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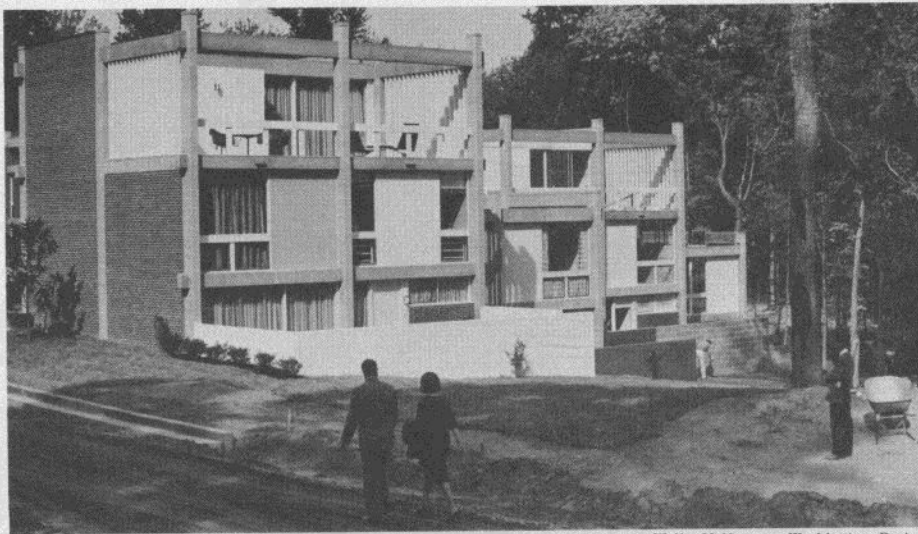
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*LIFE AND LEISURE*

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## **New Towns: Shape of Utopia?**



Wally McNamee—Washington Post

Town houses in Reston, Va.: 'Most exciting thing in a generation'

## New Towns: Shape of Utopia?

Picture a town where children walking to school need never cross a street, where homes and apartment houses overlook a park or lake, where unsightly telephone lines and television antennas lie deep underground and the law prohibits billboards, clotheslines, and garbage cans. No law bans automobiles, but who needs a car when the golf course, sailing lagoon, shopping center, and perhaps even the office, are only ten minutes away down a quiet path.

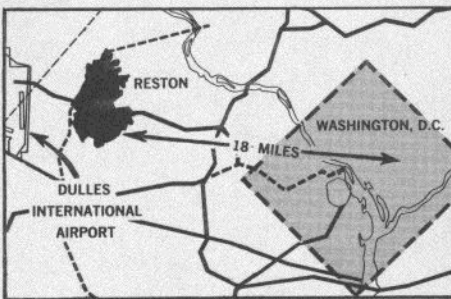
A utopian model at a world's fair pavilion? Not at all. At least twenty such communities offering some or most of these features are now being built from Virginia to California. Known as "New Towns," they mark a profound change of direction in the thrust of community planning: the goal is no longer just urban renewal—it is urban "newal." City planners, architects, and engineers are gradually realizing that the best solution to the auto-sclerosis afflicting urb and suburb is to build a completely planned town right from privately supplied scratch, where residents can live, work, play, or just vegetate without ever having to turn an ignition key. "The New Town concept," said Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall last week, "is the most exciting thing in city development in a generation."

**'Garden Cities':** The New Town concept is not new. It was first envisioned at the turn of the century by Ebenezer Howard, a London court stenographer who proposed that the city empty its slums into self-contained "Garden Cities" of limited size, surrounded by belts of greenery. Now, Great Britain boasts about twenty government-sponsored New Towns, many of them showcases of urban planning. Others have been built

in Scandinavia, Canada, and the Soviet Union. The U.S., despite the excitement generated by three New Deal-sponsored New Towns in the '30s (Greenbelt, Md., Greendale, Wis., and Greenhills, Ohio) has lagged far behind. One exception: Radburn, N.J., a pioneering experiment in planned communities by architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright; unfortunately, the Depression prevented some of Radburn's plans from getting on the ground.

Today, the most promising of the U.S. New Towns is rising on 6,810 acres of Virginia red earth 18 miles west of Washington, D.C. To be called Reston—an acronym for the name of its developer, Robert E. Simon Jr.—it will house some 75,000 people in seven separate villages by 1980. Although the first residents won't be moving in to the first village until after Christmas, the reviews are already excellent. Enthusiastically, *Architectural Record* magazine said: "If ever a speculative development deserved to make a handsome profit, that development is Reston." And the conservation-minded Udall adds: "Reston represents the finest ideas in housing."

Last week the ebullient, 50-year-old



Newsweek—Van Dyke

Reston: 75,000 by 1980

Simon, former president of Carnegie Hall, proudly toured his domain and explained: "Reston is a program that gave birth to a land plan that gave birth to an architecture—not the other way around." To launch his program, Simon borrowed two of Radburn's most interesting innovations. Man is largely separated from the auto by confining traffic to arteries away from housing areas and pedestrians to wooded pathways. And, in place of monotonous strips of dwellings, Simon has "clustered" houses and town houses about a common park, hillside, or lake. As a centerpiece, Reston will boast a fifteen-story high-rise.

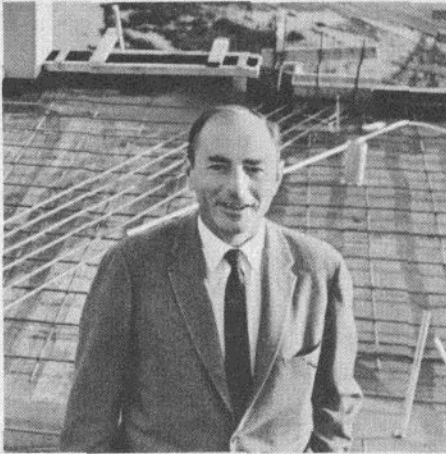
**Bridle Paths:** The result is far more recreation space. As more than 1,500 potential buyers from the Washington area house-hunted at Reston last weekend, bulldozers were tidying up a neat network of bridle paths, picnic groves, playgrounds, marinas, and the first of five golf courses. A 30-acre artificial lake is already stocked with fish and in the broad, brick-paved Village Center—designed by the New York architectural firm of Whittlesey and Conklin—everything from a teen-age rathskeller to symphony concerts and an Audubon nature course will be available. Initially, of course, most residents will commute to Washington; this January, however, a branch of Motorola, Inc., will move into the Industrial Park—one of five major business firms which are scheduled to settle in Reston. "People," says Simon, "should be able to live near where they work."

Indeed, the Reston Man need worry about very little. His lawn-trimming and snow-removal chores may be handled by the cluster association, the unit of neighborhood government. And a monthly payment of \$6 to \$18 connects him with the community air-conditioning plant, which will pipe chilled water to basement coils in every house and shop—thus saving maintenance and installation costs.

**Life Cycle:** To bring it all together, Simon, who softens his sell with the charm of a ward politician, wrestled for three years with banks, local politicians, zoning laws, and a forest of red tape. Oddly enough, his toughest struggle was convincing bankers that today's home buyers would be willing to trade their backyards for a commonly shared green. But Simon stuck to his blueprint. "It makes it possible to live one's entire life here," he explains. "You can grow up in one of the houses, live a bachelor's life in the high-rise, switch to a town house when you marry, and move back to a house when the children arrive." The three-way split seems to have already paid off—all 144 private lots in the first village have been purchased and there is a waiting list of 75.

For the more nonconforming, of course, the planned community may





Newsweek—Rowland Scherman

### Simon: A lifetime plan

seem a bit too planned. In Reston, Simon and his staff have promulgated rules for almost everything. The drugstore, for example, may put up only six seats in front of the soda fountain and anyone wishing to chop down a tree on his lot more than 4 inches in diameter must receive permission from the resident forester. A town-house resident planning to make even the slightest alteration on his buildings's façade must clear it with the architectural review board. "That's too much like living in the Army again," said one young executive last week.

**One Flavor:** Other New Towns risk becoming bland, one-class communities. At Del Webb's 15,400-acre Clear Lake City now rising on the flat grazing land near Houston's Manned Spacecraft Center, home builders must submit proposed designs to project director Wick Blanton for approval. The predictable result is a stultifying architectural sameness. "We don't want some crazy, ice-cream-parlor-looking thing," the dark-haired, slender Blanton explained last week.

Even the residents, it seems, must be uniform. Blanton confesses that if a really unpleasant type bought a house in town, Webb's partner—Humble Oil—would probably purchase it back to get him out. As for integration, Clear Lake City—like all its counterparts—insists it has no racial discrimination policy. Still, whether by chance or choice, there are no Negroes among its first 800 inhabitants (Reston recently sold one lot to a Negro colonel stationed in the Pentagon). To give residents at least some voice in how their lives are planned, builder Webb permitted the formation of a "civic league" to meet with the Clear Lake staff. At recent gatherings, according to Blanton, league members took up such momentous questions as what type of doorbells should be installed in the new houses and what grade of grass seed put down.

The sterility of communities like Clear Lake City, contends University of Houston psychologist Richard Evans, may

produce "the Levittown syndrome—a generalized climate of boredom." Philip Hauser, chairman of the sociology department at the University of Chicago, is more concerned over the effects on children. "To create an environment that gives a child a sheltered, marvelous existence," he said last week, "may make a hothouse plant out of him."

Still, the best of the New Towns seem to offer the best of everything. Not surprisingly, more than half are now rising in California, which is exploding at three times the population rate of the rest of the U.S. Among them:

■ **IRVINE RANCH:** On 88,000 acres of sunbaked ranch land 50 miles south of Los Angeles, architect William Pereira has designed the largest private development project in the world. "An ounce of farsighted planning is worth a pound of urban renewal a generation hence," said the handsome, 55-year-old Pereira last week. Pereira's "ounce" is a three-city complex that will eventually house 280,000 people. Like the university towns of Europe, the focal point will be the new 1,000-acre Irvine campus of the University of California. Branching out from the campus will be intermingled sinews of residential areas, factories, and schools. But the key to Pereira's concept is a 1,000-acre greenbelt of lakes and woods. "Master planning," he says of the greenbelt, "is a matter of determining not only what is built upon the land, but what is not."

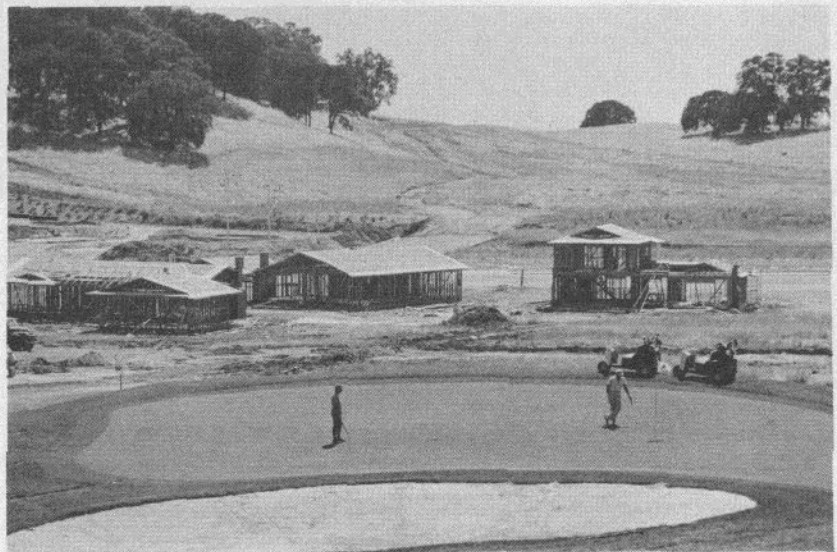
■ **LAGUNA NIGUEL:** It may sound like a cheap Spanish table wine, but architect Victor Gruen's 7,000-acre "ultimate community," some 45 miles southeast of Los Angeles may turn out to be the most scenic of the lot. Rusting farm equipment and an old tin shed now occupy the site of the town's center, but within seven years some 35,000 people will be living on Laguna's wind-blown

ridges and contoured valleys rolling down to the Pacific. Seven self-contained neighborhoods—most with ocean or lake-side views—will have homes costing as much as \$200,000. Accordingly, the brochure stresses cachet. Living in Laguna Niguel, it says, "is one of the most sought-after privileges in California."

■ **FOSTER CITY:** Fifteen miles south of San Francisco, giant dredges and barges are busily transforming a 2,600-acre slab of salt marsh into a planned community for 35,000. Like Reston, Foster City will offer garden and high-rise apartments, and homes; but the town's outstanding feature is a serpentine lagoon that will crisscross the entire town, offering 13 miles of waterfront for both sailing and swimming.

■ **SUNSET:** One of five New Towns being launched in California by the Sunset International Petroleum Corp., Sunset was born after detailed computer analysis of the "population wave." The result: a 12,000-acre town 18 miles north of Sacramento that, the computer predicts, will reach a population of up to 100,000 in twenty years. Like most recreation-oriented New Towns, Sunset built the fun part first; the Sunset Oaks Country Club opened last year, and a 19-acre recreational park soon followed. The town is so stratified it even has reserved one neighborhood for what it terms "junior citizens" or "newly formed family units" (English translation: young marrieds).

Obviously, the New Towns offer the same temptations to recommit the sins of the past—while promising to become the Promised Land. Yet with 1 million acres of open space in the United States being plowed under daily by unplanned developments, the chance to construct totally new communities—where man can live and work and play without commuting—seems worth the risk.



Green-side homes in Sunset, Calif.: A computer drew the blueprint