

Splendor *in the* Sand

FINDING PARADISE ON THE FLORIDA PANHANDLE

Setting a fresh standard of ‘New Urbanism,’ Alys Beach is quietly becoming one of the most exclusive and sought-after beachside communities in the country.

By Diana LaChance

Driving down Highway 30-A on Florida’s Emerald Coast, it’s easy to tell where the unique community of Alys Beach begins—a series of picture-perfect images begins to unfold one by one. Manicured lawns, sugar white sand, and bold white-ridged rooftops that seamlessly melt into the gulf coast sky seem to whisper to visitors that they are entering another world, one of timeless elegance and graceful simplicity. A marriage of tradition and romance, Alys Beach recaptures the spirit of those treasured places where seaside traditions began.

Inspiration for Alys Beach comes from the whitewashed masonry of Bermuda and Antigua, Guatemala, as well as the intimate courtyards and lush water views common throughout the Mediterranean.

Edited by Natalie Rushing; photography by Tommy Crow and Jack Gardner

Alys Beach was conceived as a more gracious way to live along the water, and master planners Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company are said to have drawn inspiration from the whitewashed masonry of Bermuda and Antigua, Guatemala, as well as the intimate courtyards and lush water views common throughout the Mediterranean. And while white is the predominant color throughout, hints of ochre and blue suggest additional influences from Morocco and Greece.

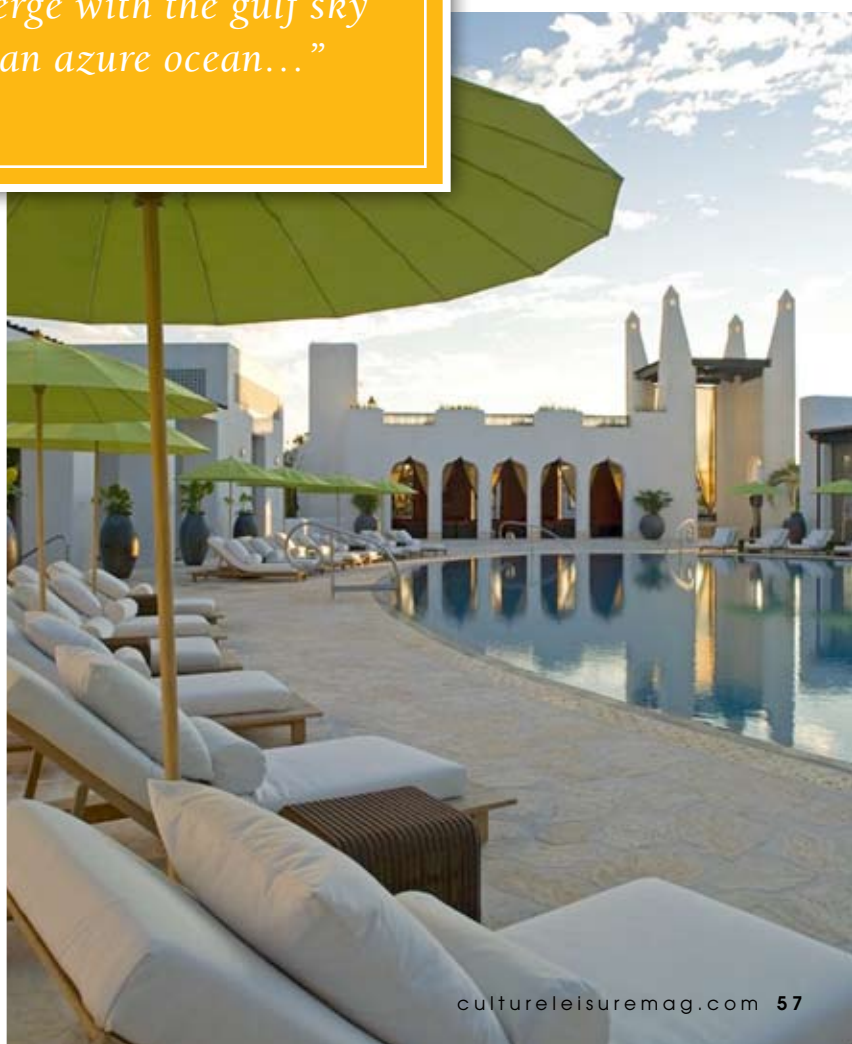
With beautiful design rich in aesthetic detail, Alys Beach has become the ideal 'New Urbanism' community, existing in perfect harmony with nature. With a pedestrian-friendly layout featuring shady cobblestone avenues, intimate garden rooms, sculpture parks, large formal lawns, fountains, and covered pavilions, the setting is evocative of the mid-1900s, before the automotive craze swept the nation. Amenities like the intimate Fonville Press Café and incredible Caliza pool, are within easy walking distance and bike-riding residents are a common sight.

But this approach is about more than a return to a simpler time in our nation's history. It's about creating a way of life that is more environmentally friendly, a goal that is furthered by the many "green" aspects—both visible and not visible—that have been incorporated into Alys Beach's architecture. These include handset cobblestone streets that limit water runoff, white houses that reflect the sun and conserve energy, shady interior courtyards that allow for through-breezes, avenues that face the water to collect the gulf winds, and shutters that prevent direct sunlight but allow for cooler, reflected light. The community also has a full-time environmental program manager as well as 21 preserved acres that back up to an expansive county land trust. And all of the homes are built to the Green Home Designation Standard of the Florida Green Building Coalition, an achievement that has landed Alys Beach on the Discovery Channel/Planet Green's World's Greenest Homes program. If all of that isn't progressive enough for you, consider this: the entire community is fortified with concrete backfill and shatterproof glass that

continued on page 59



“Beautiful white stucco walls and white-ridged roofs merge with the gulf sky like white caps on an azure ocean...”



Affectionately named for the matriarch of the town's founders, Alys Robinson Stephens of Birmingham, Alabama, Alys Beach is a reminder that what once was can indeed still be—a life of balance, a life of beauty, a life of simplicity, a life of grace. A life defined.





The Crown Jewel Called Caliza

It's hard to image anything competing with Alys Beach's dazzling architecture. But the true crown jewel is the community's infinity-edge 50' x 100' pool, whose warm salt waters invite relaxation and rejuvenation. Cushioned lounge chairs, curtained double chaises, and hammocks hanging in the shade of leafy palms offer copious seating, while a selection of private cabanas, a fountain-filled children's pool, a lap pool (complete with iPod hookup), and a discretely located hot tub make up the rest of the pool complex. Overlooking it all is Caliza, an excellent open-air restaurant and bar tucked behind arching colonnades that offers everything from succulent red snapper and lobster rolls to free-range chicken and a divine flourless chocolate cake. Though this will eventually be just one of many pools throughout the community, its magical setting is as yet unrivaled.

can take a bullet at point blank, making it one of the first "Fortified...for Safer Living" communities in the world. So unique is its design that Alys Beach has been profiled by the Weather Channel for its potential to withstand the pounding hurricanes common to Florida's coastline. And homeowners benefit too, not just from a home that can handle nature's worst, but also from reduced insurance rates.

"Homes are built to the Green Home Designation Standard—landing Alys Beach on the Discovery Channel/Planet Green's World's Greenest Homes program"

Of course, Alys Beach is not the only community on the Emerald Coast that adheres to the principals of New Urbanism. It's not even the only eco-friendly one. But it is the most beautiful. The custom-designed homes come in four styles—courtyard, villa, compound, and row house—yet each is entirely unique thanks to the collaboration of both private and town architects. Landscapers and interior designers round out the team of specialists that give each residence its own identity.

With all that Alys Beach has to offer, you might be surprised to learn that that this resplendent waterfront community is only 25% complete. Still to come is a mixed-use development fronting 1,500 feet of shoreline, a two-tiered pool complete with waterfall, restaurants and shops, an environmental center, an amphitheater, and more than 600 homes. But if you're tempted to wait until the community's completion in 2023, you'll be missing out on what's already there—a spectacularly elegant eco-friendly get-away defined by personalized service, lush accommodations, superb cuisine, and the kind of memories that will keep Alys Beach on top of your getaway list. *Home sites from \$415,000, Row houses from \$1,178,000; resort homes from \$1,900,000. Short-term vacation rentals are also available. www.alysbeach.com **C&LM***