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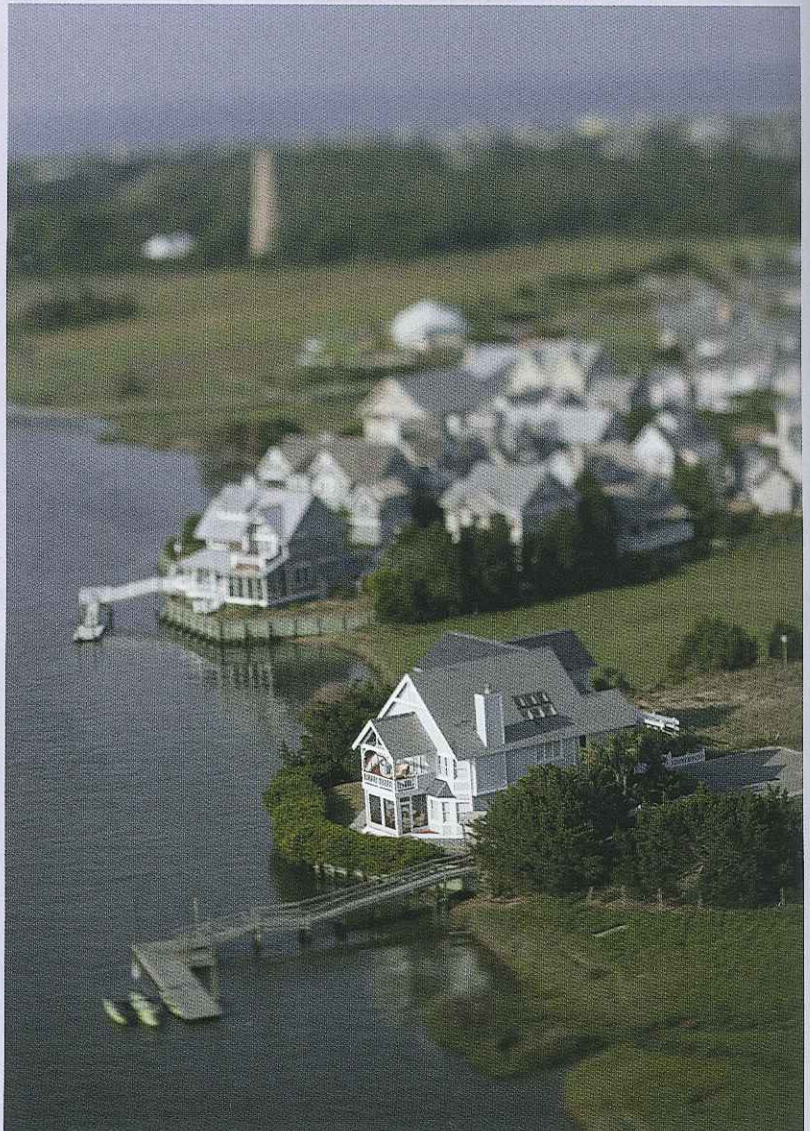
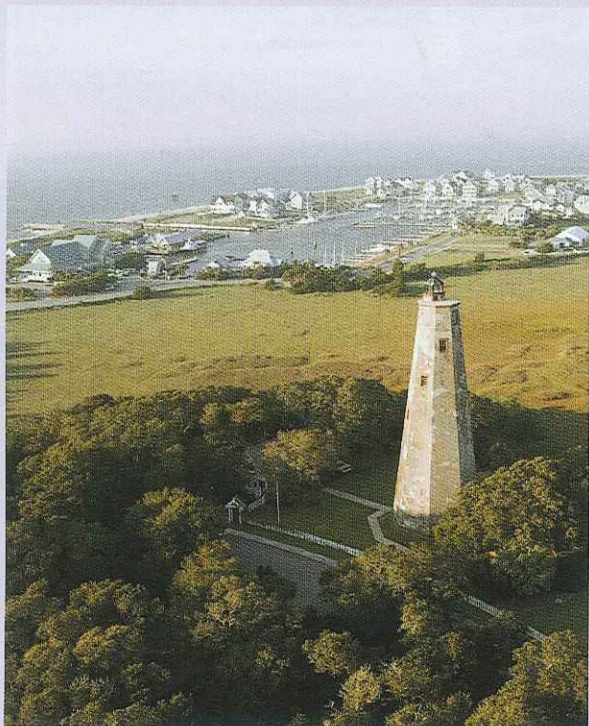
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New Urbanism Meets the Environment

North Carolina's Bald Head Island Conservancy makes smart planning and development its top priority



You *can* have it all, if you're smart about it.

That's what Suzanne Dorsey, executive director of the Bald Head Island Conservancy, tells me. We were discussing how to live with nature in a planned environment, the crux of the work the conservancy conducts on Bald Head. Dorsey should know; she holds a PhD in coastal oceanography, and she's headed the nonprofit group since 2004.

The Bald Head Island Conservancy leads a complex program of conservation, education, and preservation on the six-mile-long island. It was established in 1983 by a sophisticated bunch of island property owners who carefully articulated what Bald Head's future might be and debated who might develop it. They settled on the Mitchell family from Texas, who had some sophisticated ideas of their own.

Pooling their ideas about conserving the island's natural beauty—and avoiding the

sprawl so common along the Outer Banks of North Carolina—the Mitchells and the conservancy initially brought in architect Andrés Duany. He'd already gained notoriety for his new urbanist oceanfront community at Seaside, Florida, and he introduced a similar concept to a row of cottages on one of Bald Head's natural harbors.

For reasons unstated, that's the extent of Duany's designs for the island. In 1990, the conservancy and the Mitchells brought in

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Chuck Dietsche, a Cornell-trained architect, as planning director. All through the 1990s and into the new millennium, he and fellow architect Dan Costa designed homes for the island, clustering them together in village-like settings along the coast and into the maritime forest, respecting the island's topography and the environment as they built. "The conservancy was the watchdog and the figurehead for all that," Dietsche says.

Now, 1,200 island homes have been informed by the conservancy's findings. Designers respect the trees and maritime forest, wrapping homes around them instead of chopping them down. Tree canopies offer shelter from the ocean's salt spray, build up the island elevation from blown sand, and protect homes during high winds. "If you cut down the trees, you'd lose the roof," Dorsey says.

Equally important is protecting the island's sand dunes during overwash in a hurricane. Ecologists preserved native plant systems, then created a natural lagoon system that helps guide overwash in and channels it back out to sea.

Most impressive is the conservancy's preservation of 10 percent of the landscape. Easements protect 200 acres of old-growth maritime forest, among other choice sites. "People buy a lot next door to their property and donate it to the conservancy," she says. Some might see that as an enlightened gesture from a sympathetic owner—but it's also a perfect means of preserving a vista.

And a surefire way to have it all.

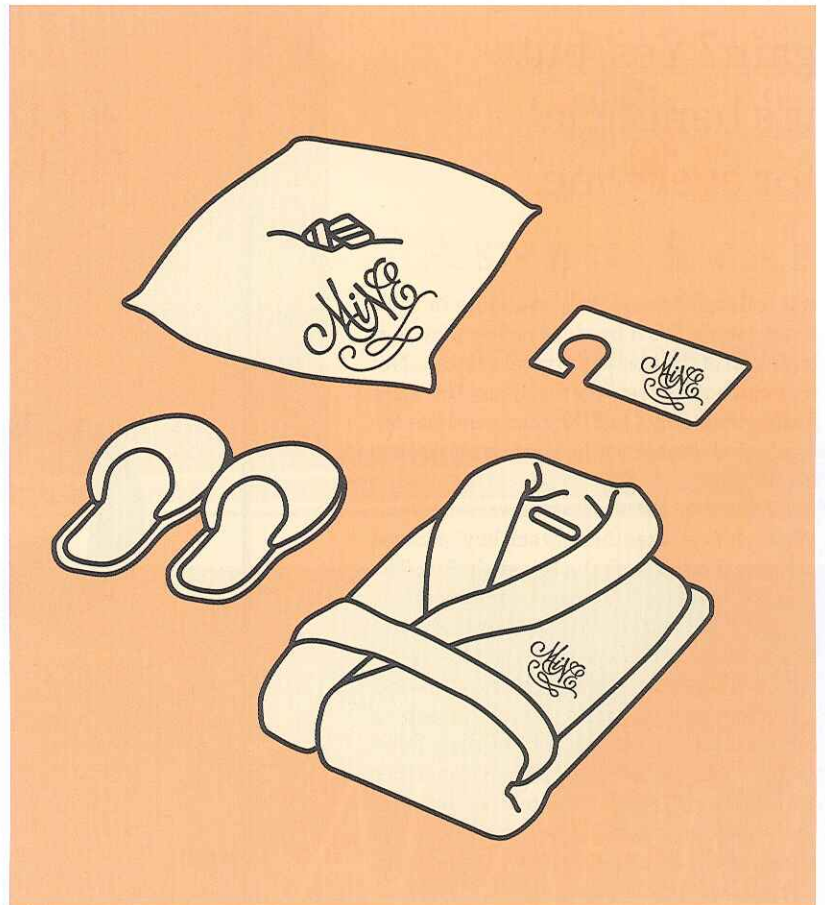
—J. MICHAEL WELTON

For more on the Bald Head Island Conservancy, go to bhic.org

IMAGE, STYLE, DESIGN

Bringing the Hotel Home

Are hotel room luxuries still as special when you buy them for your house?



When my parents went away on a trip, it always meant one thing: They would bring back wonderfully wrapped bars of soap from the hotels where they had stayed. Far nicer than the old soap bar we stocked at home, these soaps were a mark of sophistication—a small piece of luxury they could take from their hotel and use back home, reminding them of their experience. Our family was certainly not the only one to bring back the soaps as mementos; many families during the '50s and '60s kept stockpiles of hotel soaps under suburban sinks, a small yet very poignant look at mid-century travel dreams.

But now we have moved far beyond taking home the tiny hotel soap with fancy wrapping as a new generation of hotel product mash-ups has cropped up in nearly every high-end hotel chain. Ferragamo makes bath goods for The Waldorf, Red Flower Organics produces soaps and shampoos for Mandarin Hotels, and Bulgari manufactures signature-scented body products for The Ritz. These hotels, along with many others, provide and