

Americans today seem particularly sympathetic to restorative urbanism for two reasons. They hunger for a “taste” of urbanity, preassembled and sanitized perhaps—“lite urbanism” in Rem Koolhaas’s wry phrase—having for several generations disengaged from (and still unsure about) the real thing. Assaulted by the new, they seek comfort in the familiar. Traditionally, homes and neighborhoods have offered respite from the anxieties of change. Thus, it is understandable how an era of seemingly unending innovation in business, technology, and lifestyle marketing engenders sentimental nostalgia for the places we used to (or think we used to) live in. Though we may demand the conveniences of modern kitchens and attached garages, many prefer to package these in shapes and facades reminiscent of earlier (assumed to be) slower and pleasanter paces of life. Many a New Urbanist endeavor from Seaside to Kentlands to Crocker Park, Ohio, exhibit such a hybridization of modern lifestyles in traditional building forms.

The walkable city, the city of public streets and public squares, the low-rise, high-density city, the city of defined neighborhoods gathered around valued institutions, the city of intricate layers of uses free of auto-induced congestion—of course these remain appealing. Americans are not alone in pining for such qualities. In today’s Berlin, to refer to one European example, the city planning administration’s highly conservative architectural design guidelines for the reunified center are but another manifestation of this instinct to slow the pace of change—at least as it pertains to the physical, if not the social or political, environment. Many urban designers believe that it is their discipline’s responsibility to slow excess change, resist unwarranted newness, or at least advocate for such old-fashioned notions as “human scale” and “place-making.” Then we should think of:

Urban Design as an Art of “Place-Making”

A corollary to restorative urbanism is an increasing commitment to “place-making,” the provision of distinctive, lively, appealing centers for congregation to alleviate the perceived homogeneity of many and large contemporary urban areas. There are architecture and urban design firms in the United States that advertise themselves as “place-makers,” as the ads in any issue of the *Urban Land* illustrate. It is easy to succumb to cynicism. So many ordinary developments advertise their placeless character with catchy names ending in “place”