade and light, sound and texture, and arrival and discovery, planners and landscape architects are the composers of the experience, shaping places that leave an imprint long after time has passed.



The Motif

moh·teef / n.
a recurring element, idea, image, or design that appears throughout a work of art, literature, or music to help develop the central theme

DESIGNING FOR RESONANCE

When it comes to places that stay with us, our first thought rarely begins with a design feature. More often, it begins with a feeling. For Principal Gregg Sutton, that feeling is rooted in the calmness of mountainous landscapes filled with streams, vistas, and wildlife where he can disconnect from the outside world. Senior Associate Yutong Hu often returns to exciting memories tied to studying abroad in Wellington, New Zealand, where a waterfront corridor left a lasting impression through its seamless blend of urban life and nature.

As for Principal Derek Gagne, nostalgia can be found on his grandparents' farm, where the landscapes were shaped by seasons, transitions, planting, and harvest. "No matter who you are or what you're drawn to, places stay with us when they support and enrich the way we choose to live," shares Gagne. "Whether they invite connection, fulfillment, relaxation, or joy, meaning is created in the relationships between people and place, and how those relationships deepen over time."

Reflecting on Bridgesong, a new community currently underway in Blanchard, Oklahoma, Sutton aggrees. "From a design standpoint, building connections doesn't have to be complicated," he says, in reference to the site's golf component. "Traditional golf courses often include halfway houses where players can rest and socialize. But when we thought about some of our own most memorable moments on the course, we saw an opportunity to create something more integrated — a gathering space that extends beyond the expected experience."

That idea is taking shape through an informal practice range and putting green that doubles as a place for family activities. Flexible space, food and beverage, restrooms, and ample seating are deliberately positioned along the community's natural walking paths. By bringing these casual amenities into everyday view, a sport traditionally tucked behind clubhouse doors becomes a visible, low-pressure neighborhood anchor. "Simple? Yes. But it creates a destination that people, beyond just the golfers, can enjoy," notes Sutton. "That gives everyone a reason to stay, gather, and return."

"MEANING IS CREATED IN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PLACE, AND HOW THOSE RELATIONSHIPS DEEPEN OVER TIME." - DEREK GAGNE



BRIDGESONG | BLANCHARD, OKLAHOMA



The Harmony

har·muh·nee / n.
a pleasing combination of different parts or the simultaneous sounding of musical notes to form chords

WHERE EMOTION MEETS PERFORMANCE

The term often used to describe such nuances — where memories are made, people come together, and life unfolds, is placemaking.

Hu extends the definition, explaining that it is the link between a physical place and the emotional response it creates. "Placemaking is the difference between a vacation remembered as good and one remembered as great, or a neighborhood park you simply pass by versus one that invites you to slow down and move through it," she suggests. "It's that extra layer of surprise, calmness, and attention to detail that takes a destination from ordinary to extraordinary."

While placemaking sets the foundation for what makes an environment memorable, its true impact comes when the experience is shaped with intention. "It's a balancing act between what a place needs to do and how it should feel," continues Hu. "Rooting the design in local culture, creating those 'wow' moments, and layering in native planting — all meaningful elements. But none of them matter if the place doesn't function the way it should."

That equilibrium is brought to life at the recently completed The Red Sea EDITION located on Shura Island in Saudi Arabia. "For this project specifically, it was essential to incorporate key amenities that support social wellness and leave guests feeling rejuvenated," adds Gagne. "That was a non-negotiable, not only for the EDITION brand, but for the overall island experience."

Amenities such as the spa, fitness areas, pools, and Jiwa Beach Club are blended seamlessly into the master plan, giving guests places to recharge and socialize. But beyond those essentials, the design pushes the experience further into the island's natural landscape identity. Private villas are tucked thoughtfully into the shifting dunescape, minimizing environmental impact and protecting the delicate coastal geography.

At the same time, structural roofs inspired by the geometry of local seashells shelter the buildings, while intricately planted pathways weave between the amenities to create highly tactile, physical moments of discovery. Every detail works together to make the guest experience feel deeply and authentically connected to Shura Island.

As Gagne puts it, "The balance between purpose and placemaking is what helps set the tone for the larger destination, especially as one of the first hotels to open on the island."



THE RED SEA EDITION | SHURA ISLAND, SAUDI ARABIA

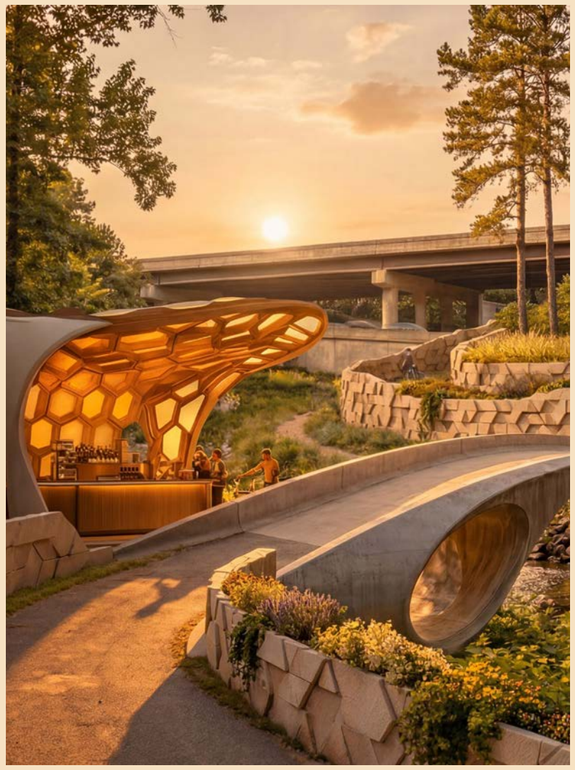


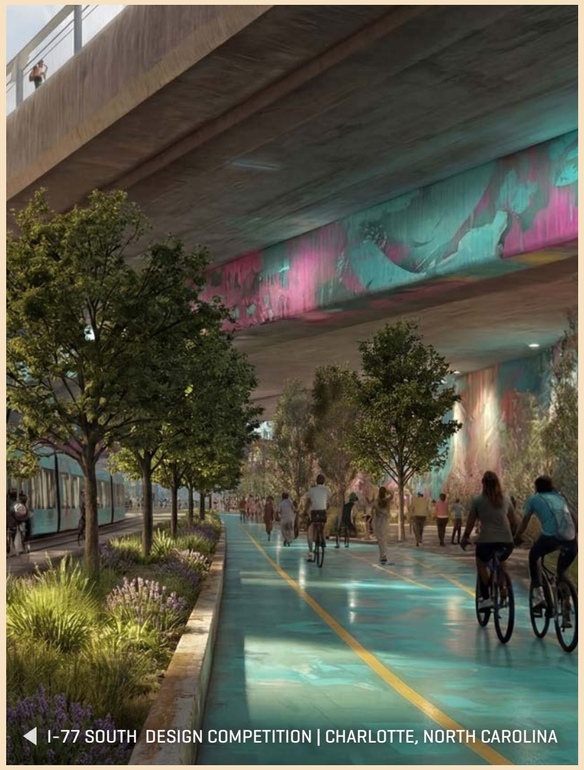
TAIKANG INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CENTER | NANJING, CHINA

The Rhythm

rith·um / n.
A strong, regular, repeated pattern of sounds, words, or movements

"IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE MOVE FROM ONE PLACE TO THE NEXT, BUT HOW THEY EXPERIENCE THE MOMENTS IN BETWEEN."- YUTONG HU





I-77 SOUTH DESIGN COMPETITION | CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

CHOREOGRAPHING THE JOURNEY

In shaping memorable destinations, many look to well-known concepts as frameworks for success. Power of 10, a theory by Project for Public Spaces, suggests that thriving places should offer at least ten activities, uses, and reasons to stay. Gordon Cullen's Serial Vision builds on a similar idea, emphasizing that places are understood in motion through a sequence of views, moments, and discoveries.

While these tried-and-true theories offer designers a valuable outline, the underlying rhythm of a place is often felt in something quieter — how naturally people move, where they choose to pause, and when they decide to connect. Often, these moments may seem effortless to the user, but they are carefully shaped through design.

"Take convenience and access, for example — they matter more than we sometimes want to admit," reflects Sutton. "Once people park, they don't want to feel like getting where they need to go is a difficult task. Through carefully considered pathways, pocket spaces, wayfinding, and other subtle design moves, each element should work together to make navigating a place feel easy and intuitive."

Hu agrees, noting that creating a great place begins with imagining the experience from the user's perspective. "When designing, I mentally place myself within the plan and ask: If I arrive as a pedestrian, where do I want to go, and how do I get there?"

But anticipating movement is only part of the equation. As much as we can imagine what it will feel like to be in a space, every part of the user journey has to be thoughtfully considered. Hu explains. "It is not just about moving from one destination to the next — getting to the grocery store or finding your way to the park. It is about understanding the moments in between: where a space feels open or intimate, reveals or conceals, and where it creates surprise, quiet, or connection."

That attention to circulation, pause, and transition can take many forms across vastly different settings. At Taikang International Medical Center in Nanjing, China, a healing garden offers patients, visitors, and staff a restorative outdoor environment that extends the hospital's focus on whole-person care beyond its walls. The landscape frames views of nature, filters sunlight through curated tree canopies, and provides quiet, intimate seating alcoves where patients, families, and healthcare professionals can pause and catch their breath away from clinical intensity.

And along Charlotte, North Carolina's I-77 corridor, the design team's vision took shape at a much larger scale, where underutilized, forgotten spaces beneath the highway viaduct were completely reimagined as active civic ground. By introducing structured pathways, vibrant lighting, and dedicated active zones into a space once defined entirely by concrete overhead, the design turned a harsh infrastructural barrier into a soft neighborhood link — proving that even the most complex urban landscapes benefit from an intuitive human flow.

Hu concludes, "Every design, regardless of scope, size, or project type, benefits from understanding how people move through it. When those transitions feel natural, the experience becomes easier, more enjoyable, and more memorable."

The Composition

kom·puh·zish·un / n.
the different simultaneous sounds, parts, or textures that stack together to make up a complete piece

DEEPENING THE CONNECTION

Yet even the most intuitive journey needs a reason to linger. Once movement feels effortless, the next layer of experience comes into focus: comfort. It lives in the details people may not immediately notice but always feel — the sensory cues that make a place inviting enough to stay.

“Connection and memory-making can’t happen unless a space is comfortable,” emphasizes Gagne. He breaks the concept into two interconnected categories: climate comfort and experiential comfort, explaining that both must work together for a place to thrive. “It’s our job as designers to ensure outdoor environments remain usable no matter the weather or time of year,” he continues. “But we also have to compliment that with the more aesthetic qualities of a place to make people want to linger.”

For Sutton, that balance is what determines whether a place is simply attractive or truly usable. “People want to be outside,” he says. “And if they’re comfortable, they’ll continue to stay.” In practice, that means thinking beyond the visual experience to the physical realities of use: shade, breeze, fans, heaters, lighting, water, seating, and enough room for people to spread out.”

It is a practical consideration, but also an emotional one. “When people feel comfortable, they relax,” says Sutton. “They stick around. They order another drink, let their kids keep playing, meet a friend, or find a quieter corner to settle into.”

This approach comes to life along the Hudson River at Hutton Brickyards in New York, where a post-industrial waterfront is being transformed into a destination rooted in history and sensory experiences. Expanded wellness programming and indoor-outdoor spaces support year-round use, while riverfront views, historic brick architecture, framed landscape sequences, intimate gardens, gathering areas, and waterfront experiences invite people to slow down and stay.

The design carefully coordinates protective shade structures, fire pits, and windbreaks, making comfort both practical and emotional, while protecting people from the harsh river elements and deepening their connection to the destination’s industrial soul.

But comfort is not only about protection. It is also about range. Hu describes it as a matter of layering, beginning with larger active zones — a pool area, green lawn, or gathering hub — then filtering back into smaller pockets where people can eat, drink, relax, and choose their own pace.

“You start with the active zones, then filter back into smaller areas for people to have leisure time,” she points out. “In that rhythm between energy and retreat, comfort becomes more than a response to climate. It becomes part of the experience itself.”





▼ HUTTON BRICKYARDS | KINGSTON, NEW YORK

The Crescendo

kruh·shen·doh / n.
the peak of a gradual increase, often associated with a musical passage

THE ART OF THE RETURN

Every memorable place has its moments — the initial arrival, a framed view, the unexpected reveal, the details that makes people stop and say, “wow.” These moments matter. They create energy, spark curiosity, and give people something to talk about. But the places that stay with us rarely depend on spectacle alone.

More often, memory is built in the silent accumulation of experience: the path that felt easy to follow, the shaded seat that offered relief, the sound of water nearby, the way light moved across a wall, or the feeling of being exactly where you wanted to be without having to think too hard about why.

For Gagne, that is where the lasting power of place begins. “People don’t remember a lot of the physical elements,” he says, “But they remember the feeling.” In that sense, the most meaningful destinations are not only designed to impress in a single moment, but composed to unfold over time, allowing people to create memories of their own.

That is the work of a designer at its most powerful. Because long after the trip ends, the event passes, or the day moves on, what remains is rarely one view, one material, or one perfectly planned feature. Instead, it’s the feeling of being there — and the quiet pull to experience it again.



> “WHEN PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE, THEY RELAX. THEY STICK AROUND, THEY ORDER ANOTHER DRINK, THEY LET THEIR KIDS KEEP PLAYING. THAT’S WHAT IT’S ALL ABOUT.” - GREGG SUTTON



DESIGN DIVIDENDS

The decisions made today create value for tomorrow.

Markets are shifting faster than projects can be delivered. Construction costs fluctuate before budgets are finalized. And regulatory requirements are evolving while projects move through approvals. Beyond these variables is another uncertainty. How will people respond when a place opens – let alone five, ten, or twenty years down the road?

Ironically, this unpredictability has arrived at a time when information has never been more abundant. Consumer research, financial modeling, and artificial intelligence can reveal countless possibilities for potential paths forward and provide more visibility into previously unrecognized trade-offs. But while the data informs, it cannot determine which opportunities deserve investment, which compromises are acceptable, and which decisions matter most.

According to Richard Centolella, an EDSA Principal, the earliest decisions carry the longest consequences because they set countless others in motion that can fundamentally alter a project's trajectory. "The challenge isn't predicting the future. It's recognizing which possibilities deserve to become priorities before your options narrow.



Early or Late

In real estate development, true project value isn't manufactured during the final phases of design. It is unlocked at the very genesis of a concept through foresight, judgment, and a deliberate strategy.

"The greatest opportunity to shape value is when a project's DNA is being formed," says EDSA Principal Pablo Massari. "Not because what comes later isn't important, but because early decisions establish the framework that every subsequent choice must work within – including where activity belongs, what needs to be preserved, how land is organized, how people arrive, and how a project might evolve over time.

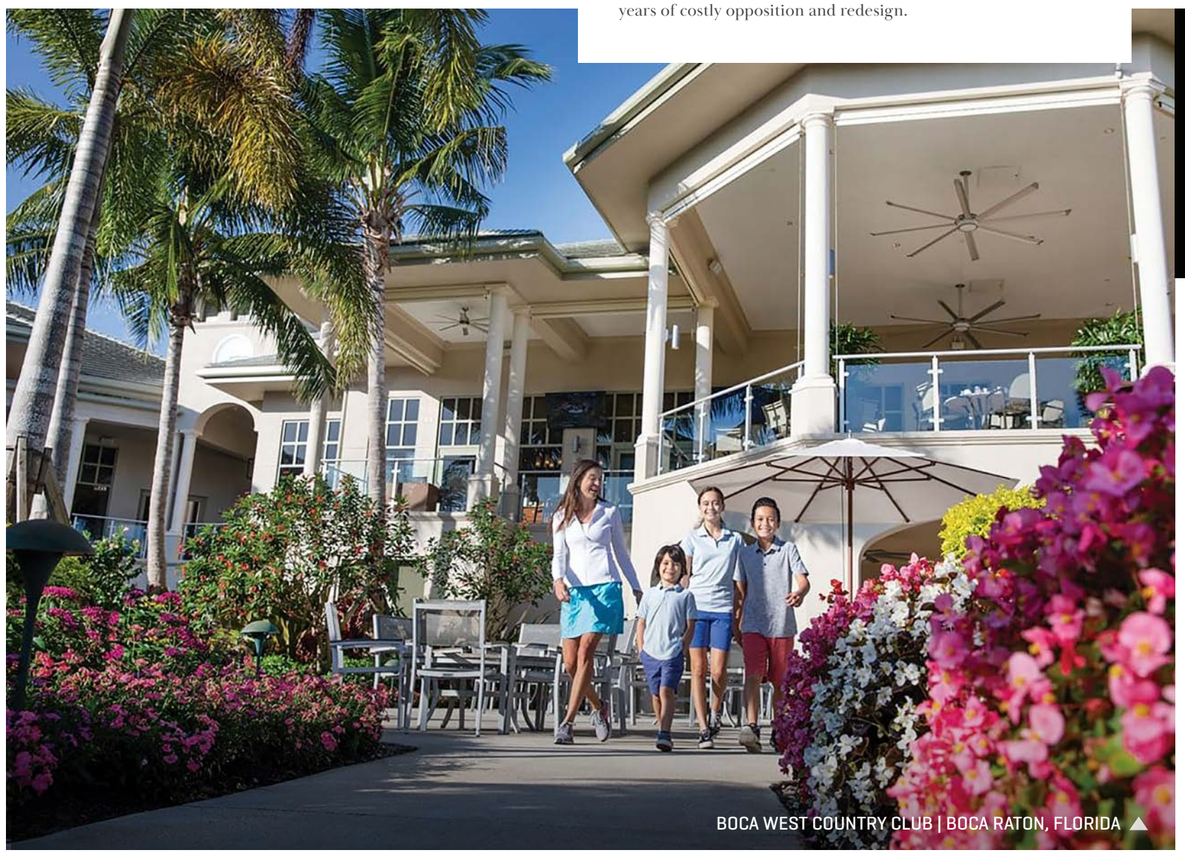
That framework isn't just a high-level philosophy. It's built into the quiet, everyday choices that often get overlooked. As EDSA Vice President Brandon Orrick points out, some of the most consequential decisions are often hidden in plain sight. "Many think about grading, circulation, land use, and open space as functional design layers. In reality, those decisions are rules of engagement for the entire site – dictating where development can viably occur, how efficiently a project functions, and how much flexibility remains with changing conditions. Ultimately, these technical choices do more than shape the land. They define the project's macro capacity to succeed."

> THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE VALUE IS WHEN A PROJECT'S DNA IS BEING FORMED.
>
> – PABLO MASSARI

Yet making good decisions early on is only part of the equation. They must also survive the friction of implementation. Massari describes that challenge as a test of contextual reality. "A project may work beautifully on paper and still face crippling resistance because of unanticipated community concerns, environmental sensitivities, operational conflicts, or approval processes." It's in those moments that compromise becomes a strategic tool. "We often recognize that a small, calculated adjustment or a 'little give' can make the path to implementation much smoother."

Whether preserving ecological lands, expanding the public realm, modifying circulation, or reallocating development intensity, such concessions create value that isn't immediately visible on a spreadsheet. What may appear to initially limit potential can build crucial stakeholder alignment, shorten approval timelines, and insulate a project from months or even years of costly opposition and redesign.





BOCA WEST COUNTRY CLUB | BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

Boca West Country Club

MAKE EVERY INVESTMENT WORK HARDER

New and existing amenity destinations were brought together around a stronger social heart – reshaping how the property works as a whole.

ASSETS LEVERAGED | COMMUNITY VALUE AMPLIFIED

Everything is Connected

The high-value opportunities rarely exist in isolation. They emerge from relationships: buildings to streets, arrivals to impressions, shade to comfort, circulation to movement, grading to infrastructure, and so on.

As Centolella explains, "The most important design decisions are in the connections, not the final destinations. We think about how people move through a place, how one experience leads to the next, and how every element strengthens what surrounds it." A pool, plaza, lobby, or park may become a signature space, but only if it occupies the right location, connects to complementary uses, functions operationally, and contributes to a larger narrative. "The value lies less in a solo feature and more in the connections that give it meaning."

Those relationships become the differentiator between a project that simply functions and one that people remember. An intuitive path, a well-placed shaded bench, a view that draws someone forward, or a promenade that becomes a natural gathering place may seem like small details but together they create something lasting – a sense of ease, comfort, and belonging. Over time, these moments create memories, and memories are what attach people to a place and give them reason to return.

That thinking helped shape the transformation of Boca West Country Club in Boca Raton, Florida. Ranked among the top private residential country clubs in the nation, the community already offered an exceptional collection of amenities – golf, tennis, dining, recreation, and social programming, but they operated as individual destinations. "You had all these incredible assets," recalls Massari, "but where was the heart?"

"The opportunity wasn't just about adding something new. It was about unlocking latent value from investments that already existed." By reprogramming key spaces and rethinking how destinations related to one another, EDSA established a central gathering place that unified the community. The result was a new center of gravity that amplified the value of every surrounding amenity. "We didn't just alter the layout – we shifted how people experience place." Daily routines became opportunities to gather, movement became interaction, and separate destinations became part of a more connected whole.

The Case for Restraint

While development is often measured by addition, some of the strongest projects derive their greatest value from what is intentionally left untouched. As projects become more constrained – financially, environmentally, politically, and socially – the decision of what not to build carries as much weight as deciding what to build.

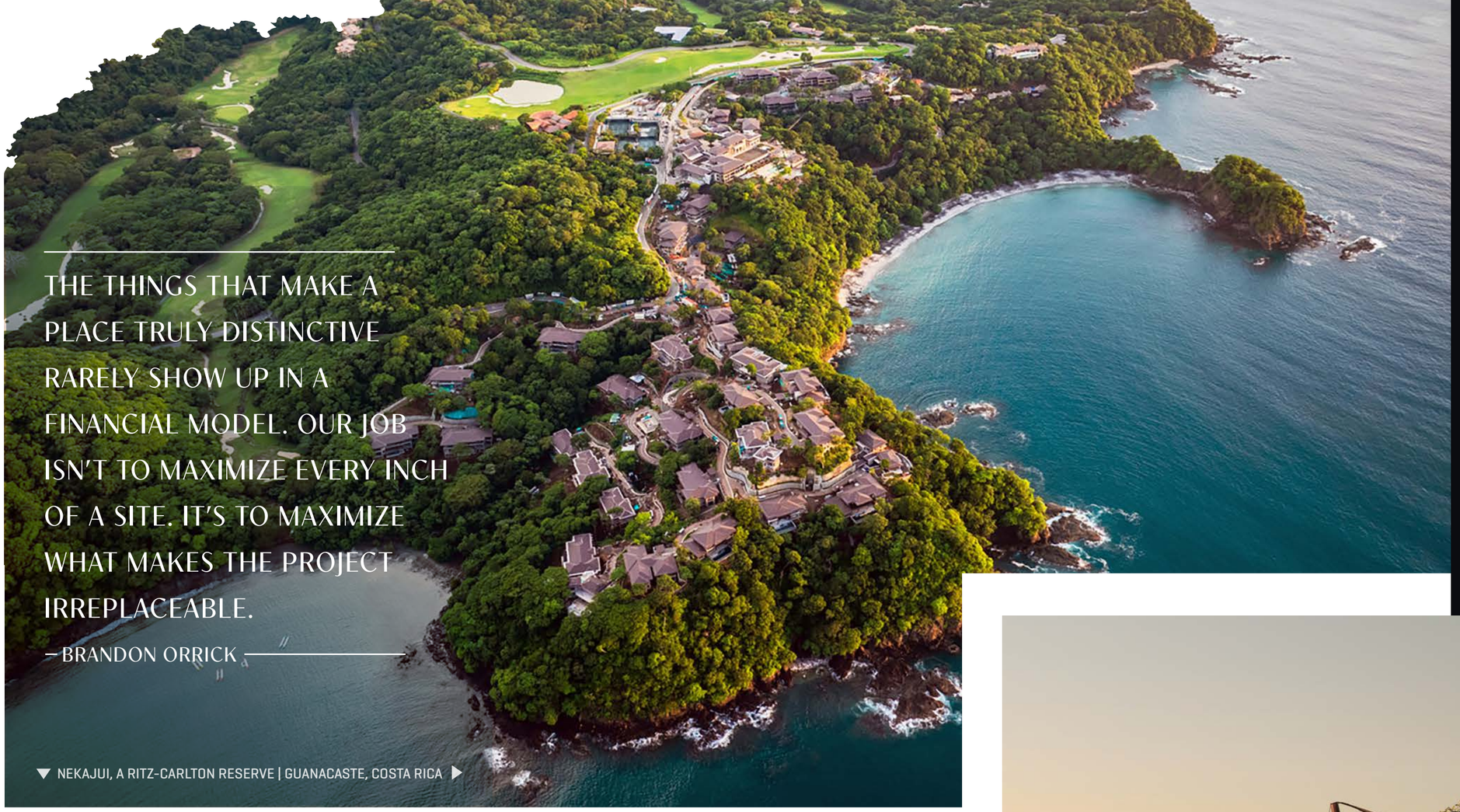
Centolella explains, “Good design is about editing; knowing what to preserve, what to simplify, and what to leave alone. The point isn’t always less. It’s understanding when less creates more value than more would have.”

Orrick sees the distinction in this philosophy. Development is often driven by optimization, asking how much can fit on a site. Design, in contrast, is guided by discernment, asking what will make this place worth choosing twenty years from now.

That often means recognizing the long-term value of landforms, ecological systems, cultural contexts, and mature landscape canopies. When considered from the outset, these assets can become lasting competitive advantages rather than hurdles to clear. “The things that make a place truly distinctive rarely show up in a financial model. Our job isn’t to maximize every inch of a site. It’s to maximize what makes the project irreplaceable.”

This reframes the move from ‘giving up’ to a highly calculated spatial strategy. The objective is to concentrate development where it generates the greatest return while allowing the site’s defining characteristics to become sources for differentiation.

As Massari notes, “This isn’t about sacrificing yield for the sake of aesthetics. It’s about reallocating density to maximize premium. By intentionally adjusting boundaries or shifting development to protect the site’s natural geometry, you can gain a distinct identity and a more resilient asset.



THE THINGS THAT MAKE A PLACE TRULY DISTINCTIVE RARELY SHOW UP IN A FINANCIAL MODEL. OUR JOB ISN’T TO MAXIMIZE EVERY INCH OF A SITE. IT’S TO MAXIMIZE WHAT MAKES THE PROJECT IRREPLACEABLE.

—BRANDON ORRICK

▼ NEKAJUI, A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE | GUANACASTE, COSTA RICA ▶



Nekajui, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve Papagayo

PROTECTING WHAT MAKE THE PLACE IRREPLACEABLE

Rather than maximizing the development footprint, the design worked with the site’s natural terrain, views, and established landscape – turning existing conditions into defining elements of the guest experience.

DIFFERENTIATION CREATED | NATURAL ASSETS PROTECTED

Few projects demonstrate that tradeoff more clearly than Nekajui, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve Papagayo in Costa Rica. Set within dramatic topography, significant coastal setbacks, and an established master-planned community, the project couldn’t simply maximize development.

Rather than conforming to a predetermined vision, the framework emerged from the character of the land itself. Designers began with the site’s defining assets and how those attributes could enhance the guest experience. Circulation follows the natural terrain providing character that decades of new planting could never replicate. View corridors were protected and create a stronger sense of place. Moments of discovery and quiet reflection are intentionally woven into the journey as a defining identity of the community.

Centolella shares, “Success wasn’t measured by maximizing the footprint, but by identifying and safeguarding the site’s true competitive advantages. By resisting conventional optimization, the design protects the very features that now give the destination its unique market premium.”



Gore Creek Promenade

STACKING RETURNS FOR THE LONG TERM

Instead of investing in ecology, circulation, art, and programming as separate layers, Gore Creek brings them together within a modest footprint – creating a public space that continues to perform over time.

EXPERIENCE MULTIPLIED | RELEVANCE EXTENDED YEAR-ROUND





GORE CREEK PROMENADE | VAIL, COLORADO

Value Compounds

Ultimately, true value creation comes down to leveraging design and capital investments to multiply the value of everything around them. Experienced developers rarely ask what an asset can deliver on its own. Instead, they evaluate how many ways it can improve the long-term performance of the entire property. For Massari, true efficiency is about compounding returns. “One good decision should make ten other decisions better. That means evaluating every investment by the positive outcomes it generates over the life of a project.”

When this philosophy is applied to amenities, traditional features are transformed. A lagoon ceases to be just a water feature. It provides active recreation, stormwater infrastructure, climate moderation, and core community identity. Trails do more than connect physical points. They seamlessly integrate wellness, ecological performance, and everyday mobility. Likewise, a welcome plaza is not just an arrival corridor but a social heart, event venue, and retail catalyst. Under this framework, the objective shifts from adding amenities to creating investments that perform multiple jobs simultaneously.

That same discipline applies to the invisible systems that visitors may never notice. Infrastructure, circulation, and open spaces dictate how easily a project adapts, how easy it is to maintain, and how resilient it remains over time. Through this lens, technical decisions yield commercial triumphs. Water management becomes an amenity instead of a hidden utility. Strategic shade extends the hours people use a space while strengthening walkability and retail activity. Flexible open-space networks allow for programming and future growth without requiring reinvestment. Orrick suggests, “These choices not only reduce risk, they optimize operations and create lasting value.”

A premier example of this is the Gore Creek Promenade in Vail, Colorado – one of the most heavily visited public spaces in the Rocky Mountains. The Promenade demonstrates what happens when investments are designed around human choreography rather than static infrastructure. Ecological restoration is used to draw people to the water’s edge. Public art is placed to pull foot traffic through the site. And, flexible programming ensures the space stays active year-round. But the real magic is in how these elements synthesize into a destination. “The value created isn’t the product of a single dramatic gesture. It’s the result of dozens of careful decisions about how people will move, pause, and return. That’s why the investment belongs in the experience, not just the asset,” says Orrick.

In the end, the projects that outperform decades later do so because someone exercised the right judgment early on – connecting investments, protecting what matters, and making choices that continue to create value long after opening day. Design is the visual expression of that strategy.

Ultimately, value is realized through people. Technical and financial considerations may shape a project, but its success depends on whether people choose it – where they want to live, where they gather, and where they return. Those choices are shaped less by any single line item and rather by how a place makes people feel every time they experience it. And ultimately, that human response has very real implications for performance.

As Centolella puts it, “At some point, the most successful projects stop being defined by what was built or what was spent. They become part of how people remember a place, how they experience it, and why they choose to return. That’s the real dividend. You’re not simply creating something of value – you’re creating something people value.”

> THE CHALLENGE ISN’T PREDICTING THE FUTURE. IT’S RECOGNIZING WHICH POSSIBILITIES DESERVE TO BECOME PRIORITIES BEFORE THEY BECOME CONSTRAINTS.
>
> —RICHARD CENTOLELLA

Hospitality *Everywhere*

The exceptional has become expected.

Once defined by resorts perched on coastlines and urban hotels anchoring city centers, hospitality's influence now extends far beyond its traditional boundaries. The value lies not in replicating the hallmarks of the industry, but in the mindset behind them.

Intuitive, welcoming, and memorable – the qualities that distinguish award-winning destinations are now guiding how people experience environments of every kind. This shift reflects the influence of an industry that generates nearly $1.2 trillion in annual global revenue and has spent decades obsessing over what makes people feel truly considered.

Jeff Suiter, EDSA Principal, explains, "Few industries have studied the human experience as deliberately as hospitality. Years of observing how people arrive, engage, linger, and return has created a deeper understanding of what shapes perceptions, behaviors, and emotional connections." As a result, the industry has become a masterclass in the relationship between people and place."



LAS OLAS OCEANSIDE PARK | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

MEMORABLE. INTUITIVE. EFFORTLESS. WELCOMING. ENGAGING.

"Effortlessness is not accidental. It comes from designing both the experience people see and the invisible framework that allows a place to deliver on its promise."

— Courtney Moore

Exposure changes expectations.

"The ability to compare the places we know with others around the world has never been easier," shares Courtney Moore, a Principal at EDSA. "With just a few clicks, people can explore global destinations through videos, reviews, photos, even guided tours. That exposure inevitably shapes how they evaluate everyday encounters."

But visibility is a two-way street. What is shared and viewed from afar can be just as influential as what is encountered in person. "As designers, we're creating environments for two audiences," explains Qianqian Zhao, a Senior Associate at EDSA. "There are people who experience a place firsthand and those who encounter it through digital content. Both shape how a destination is perceived."

Those impressions are not confined to a particular setting. A family returning from a vacation with curated spaces, intuitive wayfinding, and seamless service do not suddenly forget what made the experience effortless when they visit a public park or tour a college campus. Likewise, someone familiar with the walkable districts of Barcelona, Charleston, and Copenhagen begin evaluating their community not only for what it is, but for what they know is possible.

"People no longer compare places to others like it, but to the best experiences they have encountered anywhere," notes Zhao. "The memories that stand out become the standard against which everything else that follows is judged."



ATLANTIS | PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS



ONE&ONLY ROYAL MIRAGE | DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

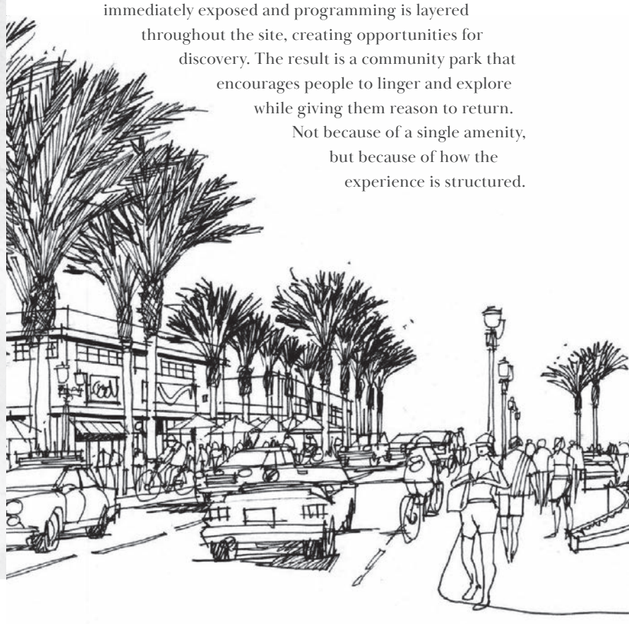
The new front door.

Hospitality has always understood what many other sectors are only beginning to recognize – experience begins before someone reaches the front door. "The first impression is not a moment. It is a scripted sequence," shares Moore. "It starts with flow, how somebody arrives, how they orient themselves, and how the journey unfolds."

Designers often describe this careful orchestration as choreography. Not movement in a literal sense, but the deliberate shaping of anticipation and discovery. At Atlantis in the Bahamas, that experience is dramatic. Visitors arrive across a peninsula framed by water features and views of the marina village before crossing a bridge into an oversized lobby anchored by monumental architecture and an aquarium backdrop. The experience is intentionally theatrical. At One&Only Royal Mirage in Dubai, the sequence is almost opposite. The arrival unfolds quietly through intimate courtyards, planting, fire features, and personal interactions. Understated, but no less intentional. Different scales. Different expressions. Different emotional responses. Same principles.

That attention to first impressions is reshaping how civic spaces, campuses, and mixed-use destinations are designed. "Developers increasingly recognize that streets, parks, plazas, and public corridors serve as the 'front door' to entire communities," shares Suiter. "Just as a hotel arrival establishes the tone for a guest, the public realm sets expectations for how a district, neighborhood, or city will be experienced. The sequence may look different, but the same principles of anticipation, orientation, and discovery still apply."

Las Olas Oceanside Park in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, illustrates how hospitality thinking translates. As an urban waterfront, the arrival unfolds gradually. Views are revealed rather than immediately exposed and programming is layered throughout the site, creating opportunities for discovery. The result is a community park that encourages people to linger and explore while giving them reason to return. Not because of a single amenity, but because of how the experience is structured.





FAT VILLAGE | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

The multiplier effect.

Historically, places were organized around a single purpose with large portions of the built environment prioritizing efficiency. Retail centers existed for shopping and parks for recreation. Residential communities provided housing while healthcare campuses delivered medical services. Separate uses. Maximum throughput.

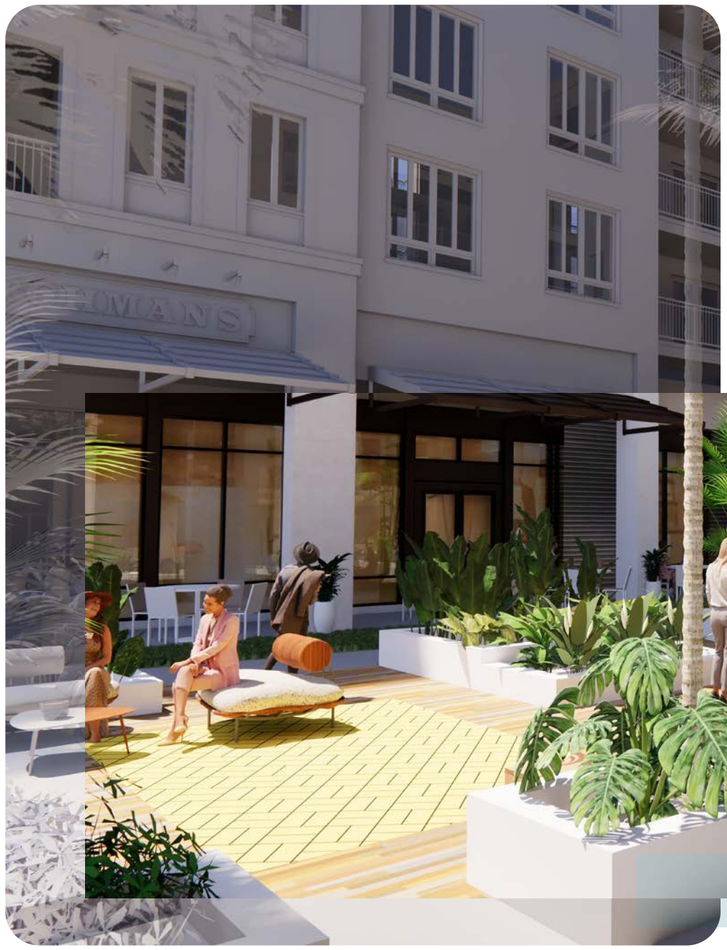
Hospitality operates on a different premise. Instead of a single activity, dining overlaps with entertainment. Recreation intersects with social interaction. Public spaces become destinations rather than circulation zones, and the overall experience encourages exploration rather than transaction.

“People don’t experience places one use at a time,” suggests Zhao. “They experience them holistically.” The environments that resonate most are the ones where different activities naturally build on one another and use overlap in ways that feel seamless and intuitive.

Projects like FAT Village in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, are being conceived less as collections of buildings and more as engaging ecosystems. Retail is layered with dining. Art intersects with public space. Programming evolves throughout the day and into the evening. The objective is not adjacency in function but a combined richness of place.



SIESTA KEY PROMENADE | SARASOTA, FLORIDA



Suiter points to historic European cities as a point of reference. “Long before hospitality became an industry, public squares, piazzas, and marketplaces were functioning as social infrastructure. They blended commerce, culture, recreation, and civic life into environments designed for people rather than vehicles. What hospitality refined was the intentional integration of those experiences into a cohesive and memorable journey.”

Westgate Gardens offers a compelling example. Planned on the former Palm Beach Kennel Club site in West Palm Beach, Florida, the mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood combines housing, retail, open space, and community amenities within a walkable framework. The goal is not simply to provide places to live and shop, but to create an environment where daily activities become part of a larger experience. Community-centered commercial and wellness-focused spaces are designed to encourage time spent within the neighborhood – creating reasons to linger rather than simply pass through.

That same layering can happen at a more intimate scale. On one of southwest Florida’s barrier islands, the Siesta Key Promenade brings different activities together within the public realm. Rather than relying on a handful of traditional amenities, the meandering promenade creates a sequence of opportunities that accommodates different rhythms of daily life. Outdoor kitchens and gathering areas encourage social interaction and recreation brings activity, while intimate seating and terraced ‘living room’ environments offer places to slow down or retreat. The richness comes from the mix. What matters is how intentionally those pieces come together.

“The real influence of hospitality isn’t what we borrow from it, but what it teaches us about how people experience, connect, and value a place.”

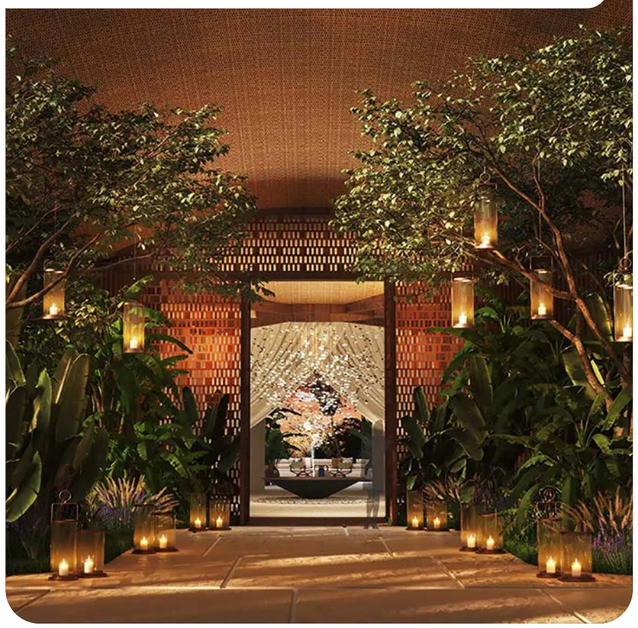
— Jeff Suiter

What travels well

Ideas worth carrying forward into places of any kind.

01 / THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES

Consider the approach, thresholds, and sequence of arrival to build anticipation and make people feel considered from the start.



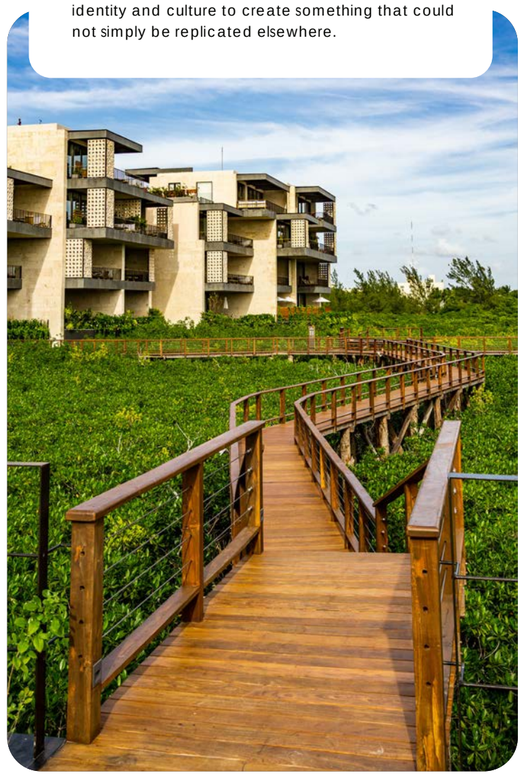


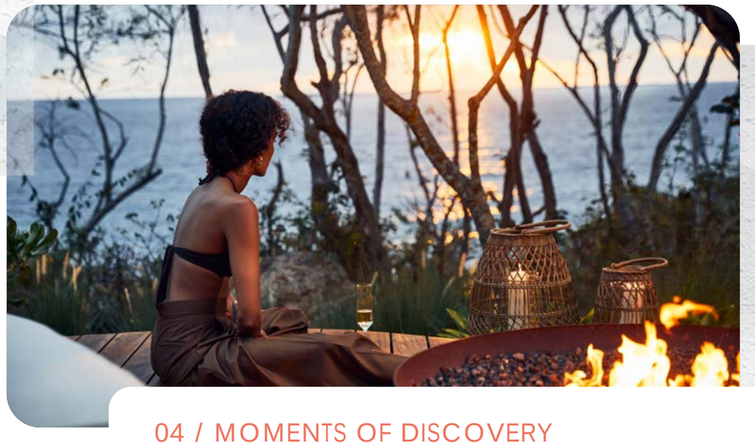
02 / A RHYTHM OF ITS OWN

Layer experiences that support how people spend their time and give them reasons to engage throughout the day and between peak moments.

03 / UNMISTAKINGLY HERE

Turn context into character – drawing from local identity and culture to create something that could not simply be replicated elsewhere.





04 / MOMENTS OF DISCOVERY

Elevate the everyday with thoughtful details and unexpected encounters that make an experience feel personalizd rather than standardized.



05 / BESPOKE BY DESIGN

Design for different preferences and patterns of use – giving people choices in how they make the experience their own.

Cracking the code.

The first thing people notice about a great hospitality destination is the ease of the experience. That feeling that every detail has been carefully considered. But what people don't notice may be one of the most valuable lessons.

According to Moore, one of hospitality's greatest achievements is the invisible integration of service and infrastructure. "At successful properties, guests seldom see housekeeping carts or the back-of-house systems that keep everything functioning. Guests experience enjoyment without ever encountering the operational framework that makes it all possible."

That distinction is increasingly more important as hospitality thinking diversifies. It is one thing to design a residential community with resort-like amenities, a mixed-use development with engaging programming, or a public realm that encourages people to stay. It's another to consider how those places will be operated, maintained, and adapt over time.

That long-term view also means planning for change. Consumer preferences shift. New concepts emerge. Operators change. What feels relevant today may not be a decade from now. The goal isn't to predict the future, but to create places capable of evolving.

Atlantis Aquaventure in Dubai illustrates the point. Years after opening, the destination continues to respond to changing guest expectations with enhanced programming, services, and ongoing reinvestment. According to Moore, "You can't know at the outset what the next attraction or experience will be. The challenge is creating a framework that gives future ideas somewhere to belong without having to rethink the destination each time."

The bigger point is that hospitality treats change as part of the business model – continually adapting to remain relevant and valuable. As hospitality thinking moves into residential, mixed-use, and public environments, perhaps its more consequential influence is the idea that design should not only create value at opening, but create the capacity for that value to grow over time.

What translates.

If hospitality becomes the expectation, what then is the differentiator? For Suiter, that question points to an important tension. "The more hospitality influences other sectors, the greater the risk that everyone starts reaching for the same answers."

"People carry the best of what they have encountered from one place to the next and their expectations travel with them."

– Qianqian Zhao

A lounge, great food and beverage, thoughtful programming, or a beautifully designed public realm can enhance a project, but none of those things make it distinctive. "Hospitality becomes valuable when it changes how we think about people, not when it becomes another formula for what to give them," shares Suiter.

That distinction matters. Not every community should feel like a resort or every mixed-use development operate like a hotel. The opportunity is to bring the same level of attention to how people arrive, move, gather, linger, and connect – and translate that understanding in a way that is specific to the place.

"We always ask how the experience can be unique to its location rather than existing anywhere," adds Zhao, "Amenities, activation, and service can all be replicated. What can't is the culture, landscape, history, and character that make a place distinctly its own."

That may ultimately be the future of hospitality everywhere. Not more amenities. Not more programming. Not more spectacle. But places that feel unmistakably connected to where they are and who they serve.

Hospitality was never about just hotels. It was always about understanding people. What now changes is where and how we apply that understanding.

PLANNING FOR THE

LONG GAME

Planning is second nature.

We plan vacations, big meetings, financial goals, and the everyday moments in between. And when those plans shift — when a storm rolls in, a flight gets delayed, or a meeting moves — we adjust. We reroute. We figure it out.

But what happens when the plan is not for a few days away, but for an entire community? A world-class resort? A district, waterfront, or piece of critical urban infrastructure meant to evolve for decades?

At that scale, you cannot simply start over. The stakes are higher, the timelines are longer, and the unknowns are far greater. That is why, in design and development, planning cannot be treated as a fixed solution. It must be a flexible framework that can adapt, respond, and strengthen over time.

NEVER ASSUME THE ANGLE

Historically, master plans were often built around a defined end. They served as a blueprint, mapping where things should go, how they should function, and what a place was expected to become. The goal was to create order, establish direction, and bring a long-term vision into focus.

But over time, it became clear that places do not evolve in straight lines. Communities shift. Economies fluctuate. Climate pressures intensify and technology evolves. What may have once felt like planning within an expected environment can look entirely different just a few years later. This is where planners and landscape architects have long brought an important perspective.

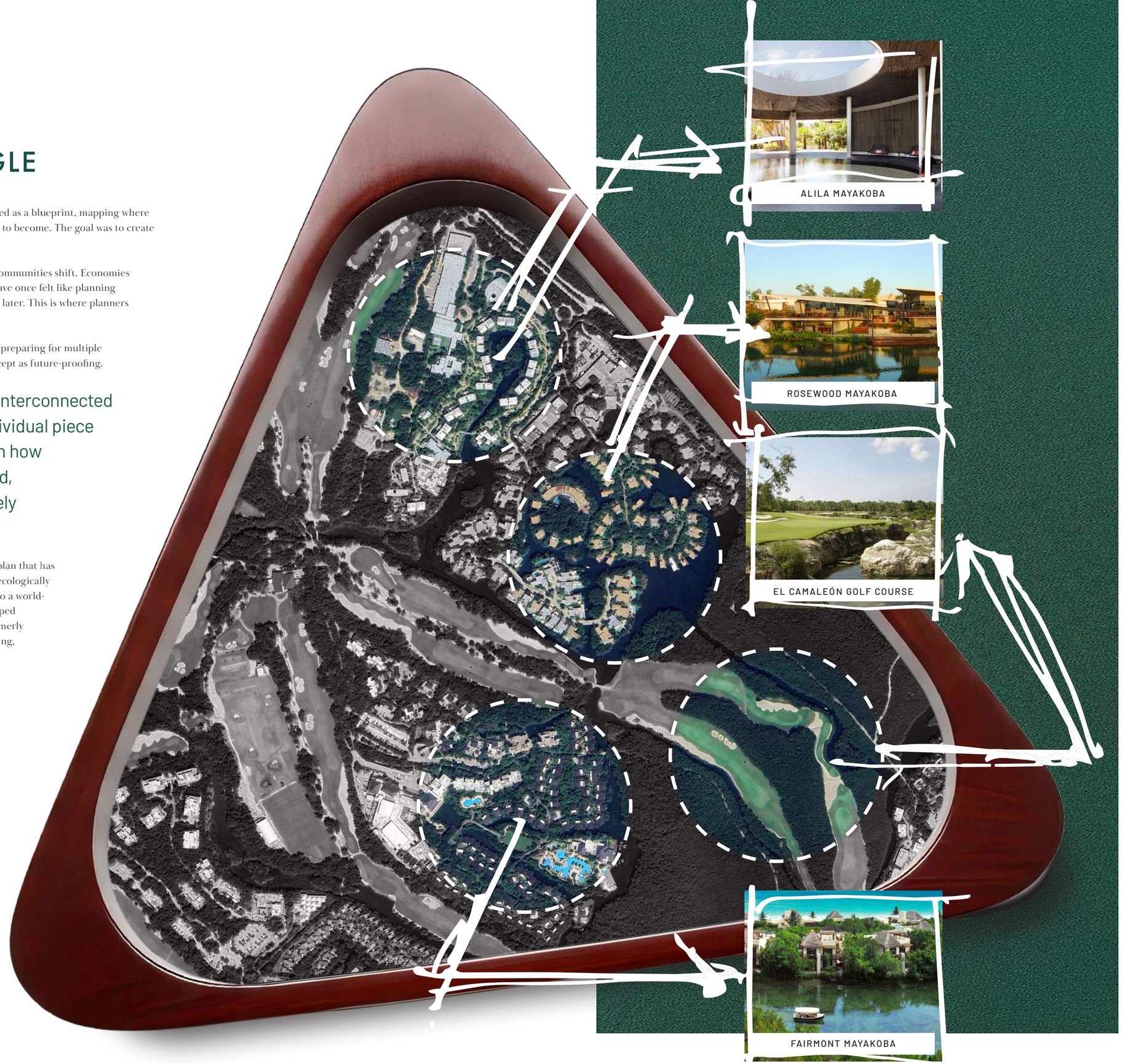
"Master planning is less about predicting a defined future and more about preparing for multiple possibilities," shares Devon King, Principal at EDSA. She refers to this concept as future-proofing.

"It's the ability to view a project as a complete, interconnected system while also understanding how each individual piece may need to evolve. It requires thinking through how different elements can be accessed, maintained, operated, experienced, or even owned separately over time." – DEVON KING

Future-proofing comes into clear focus at Mayakoba, a large-scale master plan that has been guided by EDSA since the early 2000s. Spanning nearly 600 acres of ecologically valuable land, the once-undeveloped destination has gradually evolved into a world-class wellness retreat. What began as a long-term framework has since shaped the arrival of high-end resorts such as Rosewood, Fairmont, and Alila (formerly Andaz), among others, along with luxury residences, golf, recreation, dining, and shared amenities.

Taking it a step further, the planning strategy was shaped around 270 environmental requirements established by Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. This ultimately preserved the site's ecosystems while creating financial certainty for investors, along with long-term social and economic benefits for the local community. The plan also expanded the site's natural cenote pattern into a connected network of canals and lagoons, strengthening the mangrove forest while immersing guests in an authentic experience.

Marc Hall, an EDSA Principal, points to the case study as a prime example of smart planning, sharing that future-proofing begins with protecting the land's core ecological frameworks. "Whatever you're planning, the first step is to figure out how to preserve and enhance what is already in place," he explains. "When the primary systems — waterways, habitats, vegetation, drainage patterns are protected and organized, they create opportunities for what development parcels can become."





THE MULTI-POSSIBILITY MINDSET

Long-range planning has always required foresight, but today, the variables are multiplying faster than ever. Where people live, how they work, how they move, and what they expect from places are all shifting in real time.

Take the last few years, for instance. Office work shifted almost overnight from in-person to remote, then to hybrid, and now, for many organizations, back toward a more regular in-office presence. Golf courses, once considered in some markets as underutilized land, are finding renewed value as wellness and lifestyle-driven amenities. Retail continues to evolve as well, balancing the ease of online shopping with the demand for brick-and-mortar spaces that offer more personal, experience-based encounters. These shifts, among others, show how quickly expectations change, and why development can no longer be planned around fixed assumptions.

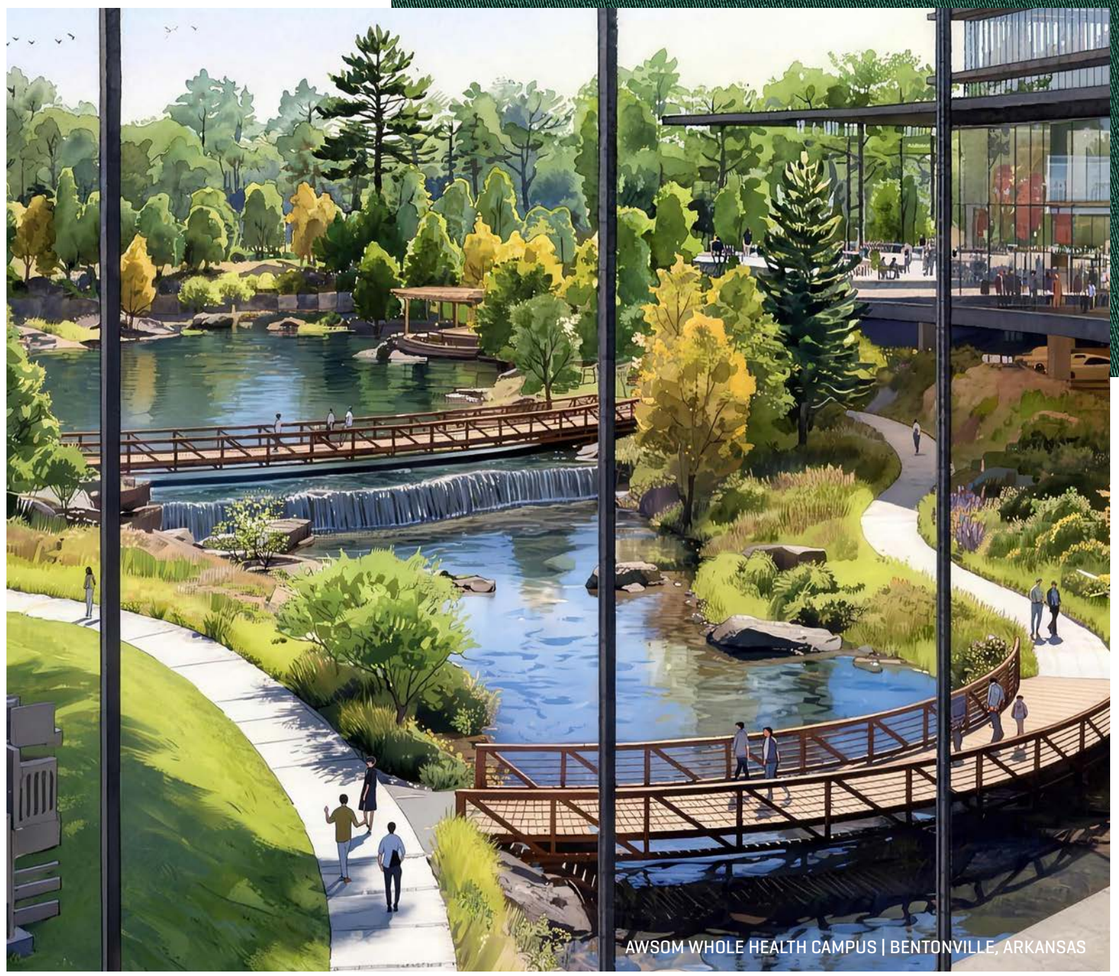
"Gone are the days of simply maxing out the land with the spaces and amenities we assume end users will enjoy," says EDSA Senior Associate Dan D'Angelo.

"As people's life patterns become less predictable, we have to dig deeper. The focus now is on understanding long-term future needs and creating livable places that work today while leaving room for adaptation over time." – DAN D'ANGELO

That need becomes especially clear in sectors like education and healthcare, where programs, service models, and access requirements can shift before a project is even complete. "The pace of change can sometimes move faster than the creative process itself," adds King. "Often, we are designing before the final program is fully defined. And even once it is, there is always the possibility that needs will shift again. That is what makes flexibility so critical."

At the AWSOM Whole Health Campus in Arkansas, in collaboration with the Alice Walton Foundation (AWE), that idea comes to life through a landscape-first approach to wellness. Rather than treating the campus as a collection of medical buildings with outdoor space around them, the plan uses landscape as the connective tissue — linking care, movement, arrival, pause, reflection, and community access.

"From our research, it's clear that many people avoid taking care of their health because they view hospitals and clinics as intimidating," continues King. "To help address that and to support AWE's goal of whole health, we worked with them closely to prioritize outdoor spaces like gardens, trails, and pedestrian pathways, among other features. These elements create a more serene environment while keeping the plan flexible to support future change."



AWSOM WHOLE HEALTH CAMPUS | BENTONVILLE, ARKANSAS

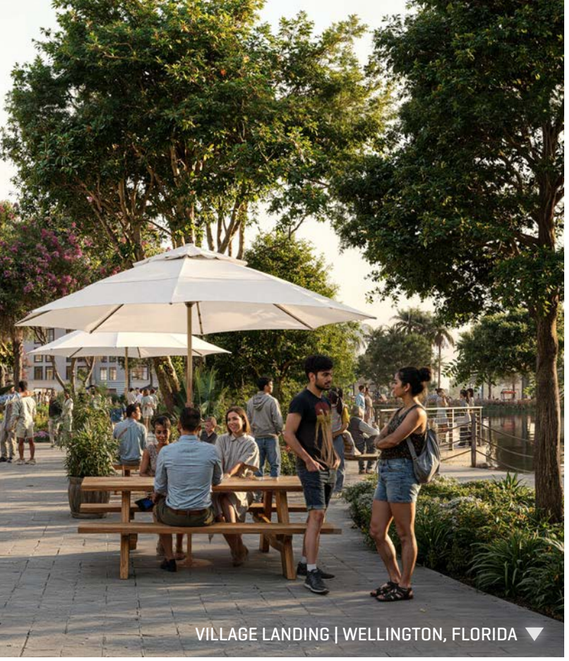
READING THE VARIABLES

The honest truth? Even the strongest plans cannot account for every factor that will shape a project' long-term success. Transit and parking will continue to be part of the unknown. While designers can estimate the number of vehicles, pedestrians, or daily users a place may need to accommodate, there is no way to fully predict how people will arrive in the future — whether through rideshare, emerging mobility options, or patterns that have not yet been imagined. That ambiguity is part of planning for a world that is always changing.

Still, uncertainty does not mean guesswork. It just reinforces the need for a clear, intentional planning. "When approaching a new project, we don't just pull the answers to a site out of thin air," Hall points out. "The location, the client's vision, the financial realities, the environmental conditions, and the many variables beyond them, all need to be evaluated and fully understood to determine what is not only plausible, but valuable for the long term."

That foundation begins by first clearly defining the project. Before a plan can take shape, the team works together to establish objectives, align expectations, and bring the right multidisciplinary voices to the table. From there, the process moves into analysis, where physical, environmental, economic, and cultural components of the site are observed and understood. Workshops, both virtual and on-site, then help translate that information into a shared project vision, creating a framework that guides the master plan as it moves forward.

"Throughout the planning process, collaboration with the full team allows the strongest vision to take shape," explains D'Angelo. "The end result becomes more than what the client requested, what the land required, or what the designer first imagined. It becomes the best expression of all three — grounded in today's realities while leaving room for where the market may go next."



VILLAGE LANDING | WELLINGTON, FLORIDA





PEOPLE IN PLAY

Even with the right research and framework in place, a master plan cannot succeed on technical logic alone. Data may help define what is possible but people ultimately reveal whether a place works.

"The focus is more so on how we make the places we plan a truly livable environment," notes D'Angelo. "In practice, that means considering the everyday details that shape comfort and connection — shaded walkways, open green spaces, safety overlays, wellness amenities, gathering areas, and the small moments that encourage people to slow down, stay, and return."

Village Landing brings this human layer into focus, shaping a new mixed-use destination in Wellington around the way people experience daily life. Rather than treating the public realm as a collection of separate amenities, the plan weaves together shaded pedestrian connections, active retail, outdoor dining, flexible open space, and lakefront experiences to create a setting that feels intuitive, welcoming, and rooted in South Florida.

"At the heart of the public realm is a central park and interactive water feature," contributes King. It is a hub where families can gather, kids can play, and people can pause between shopping and dining. But the real value lies in its range of use. "That same space can shift into an ice skating rink, a holiday display, a movie screen, a stage, a yoga lawn – just about anything the community wants," she continues. "It becomes more than an amenity. It becomes a social heart for the destination."

Those human-centered details are what give destinations their staying power. They turn a plan from something that can respond to change into something people actively want to return to. In the end, future-proofing is not only about preparing for what may shift, but creating places that remain relevant, comfortable, and meaningful through every stage.

BEYOND THE BREAK

The ultimate measure of a master plan is not whether the final buildout matches the first drawing exactly. It is whether the place can hold its purpose through change. When a project is grounded in its natural systems, supported by intuitive infrastructure, and shaped around meaningful public space, the plan becomes more than a map. It becomes a foundation for long-term value. As Hall puts it:

"If you lock in a plan's essential components from the start, the rest can pivot a thousand times. The architecture can be repurposed, reimagined, or entirely rebuilt as the world shifts, but the underlying value of the place remains untouched." – MARC HALL

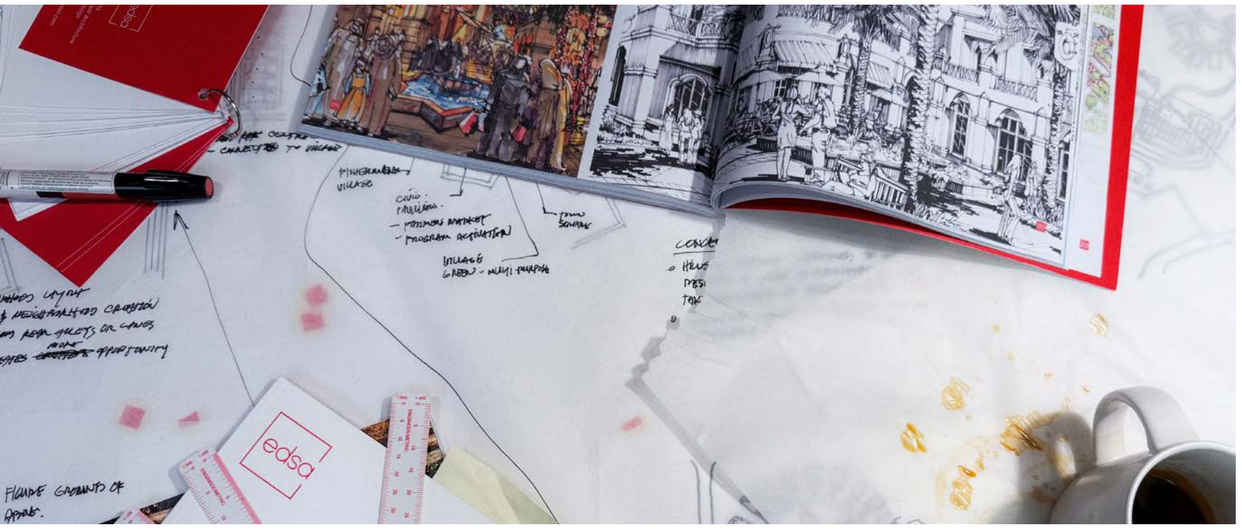
That is the real power of future-proofing. It is not about controlling every outcome, but establishing the conditions for a place to mature with purpose. The strongest master plans leave room for new uses, new needs, and new generations, while holding onto the qualities that made the place worth building in the first place.



EDSA

THE VALUE SYSTEM BEHIND A LASTING PRACTICE

ECONOMICS



COSTS AND PROFITS. **SUPPLY** AND DEMAND. **RISK** AND RETURN.

Every business has metrics. But the most successful organizations understand that value is shaped by more than financial analysis alone. The greatest returns are a result of decisions that continue to make an impact.

For more than six decades, EDSA has grown its business around that philosophy – balancing sound decisions with long-term investments in people who become leaders, client relationships that evolve into trusted partnerships, accumulated experiences that sharpen judgment, and a culture of curiosity that continually elevates what the practice can achieve.

"The firm has advanced in many ways, but the heart of our practice has remained remarkably consistent," shares EDSA Chief Executive Officer and Principal Scott LaMont. "We have never viewed sustaining a healthy business and delivering exceptional design as competing priorities. One reinforces the other. This mindset has allowed us to grow, adapt, and take on increasingly complex work across global markets without losing sight of who we are."
That foundation has supported a large and continually evolving body of work, encompassing nearly 5,000 projects in over 100 countries. Yet the firm's greatest asset has never been the size and scope of its portfolio.

"Our success is the result of creating momentum and a collective legacy," explains EDSA Chief Marketing Officer and Principal Jill Martinez. "Every experience, challenge, lesson learned, and thoughtful decision contributes to a body of knowledge and opportunity base that shapes the practice."



REFLECTING ON RECENT WINS

THE **CURRENCY OF TRUST**

Roughly three-quarters of all EDSA's assignments stem from repeat business — a proud reflection of enduring partnerships that have advanced the firm for generations. While this statistic is a clear testament to design excellence, it equally demonstrates the firm's deep-seated commitment to fostering relationships.

"Repeat business is rarely about a single successful project," explains EDSA Principal Doug Smith, who previously led the firm as President. "Clients return because they know how we think, how we collaborate, and that we'll continue to look out for their long-term interests well beyond the life of a project."

At the end of the day, it comes back to trust. Trust is earned by understanding what drives a client's business, how decisions ripple across development, operations, and long-term asset performance, and where design can create value beyond the project itself. Rather than simply delivering a defined scope, EDSA approaches every engagement with the curiosity to understand the broader business – helping clients make decisions that strengthen both the project and the organization behind it.

This emphasis on connection is what has allowed individual collaborations to grow into decades-long partnerships. For instance, EDSA's relationship with Kerzner International began during the development of Atlantis Paradise Island in the Bahamas, where a shared commitment to the project's vision established a foundation of trust that has since carried across the Atlantis portfolio, from Sanya to Dubai, with additional properties now in the pipeline. That relationship also carried EDSA back to the Middle East, leading to a longstanding partnership with Mirage Leisure and Development and work on landmark destinations including Madinat Jumeirah, One&Only Royal Mirage, and Bluewaters Island.

The same holds true for EDSA's alignment with MSD Partners. What began with the transformation of The Boca Raton Resort in Florida has expanded into active collaborations across Hawaii, Colorado, and Orlando, with each assignment building on established confidence. Rather than approaching each undertaking as a standalone transaction, EDSA brings continuity, shared knowledge, and an understanding of the client's goals from one market to the next.

These relationships represent a much larger ecosystem of enduring ties that continue to flourish across the firm. "This is genuine trust, genuine partnership, and genuine friendship built from the ground up," reflects LaMont. "Beyond getting the work done — and, of course, doing it well — there is mutual enjoyment in what we do and time spent together. Clients remember the experience of working with us just as much as they value the places we help create."

ROUGHLY 75%
OF ALL **EDSA** ASSIGNMENTS STEM **FROM REPEAT BUSINESS**



BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF EDSA



TURNING DESIGN THINKING INTO OPPORTUNITY

"CLIENTS KNOW HOW WE **THINK,** HOW WE **COLLABORATE**, AND THAT WE'LL CONTINUE TO LOOK OUT FOR THEIR **INTERESTS."**

DOUG SMITH

THE **BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY**

When the firm speaks about investing in the collective — the team, the 'we' — that commitment extends just as deeply to the people within EDSA as it does to those who collaborate alongside it. Because talent is not simply a resource, but the engine behind the firm's continued creativity and success.

"Attracting and hiring great talent, while essential, is only the beginning," Martinez notes. "The real investment is in establishing an environment where people can grow, contribute meaningfully, and feel connected to both the work and a supportive culture."

That investment takes many forms at EDSA – from continuous learning through EDSA-U and individualized leadership paths to firmwide retreats that strengthen relationships. Together, these efforts create a workplace where people are nurtured in their development, challenged to keep evolving, and connected to the firm's larger purpose.

"THE REAL INVESTMENT IS IN ESTABLISHING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE CAN GROW, CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY, AND FEEL CONNECTED."

JILL MARTINEZ

The results are reflected in the firm's striking longevity. Nearly half of current employees have spent at least five years at EDSA, while nearly 85 percent of the leadership team has advanced from within. Smith, who has spent close to four decades with the firm, credits his own career to the people, the work, and the opportunities along the way.

"I was initially drawn to EDSA for its reputation and international presence," he remarks. "But what has kept me here is being treated well, doing impactful work, and continuing to grow in ways I never expected. I cannot imagine having built a more meaningful career anywhere else."

That longevity creates a powerful cycle of learning. Emerging designers grow alongside leaders who have spent decades shaping the practice, gaining technical knowledge with the judgment, confidence, and perspectives that come with experience. At the same time, fresh ideas and new ways of thinking move upward, creating a two-way exchange that keeps the firm grounded, dynamic, and prepared for what comes next.

THE **AGILITY TO EVOLVE**

Markets shift, client priorities evolve, and new technologies continually reshape how design is understood and delivered. But EDSA's ability to endure has come from moving with those changes without allowing them to redefine who the firm is. "We have been very nimble," LaMont affirms. "The team has never been afraid to enter a new market, take on the next big assignment, or invest where we see real opportunity." That willingness has carried EDSA across regions and project types, creating a more balanced practice while giving its designers a broader frame of reference.

It has also shaped the firm's expansion across seven locations, each established to immerse EDSA within a regional context, strengthen client connections, and position teams closer to where growth is occurring. "We have become more well-rounded, more diverse, and more attuned to local communities because we have never been afraid to take risks," continues LaMont. "Each move has expanded not only where we work, but how we think – bringing new perspectives, stronger relationships, and a deeper grasp of various markets."

But agility is not the same as chasing every new idea. EDSA studies where markets are moving, what pressures are shaping development, and how client needs are likely to evolve. "We are proactive rather than reactive," Martinez articulates. "The most meaningful opportunities are where client needs, market momentum, and the strategic thinking we can offer come together."

That intelligence is continually shared across the practice. Market research, firm-wide meetings, and project discussions help teams connect what they see in one region or sector to opportunities elsewhere. Data, AI, sustainability metrics, and new technologies are seamlessly integrated into this framework as well, refining how the firm anticipates disruption, measures performance, and communicates value.

"Staying relevant does not mean changing who we are every time the market moves," Martinez concludes. "It means understanding change well enough to know where our strengths can matter most and having the confidence to act when the right opportunity emerges."



85% OF EDSA'S LEADERSHIP HAS ADVANCED FROM WITHIN

MAKING MEMORIES WITH THE OG

GETTING PROJECTS BUILT - AND HAVING FUN WHILE DOING IT



SHAPING EDSA ACROSS GENERATIONS



GIVING BACK TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

CHEERS TO 67 YEARS OF DESIGN EXCELLENCE



SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER



COLLABORATING WITH CLIENTS

CELEBRATING PROJECT MILESTONES



THE COMPOUNDING EFFECT

The most enduring organizations are rarely defined by a single project, breakthrough, or period of growth. They are shaped by what accumulates over time. Trust built on one assignment becomes confidence on the next. Relationships evolve into partnerships. Experience becomes knowledge, knowledge cultivates talent, and talent grows into leadership.

Over time, EDSA's reputation has become less about individual projects and more about the principles and perspectives that consistently guide the practice. These ideals underpin how the firm moves forward — informing decisions, strengthening collaborations, and creating new possibilities. Lessons learned become opportunities, trusted relationships open new doors, and one generation of leadership prepares the next.

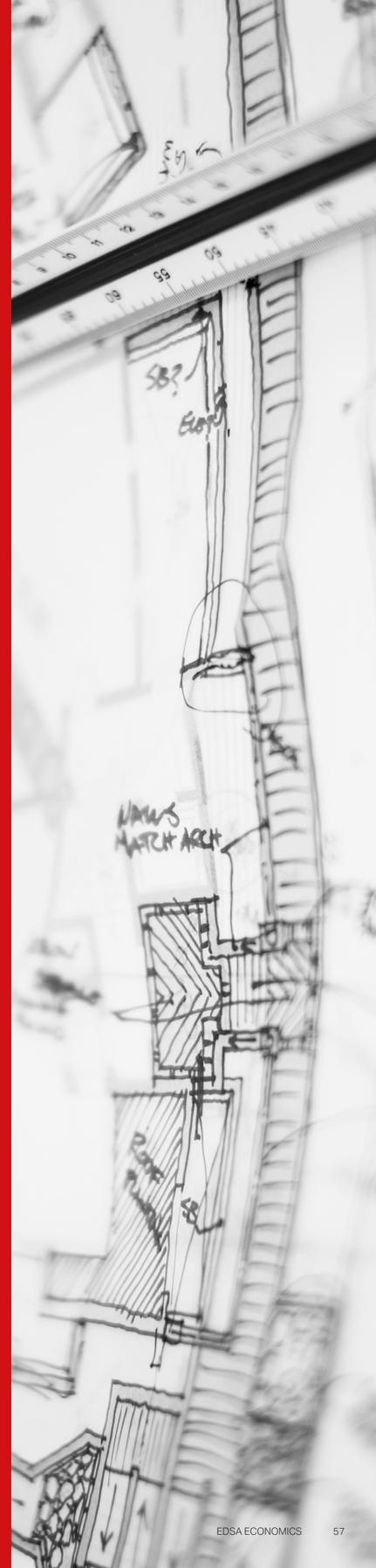
That continuity has allowed EDSA to evolve without losing what has made the practice successful in the first place. The people, lessons, and relationships developed along the way remain active within the firm — providing a foundation for continued evolution.

As Smith sees it, longevity comes from continuing to invest in what has already proven to be meaningful. "The grass isn't greener on the other side of the fence," he points out. "It's greener where you fertilize it."

That may be the simplest expression of EDSA Economics: what the firm puts into its people, partnerships, and practice does not disappear. It multiplies — and becomes the foundation for whatever comes next.

"CLIENTS REMEMBER **THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH US** JUST AS MUCH AS THEY **VALUE THE PLACES WE HELP CREATE."**

SCOTT LAMONT





Rethinking the role of **amenities** in creating **lasting value.**

Staying Power



The best amenities don't just attract attention — they shape how time is spent. They become part of daily life, invite discovery, and create experiences that inspire people to return.

In the not-too-distant past, amenities were supporting characters in the story of a place. A fitness room tucked into a corner, a pool situated where space allowed, and a recreation area added because one was expected. Essential? Yes. But drivers of value and differentiation? Rarely. That has now changed.

According to Ryan Clifton, a Principal at EDSA, the industry has reached a level of sophistication where amenities are helping define how real estate is positioned and perceived. "People may buy a home or book a hotel room, but they're also choosing how they want to spend their time." That shift has elevated amenities from ancillary features to strategic assets – shaping how people experience a place, how they talk about it, and how they decide between competing options.

As amenities evolve, their influence on project performance has become more tangible. The right mix can extend a hotel stay, strengthen the appeal of a residential community, or give people a reason to spend more time in a mixed-use district. Those behaviors translate into increased spending, stronger retention, repeat visitation, and long-term value.



HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO | ATHENS, GREECE

But greater value has also brought greater predictability. Walk through an urban neighborhood, resort destination, or corporate campus and the similarities quickly emerge – the same outdoor lounges, familiar wellness spaces, and flexible outdoor rooms designed to be everything for everyone.

"The issue isn't the amenities themselves," shares Peter Dunne, a Vice President at EDSA. "The challenge is that they are increasingly being designed through a single formula with little regard for place, audience, or context. Something that works incredibly well in one setting can feel completely out of place in another." Differentiation then comes not from introducing something new for novelty's sake, but from understanding what belongs here, for these people, in this place.

Courtney DuChene, a Senior Associate at EDSA, agrees. The conversation has changed from what to include to how people spend their time. "This evolution moves amenity thinking beyond a checklist exercise. Rather than asking what a project should have, the more important questions become: What is missing from the experience today? Where do people gather without being asked? And, how can every amenity contribute to a larger story rather than exist in isolation?"

From Feature to Strategy

"In competitive markets, the tendency is to add offerings to ensure no expectation goes unmet. But there's a tipping point where accumulation dilutes impact," observes Dunne. "The projects that outperform are not always those that push the threshold, but those that step back with thoughtful editing."

That restraint means creating amenities that 'work' harder. A space designed for one purpose can quickly lose relevance when lifestyles, technologies, or expectations change. Conversely, a space designed with range can absorb those changes without losing its identity.

At Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Athens, Greece, a large open lawn serves as a wellness space, event venue, and social hub depending on the season, time of day, or resort needs. Rather than dedicating valuable real estate to a series of narrowly programmed uses, the design allows a single space to serve multiple purposes without feeling over defined. "It creates possibilities rather than prescriptions – giving guests the freedom to make the experience their own without the operator having to continually reinvent it," explains Clifton.



LUSTICA BAY | RADOVICI, MONTENEGRO

> "The projects that outperform are not always those that push the amenity threshold but **step back with thoughtful editing**."
> – Peter Dunne

MOMENTS IN MOTION

8am
A NEW DAY
Wellness spaces set the tone for how the day begins.

11am
TIME TOGETHER
Casual areas and great food turn breaks into moments of connection.

3pm
ROOM TO EXPLORE
Paths, parks, and programs invite discovery and spontaneous moments.

6pm
EVENINGS THAT ENDURE
Lighting, ambiance, and gathering spaces extend the day naturally into night.

The Stay Factor

One of the biggest misconceptions in amenity planning is that attraction and engagement are the same. In reality, what captures attention is not always what sustains it. People are drawn to aspirational amenities like dramatic water features, expansive clubhouses, and highly curated environments. But once living, working, or vacationing in a place, usage patterns can often tell a different story.

Sometimes, a space can be thoughtfully designed but fail to generate activity if the underlying conditions aren't right. DuChene recalls a project where a client added a brewery and outdoor patio overlooking a golf course. Despite the investment, it saw limited use. "Just because you create it, doesn't mean people will come and stay. You must understand what draws them there in the first place."

DuChene extends that thinking to what qualifies as an amenity. "Climate comfort is huge," she emphasizes. "Cooling strategies, visibility, access, and ambiance play important roles in determining whether people linger or move on. A waterfront promenade, social terrace, or recreation court may attract attention, but human comfort is what turns a moment into time spent."

Strength of the Amenity Ecosystem

The most valuable expression of an offering may be how easily a place connects people to the experiences they seek. “The amenity can be ‘proximity’ – to restaurants, places where you bring your dog or kids, and feel safe while there,” remarks Dunne. “In this sense, value is tied to connection and convenience – how easily people can access the services and social opportunities that support their lifestyles.”

That thinking does not diminish the value of traditional amenities. Pools remain highly desirable in hospitality and residential settings. Golf continues to attract buyers and visitors to certain markets. And, sports facilities, wellness centers, clubhouses, gaming environments, and entertainment venues also drive demand.

Increasingly, their value lies not solely in their presence, but how they connect to and strengthen the overall experience.

This distinction is increasingly important as developers evaluate return on investment. Clifton suggests Evermore in Orlando, Florida, and Fazenda Flamboyant in São Paulo, Brazil offer useful lessons. Their lagoons may be a defining draw, but they are not the only reason people stay. The gathering spaces, recreation opportunities, dining experiences, and social infrastructure surrounding them create a rhythm that keeps people engaged. Clifton notes, “Signature amenities succeed when they are supported by a network of daily experiences that encourage use.”



OWENSBORO RIVERFRONT | OWENSBORO, KENTUCKY



“Signature amenities succeed when they are supported by a **network of daily experiences** that encourage use.”
– Ryan Clifton



EVERMORE RESORT | ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Value of the In-Between

Today’s amenity strategies recognize that the journey is just as important as what awaits. What people remember often extends beyond the pool, clubhouse, or park itself to the walk there, the chance encounter, or an unexpected moment of discovery.

Dunne points to choreographing experiences. “Instead of simply creating a way to get from point A to point B, we have a design opportunity for what happens along the way.” The result may be public art that adds an element of surprise, a shaded edge that naturally becomes a place to gather, or an overlook that invites pause. “While these circulation interventions rarely headline marketing materials, they often shape what people remember most.”

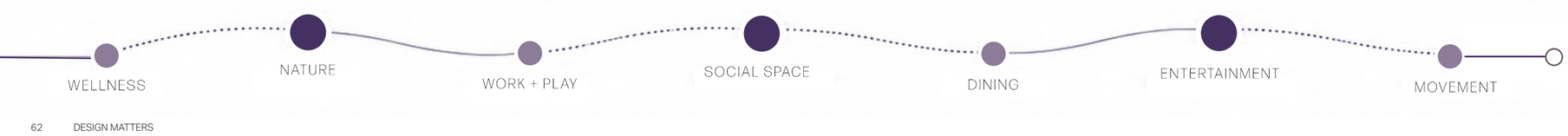
At Hunter’s Creek in Orlando, Florida, planning and design efforts are building upon an already well-used park by improving pedestrian and bicycle access. But connectivity is only part of the opportunity. Creating reasons to pause, gather, and discover along the way is turning everyday movement into an experience of its own.

“Residents are choosing the shaded path and thinking about the bench where they’ll stop for a few minutes,” says DuChene. “And those decisions are shaping how long they stay, who they encounter, and whether they choose to come back. Over time, those seemingly small interactions create the patterns of daily life that build community.”

Likewise, at Howard County Public Garden in Maryland, this philosophy takes shape through a series of nature-based encounters woven throughout the landscape. Treehouses, sculptural elements, water features, and themed environments spark curiosity without prescribing exactly how they should be used. Children and families are given the freedom to wander, play, and engage on their own terms. The result is a place where moments of surprise and wonder become just as meaningful as the headline attraction.



HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC GARDENS | GLENWOOD, MARYLAND



THE RHYTHM OF **DAILY LIFE**





Integrate don’t isolate

Amenities create the greatest value when they’re woven into the experience, not hidden behind it.



Anticipate what’s next

Flexibility and foresight ensure that amenities remain relevant as needs and expectations evolve.



Design for everyday life

The best amenities support how people live – quiet moments, active pursuits, and everything in between.

Beyond the Amenity Zone

The biggest change in amenity planning has little to do with the amenities themselves and everything to do with where they are located. The traditional model concentrated lifestyle features into distinct destinations. A clubhouse sat at the center of the property. The fitness center occupied a dedicated building while recreation spaces were grouped together into a defined zone. The assumption was straightforward: if the amenity was desirable enough, people would seek it out. Designers, however, are finding that assumption doesn’t always hold.

“The most successful amenities aren't places people have to seek out,” says Clifton. “They align with the ways people already move through and experience a place.” While this observation seems simple, it fundamentally changes how amenities are planned. “As communities, resorts, and mixed-use environments continue to compete, accessibility and integration are becoming as valuable as the amenities themselves.”

> “Successful amenities are not those that attract the most attention but those that **give people a reason to stay**.”
> — Courtney DuChene

For example, a pool may serve as the destination, but its value extends well beyond its footprint as the spaces between destinations become part of the amenity experience. Projects on Shura Island, Laheq Island, and Qiddiya in the Red Sea demonstrate this thinking. While positioned as a hospitality experience, these developments integrate wellness, ecology, and community in ways that extend beyond traditional models.

“The era of the amenity zone is giving way to something more fluid,” Clifton explains. “Competitive advantage no longer comes from a single standout amenity. It comes from creating a network of experiences that work together to make a place feel richer, more connected, and more engaging.”

Preparing for What Comes Next

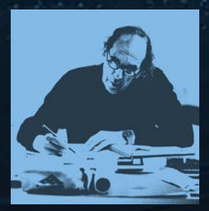
Perhaps the next evolution of amenities is not about invention, but discernment. As Dunne suggests, “The places that endure will be those that understand the difference between offering more, and meaningful offerings. Because in the end, the best amenities are the ones people return to, rely on, and cannot imagine a place without.”

DuChene believes that shift will continue to blur traditional definitions. “When done well, amenities cease to feel like amenities and become the reason a place works. The most successful may not be the ones that attract the most attention. They may be the ones that quietly give people a reason to stay.”

Looking ahead, Clifton wonders whether the industry may eventually move beyond thinking about amenities altogether. “There was a time when amenities differentiated one project from another. Increasingly, they're becoming expected. The question is no longer what amenities a place offers, but what kind of life it makes possible.”

RETREAT RESIST RESPOND

A STUDY OF LIVING WITH WATER



The Joseph J. Lalli Design Fellowship is an annual designation granted to an EDSA employee who presents a compelling proposal to travel and immerse themselves in a new environment to better understand its unique attributes and influence on design.

Some places capture your imagination through beauty. Others through the ideas they inspire. For Shuvo Datta, an EDSA Associate, the Netherlands offered both. But his fascination did not begin with postcard images of tulip fields, windmills, or historic canal streets. It began with water — specifically hydrology. How it moves, how it shapes cities and daily life, and how, with the right thinking, it can become a source of innovation and possibility.



WHY WATER?

I remember reading about Dutch cities and feeling a deep connection to place.

Shuvo's interest in water urbanism began during his undergraduate studies in Bangladesh, where he researched nature-based solutions and their potential to improve public water quality. He continued exploring the topic during his master's thesis at Texas Tech University, where he came across several Dutch precedents known for their thoughtful relationship with water.

"I remember reading about Dutch cities and feeling a deep connection to place," Shuvo explains. "While the Netherlands is very different contextually from my home country of Bangladesh, the two share a lot of similarities." Both are low-lying delta landscapes, meaning water is more than a regional feature, but a driving force that has long shaped settlement, infrastructure, and ecology. And while Shuvo grew up navigating water-related threats, such as storm surge, drainage challenges, salt intrusion, and more, he found it captivating that the Dutch — known as the pioneers of water engineering — had been actively navigating such challenges as early as the 11th century.

A few years later, Shuvo joined EDSA with the water conversation still very much on his mind. Driven by a continued interest in how communities live with, adapt to, and design around water, he applied for and received the Joseph J. Lalli Fellowship — an opportunity that brought him to the Netherlands to experience the places he had long studied.





A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

"Before embarking on my trip, it was important that I understood the Netherlands beyond the surface," Shuvo shares. "I wanted to be intentional — to understand the context, identify the places and systems I needed to experience, and gain a deeper sense of the country's relationship with water."

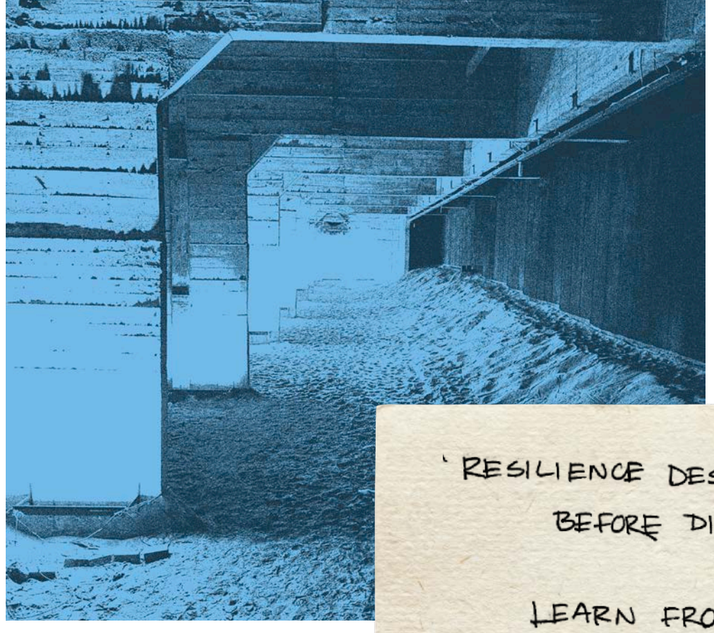
Located in the low-lying delta of the Rhine, Meuse, and Scheldt rivers, the Netherlands has always been defined by water. With much of the country sitting at or below sea level, the Dutch have developed a series of intricate systems — such as canals, dikes, polders, pumps, and storm surge barriers — to protect and reclaim land. More recently, that relationship has continued to evolve, moving beyond the idea of simply holding water back and toward a more adaptive approach that makes space for water and explores its innovative potential.

"My trip was curated as a journey through time, one that honored the Country's past while revealing how those lessons continue to shape its future," Shuvo reflects. "It moved through three main ideas."

RETREAT Understand the past and the consequences of living in a vulnerable delta landscape.

RESIST Explore present-day technologies and design strategies that allow communities to live with water.

RESPOND Look at solutions that strengthen the relationship between people, infrastructure, and nature.





'RESILIENCE DESIGNED DECADES BEFORE DISASTER HAPPENED

LEARN FROM MISTAKES—

SO, EVERY DETAIL TELLS A STORY.

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

Shuvo's travels began in Zeeland, the Dutch province most closely tied to the devastation of the 1953 North Sea Flood. For him, it was an essential starting point and a place where the country's vulnerability to water, and its resilience in the aftermath, could be understood through lived history.

His first stop was the Watersnoodmuseum in Ouwerkerk, a memorial and museum housed within the four concrete caissons used to close the final breach in the dike after the disaster. "Much of the urgency and advancement around water was shaped, in part, by the memory of this flood," Shuvo shares. "Being there helped me understand not only what happened, but how communities found a way forward."

The museum moves visitors through the story in stages. The first caisson outlines the scale of the disaster through footage, maps, photographs, and records of the night the water broke through. The second shifts from facts to human experience, honoring the victims, survivors, families, and rescuers. "It was a very moving memorial," Shuvo says. "This was when water transformed from something to be studied into something living and deeply human for me."

From there, the experience turns toward recovery, reconstruction, and the future. The final caisson explores the enormous effort to rebuild communities, restore a sense of daily life, and rethink how a country so shaped by water could better protect itself. Ultimately, that response took form through the Delta Works, a massive national program of barriers, dams, sluices, and coastal defenses developed after the 1953 flood.

Shuvo then traveled southeast to the Oosterschelde, a tidal estuary where the North Sea moves inland between Zeeland's islands. There, he saw the Oosterscheldekering, one of the Delta Works' most important storm surge barriers. What stood out to Shuvo was not the scale, but the shift in thinking. "The original plan was to close off the estuary completely," he shares. "Instead, the Dutch built a movable barrier that protects against storm surges while staying open most of the time, allowing tides and ecosystems to continue functioning."

Next on Shuvo's path of the past was Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where 19 historic windmills rise from the low-lying polder landscape. Built long before the Delta Works, the windmills were part of a centuries-old system designed to keep the surrounding polders dry. Powered by wind, they lifted excess water from the lower land into higher storage basins, where it could later be released into the river when conditions allowed.

Sometimes, it's the smallest actions, repeated over generations, that make the greatest difference.

Beyond their engineering purpose, the windmills also offered a glimpse into the daily lives of the millers who called them home. Inside, compact living spaces are stacked across multiple levels and connected by narrow wooden stairs, while the massive wooden wheels continue to turn with the power of the wind — a reminder of the constant effort it has taken to keep this landscape dry.

"It's simple in concept, but incredibly thoughtful in execution," mentions Shuvo. Here, water management is meant to feel less like an act of control and more like an ongoing relationship between people, land, and time. He continues, "It showed me that resilience doesn't always have to be one bold move. Sometimes it's a network of smaller actions that are repeated and maintained over generations that make the biggest difference."

DESIGNING FOR THE PRESENT

After exploring the history of Dutch water management of the past, Shuvo moved through Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Almere to see how those lessons are being applied today. "For me, this was the 'Resist' phase," Shuvo explains. "Not resisting water by pushing it away but resisting the assumption that water makes a place unlivable."

Across each stop, he began to see how that mindset moves from infrastructure into everyday life. In Amsterdam, Sluishuis offers one expression of living with water — an iconic waterfront apartment building that appears to hover above the IJ Waterway. It includes a dramatic opening carved through its center that pulls water directly into the experience of the place. In Almere, floating homes showcase another perspective. Set within the canals, these residences rise and fall as water levels change, making adaptation part of daily life rather than a hidden technical solution. And near Utrecht, Vinkeveense Plassen reveals water at an even larger scale. Once shaped by peat extraction, the landscape has transformed into a striking network of lakes, narrow islands, homes, docks, and recreational spaces. Here, water is the structure of the place itself.

"With these designs, there was no sense of fear," Shuvo explains. "It wasn't about pretending water could be controlled completely, but about giving it room, understanding its movement, and letting that relationship shape the way people live. It showed me that being one with the water can be a way of life."

WATER MANAGEMENT Wind-powered mills pump excess water from low-lying polders into higher canals and reservoirs.

LIVING HERITAGE The mills were both homes and workplaces, where generations of millers lived while maintaining the landscape.

EMBRACING THE FUTURE

With the past guiding the present, Shuvo's next question became clear: How can we design for a future where water conditions are changing faster than ever? In the Netherlands, that answer is not being left to theory alone. Through government action, academic research, and private-sector innovation, the Dutch are actively testing what the next generation of climate-adaptive living could look like.

That inquistiveness led Shuvo to The Green Village at Delft University of Technology (TU Delft), an open-air living lab where sustainable ideas are tested at the scale of real streets, homes, water systems, energy networks, and materials. Here, innovation is not tucked away in a classroom or buried in a research paper. It is built, monitored, challenged, and improved under everyday conditions.

"Exploring The Green Village was a full-circle moment for me," Shuvo reflects. "Delft was one of the places that first inspired this trip years ago, so seeing these ideas being tested in real life made the future feel less abstract. It was exciting to see that adaptation is not just something we talk about — it is something we can build, measure, and improve upon."

From the Urban Jungle Project, which explores how lightweight, elevated planting systems can bring trees and dense vegetation into hard-to-green urban spaces, to new water and energy technologies being tested on site, The Green Village shows resilience in motion. The point is not to present one perfect solution, but to create a place where ideas can fail, evolve, and become stronger before they are scaled into cities.





This journey made me realize that if we embrace water as a partner, we can shape landscapes that are not only resilient and adaptive but deeply human.

> "LET IT FLOW".

By the end of his trip, Retreat, Resist, Respond had become more than Shuvo's travel framework. It had become a way of seeing resilience itself. What became clear is that there is no single answer for navigating water. Instead, resilience is an ongoing practice of listening, adapting, and designing with the forces that shape our world.

For Shuvo, the Netherlands challenged the idea that resilience is defined by control. The broader lesson was not that the Dutch have mastered water, but that they have learned to stay in conversation with it —adjusting, testing, rebuilding, and reimagining as conditions change. In doing so, they offer a model that extends far beyond their own borders, especially for regions facing similar water-related pressures.

"This journey made me realize that when we embrace water as a partner, we can shape landscapes that are not only resilient and adaptive, but deeply human, Shuvo concludes. "If there's one lesson I'd carry forward for places facing water-related challenges, it's this: learn to let it flow."

A Designers' Lunch Guide

A TASTE OF EDSA,
ONE FAVORITE DISH AT A TIME

Whether exploring a new city, visiting a project site, or stepping away from the office for a much-needed break, one thing connects us all: a love of good food.

What we eat says a lot about who we are. It reflects our cultures, routines, travels, and the flavors we grew up with — or sometimes the dish we simply can't stop ordering.

So, we invited employees to share their lunch guides: favorite dishes, go-to orders, local specialties, hidden gems, and the meals they think everyone should try.

Consider this your invitation to dig in and discover the foods, flavors, and favorites that fuel us and bring a little more inspiration to the lunch hour.

01. MIKE MEI'S CHEESY CHOICE

Mike's order at Denver's Odyssey Italian Restaurant is chicken piccata with one very important addition: extra cheese, please.

02. BROOKE SULLIVAN'S LUNCH STAPLE

Chicken, sweet potatoes, and salad from the Naked Farmer. Nothing complicated, just a simple combo that always hits.

03. AMY HARBERT'S MONDAY MUST

Monday Pho-nday! A warm, comforting bowl of pho is Amy's tried-and-true way to start the week right.

04. JAGGER JAVENES' DELI DELIGHT

Some might call it a craving. Jagger calls it gratitude. Either way, a pastrami sandwich is the answer.

05. QIANQIAN ZHAO'S DISNEY DETOUR

A day at Disney deserves a memorable meal and Qianqian's pick is Narcoossee's for a little extra magic.

06. NATE PARKS' SOHO SCORE

At Raoul's, get there early enough to snag the coveted burger. Miss it? Steak frites makes a pretty great Plan B.

07. MATT EVANS' CHEAT MEAL

Sometimes only a half-pound cheeseburger will do. For Matt, that means a trip to a Raleigh favorite: Char-Grill.





08. ALEXIA LETSCHE'S COZY CORNER

Top Hat brings all the brunch essentials: great food, a laid-back atmosphere and the kind of cozy vibe worth lingering over.

09. MARIA RUBIO'S THAI CRAVING

No need to study the menu. Maria is heading straight for the Pad Thai at Suan every time.

10. NATALIE SANTANA'S FEEL-GOOD FAVORITE

Lunch with the team calls for Doc B's and a Tofu Wok Out Bowl with brown rice and sesame teriyaki. SO good.



11. HAOYUE JI'S MUST-ORDER

Haoyue doesn't mince words about the poached chicken at Gai Chicken. Simply the best. Consider the order decided.



12. JORDAN CHIANG'S CLOSE-BY CATCH

Five minutes from the Fort Lauderdale office, Sushi One delivers quality sushi and friendly, family-owned charm.

13. YUN FNG BANG'S LUNCHBOX WIN

Quick, easy, and surprisingly delicious, Trader Joe's Pad See Ew proves a great lunch doesn't have to be complicated.

14. HEEWON KIM'S CARB CRUSH

Pummarola does carbs right. Fluffy pizza crust, great pasta, and a carbonara that keeps Heewon coming back.

15. RISHABH CHOPRA'S FRESH FIX

A CAVA falafel salad bowl checks all the boxes: fresh, flavorful, and filling enough to power through the afternoon.



16. BRIAN STUDER'S ITALIAN FIX

When an Italian sub is calling, Brian knows exactly where to go: Louie Bossi. Enough said.

17. SHUVO DATTA'S OFFICE OBSESSION

Ekiben's Neighborhood Bird Bun with broccoli tempura have won over the Baltimore office (and apparently BTS, too).

18. YINGRONG LYU'S TASTE OF HOME

Restaurants are great, but Yingrong's pick comes straight from home. Nothing beats a meal made by family.

19. HENRY KEE'S CAFÉ RUN

Sweet, savory, or caffeinated, Gran Forno has Henry covered with sandwiches, croissants, espresso, matcha, and more.



20. FLAVIA GONDIM'S BRAZILIAN BITE

Smoky, savory and straight from home, Brazilian BBQ is Flavia's pick when nothing else will quite do.

The last page is rarely the end of the idea, the next challenge, and the next story. It's simply a pause before the next opportunity to create places that matter. Here's to the conversations still to come, the possibilities yet to be discovered, and the places waiting to be imagined.

— The EDSA Team





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