

SUSTAINED DEVELOPMENT

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This is Sustainable Development. The striking design similarities among these complexes say a great deal more about our values than is immediately obvious. They show how our lack of connection with the land ends up expressing as all sorts of other deficits: stable family, an ancestral home, or a sense of history and permanence. They also show how much people miss having soil in their hands or under foot. Note the shiny Hummer, with a suspension designed to clear rocks and stumps... It has blackened tires.



Here is the 'gateway to the city', a "community" of people who have no time to meet. Note the adornments, on the arch, under the windows, etc. The "wrought iron" hardware is powder-coated, thin-wall robot-welded steel tubing that looks like iron, produced by the same manufacturers on similar developments. The landscaping is "installed" the same way as fake balconies or fake antique light fixtures. There are ersatz trellises but you will not see anything *growing* on said trellises, because that makes them hard to maintain.

So, fake wrought iron, concrete composite “tile,” fake balconies, fake flower pot shelves, fake trellises, fake corbels, and stucco, lots of stucco. Low maintenance and no commitment, except for money of course (in light of the current mortgage crisis, hold that thought).

Here we have a row of “private” entrances, with planters jutting into the walkway as “meandering foot-paths” (don’t trip if the power goes out) leading to the “central focus”: a pre-cast fountain to evoke the ambiance of a running stream. For the most part, these developments all use the same landscape plants procured from the same industrial nurseries.

The construction is stucco on strand-board over wood frame. The whole project was completed in under two years.





Customers pay a lot extra for units like this one, because it has a *separate* private entrance, the illusion of a place of your own, with land around it.

The porch (not much bigger than what you see) recalls a veranda. It is an illusion of a place to sit and look at the land (instead of the dental offices next door).

The pillar and wall-caps are all pre-cast colored concrete. No paint required.

Now, lest you think I just hate high density in principle, you would be mistaken. I was once a big fan of Le Corbousier's huge Bauhaus monstrosities, and for other reasons besides environmental (although that was part of it). It was enticing to envision a sort of a cross between a shopping mall and a university campus, with machine shops, labs, and other play-rooms appropriate for development work... a designed entrepreneurial community if you will.

Even in the mid-80s however, it was obvious to me that for high density development to be a living growing community with dynamic stability over the long term, architecture had to give way to a driving social and economic paradigm that fosters gradual growth and change, making high-density living the way people *want* to live and raise their children. The key elements would be distributed capital and what later became the Internet in order to move ideas and information instead of people so that they could manage multiple careers simultaneously staying in the same community.

This place is planned for the people to move. When it's old, they'll replace it. The community is an illusion.



The name of this compound is a work of marketing genius. “[Communications Hill](#)” is the only prominent rise of its type on the valley floor, so it had a number of radio towers on it. Most people rightly think such towers are ugly. The developer merely dressed them up and turned them into a “central focus,” a feature! No complaints that way.



This is the “light rail” station ([at Capitol & SR87](#)) the people of Communications Hill **will** use as soon as the planners figure out how to force them out of their cars. Of course, its absurd to live there without a car because the nearest services are over a half-mile away.

This photo was taken at about 3:30 PM, well into Silicon Valley commute hours. I waited here for about fifteen minutes with two trains stopping by. During that time I saw perhaps three people on the platform. The reason is simple: The people who live around here do not have the time for mass transit, any more than they have time for their kids.

The Valley Transit Authority is recognized as one of the worst-managed in the nation. It consumes 80% of transportation funding in this area, and provides but 1.1% of the passenger miles. They tinted the windows on the trains so that the taxpayers cannot see how few riders there are. The planners will tell you that this is “for the future,” meaning they plan to coerce people into becoming customers. Given the time it takes to get through an airport these days, consider the invasive and time-consuming procedures to secure a public transportation infrastructure.

Why move the people when you can more easily move the work? It wouldn't be “control issues” at their employers, would it?

Back to planning: Besides getting to the store, how will the residents get home from here without a car?





This idiotic staircase (complete with “rest stop”) was probably ordered by the Planning Department, but such things are taught at schools of architecture, now overrun with Sustainable Development chaché. Can you imagine doing this with packages or groceries? So, what’s so special that anybody would live up there? Is it the view?



This was as good as I could make it look, and as long as you raise your eyes, it's fine. The land in "the view" is off limits to development because the voters got the Open Space District to "preserve" it for them. The developers of their homes used up (and wrecked) what was once some of the finest farm land in the world. It is now dedicated to a process of cramming successive waves of people who once afforded separate houses, into mass housing.



There are three generations of the same planning mind-set here. The mobile home park was succeeded by “town homes” that led to Communications Hill (because the rest was full), all surrounding a “big box” mall up against the light rail line (the station is on the right; photo taken at about 5PM with about a dozen people on the platform). Watch the planners squeeze the owner of the mobile home park for “redevelopment” deeming it “urban blight.”



The style is reminiscent of row-housing in London, except that the chimneys all have caps for anything but a natural gas “B-Vent.” In other words, they’re fake too, but people want to see real fire. There are no garages in any of this construction. Further into the city, the crime rate requires garages.



You just can't be too safe. There are fire sprinklers inside, with control boxes facing the street. There is an audible alarm on the upper right. There are flashing lights on the upper left to show which house has the alarm condition. There is even an ADT sticker in the lower right corner of the upper window. It would be little surprise if the outer layer on the window is unbreakable polycarbonate.

OOPS!

Yes, despite all this precaution, the gang-bangers staked out their territory almost immediately. With but two vehicle entrances to Communications Hill, the residents might *think* the police should keep them out, but no amount of precaution can overcome fundamental social problems, many of which derive from the organizing principles here.

The isolation is psychological not physical, it is in hearts and minds, not topography and architecture. Maintaining the illusion of isolation is a way to believe one has control over one's own life, evidence to the contrary. The state is in control, while mass-producing destructive kids.

There is no substitute for raising children in intact families. Beyond that, their ability to function with confidence within a community starts as a sense of internal security that their home is tangible and permanent, having a real future. Every effort has been made here to offer instant symbols of that continuity and connectedness. The problem is it's obviously fake.

You just can't provide "instant community" to children of people who move an average of every five years any more than you can give them a sense of contact with the land learning it from National Geographic and Animal Planet.



Here is the one real opportunity these people have for that connection, and I'll bet not one person in Communications Hill knows it. This land needs them badly. It is virtually all weeds: wild oat, rip-gut, foxtails, and various thistles. It has been a good many years since it was grazed. The ground is hard and everything is dry.





Somehow this picture says it all...

But do **you** see it yet? See if you can guess...

The trees for the instant “tree-lined street” are from a factory nursery; indeed, they are probably genetic clones all planted the same day. The grass came in on a truck and was rolled out like a carpet. The lamps are meant to recall a dim and opulent urban past few ever really had but everyone has seen on TV, with visions of hoop-skirts and evening gowns at the ball. It’s all perfect, straight, and geometrically conformed.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the concrete, is what is left of reality, which the “property managers” mow down once a year so that it doesn’t catch fire and combust their dreams. There is naught but a stray morning glory to remind them of what originally brought people here.

This being liberal Silicon Valley virtually ALL of these residents think they care about wildlife and habitat... on somebody else’s land. They’ll do as much as their limited attention span will allow, to grab “more,” so that they can have a place to escape for a vacation, **but they won’t lift a finger to rescue a habitat sitting right in front of their eyes every day.**

That wouldn’t be “Natural.”

Sycamores grow fast. As some folks lose their view of the distant hills, differences in tastes will raise their ugly heads. Some will want the view back. Others would rather not be visually cattle-prodded with a sea of tile.

Then the arguments will start at the home-“owners” association meetings, and enforced uniformity will rule.





This project in mid-town keeps the cars underneath, behind bars (other side of the building). As a sweetener for the developer, the City of San Jose maintains the “front yard” as a public park, taking both the property taxes and the maintenance budget off the hands of the developer and residents. Poor folks on the East Side effectively subsidize that, brought to you by the people who wail about “affordable housing”! The sycamores will soon hide the view here too. Best they pollard those trees, and soon!



Few who live here know or care about the significance of [Race and Saddle Rack Streets](#). The names recall the race track that used to be here. The track recalled horses with room to run that used to be here. This “layered history” is a vain attempt to lend a sense of permanence to a place that demonstrably has none.



And, of course, there is the obligatory empty light rail station across Race Street. The new construction is for more of the same. The prior two photos show less than a quarter of what is going up on this site. Where will they get the customers? They'll use regulations to offset supposed global warming to force them in from the suburbs.



This photo was taken at 5:30PM on [Tasman Drive in the heart of Silicon Valley's electronics industry](#). This was the busiest light rail station I saw and the heaviest passenger drop: only seven people, with a mobile home park just behind and to the right of this position. Why do I keep hammering VTA light rail? It recovers only 12% of its operating costs through fares. Its value is as a means to control the movements of their "customers."



6:05PM at [Tasman and Fair Oaks](#). One passenger debarks. Look at all the money this cost to build and operate. We could have hired private jitneys for less. A bus right-of-way would have been more effective, cheaper, and FAR more flexible. Buses can go anywhere. Light rail cannot. This is about control.



Nearby is the short side of yet another project: 170 units originally starting at over \$700,000 a pop. There are dozens like it. Think about how many new units this represents in the whole Valley. How does an industry building this much inventory so fast find enough customers able to drop \$800,000 for a townhouse? The developer is carrying the paper. So if you think the mortgage crisis was all sub-prime loans, think again.





We have yet to feel the impact of financial distress in developers like these. If there is a serious downturn in this economy, say from a tax increase on “the rich,” there is no way they will be able to unload this much inventory. Frankly, I don’t feel sorry for these developers. It’s the socialists who sold the public on the idea of mass construction of expensive tenements as “Sustainable Development” that really steam me.



We have the same meandering paths to the same “private entrances.”
Although the instant landscaping looks like it has been here a while, the place is brand new.



We have “branding.” Whether your job takes you to Sunnyvale, CA or Upton, MA, a Pulte Home is a home of exactly the same quality as the one you lived in...

Why do people commit to live in very expensive real estate and move so often when so much of this work is done on computers? It is really damaging to children.

One reason is that **too many people cannot be trusted** not to take their knowledge to another company or start one of their own. The difference between the value they create and their compensation forms the basis for that distrust. That difference is what concentrates capital.

As a result of what is essentially a moral and educational problem, the amoral control freaks of this world have decided that everybody has to be watched. So, the minions spend hours every day getting to and from an expensive tenement and a needless work cell and leave their kids with a government dedicated to turning them into willing sheep. Sheep are not terribly creative.

Such is the price of dishonesty and control, intentional or unconscious. But low total ROI and wasting prime land is not all that’s counterproductive here.

The workers don’t have the capital when they’re paying so much for over-priced real estate out of a contrived shortage of land. If you worked at home, wherever it was, you could teach your kids while you were at it. I spent less time teaching my kids than it used to take driving them to and from school. The return for my family has been incredible. They have excelled. They know they are loved. Nor are they anybody’s fools.





Moving into town we have the top-end: [Santana Row](#). This is Sustainable Development other people come to visit, to drop their cash rubbing elbows with people who have more of it. Besides the condominium apartments you see here, the place is crawling with single women looking for someone to spend an “evening out,” on them.

You can start at the local bookstore, basking amid the ambiance of superior intellect (which passes for a breeding advantage these days).

You can sup on coffees of the world, discuss politics, cite truisms, and figure out whether it is worth the risk of going any further.

Most important, it is a bookstore at which one can derive all those benefits without expending the time to read. Few people these days have the attention span to read a book anyway.

Place after place, everything is for sale: jewelry, Gucci, knick-knacks for the nest, baubles for the babe, wines, food, furniture, clothes, antiques, perfume, even cars...

I did not see *any* young children. There are no hardware stores. The toys are for adults. This place is for players, not builders.

I took my two teen-age daughters on this shoot. It was a good thing too because they pointed out a number of the photos you'll see here. As we walked, I asked them,

“If there was one word you would use to describe what you see in the people you see here, what would it be?”





There was not even a little hesitation in the answer; the younger one piped right up: "Desperation."
It was the constant twitter of forced laughter that had got to her.





Amid the instant huge palms, the instant flower gardens, and the brand new antique shoppes, desperation is everywhere.

Santana Row is all about owning or attaining *symbols* of the things people are told that everybody wants, things they think they need in order to show that they are worthy, symbols they know are ultimately unsatisfying.

I don't think I have to tell you that there isn't a church.

But, there is the next best thing!





There is an instant “old church,” hawking over-priced “Vintage” wine you can fantasize was made by monks. Yep, that façade is made of brand new “old” pre-cast concrete blocks, carefully and (I must admit) expertly stained to look old. And if the wine doesn't work...



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We have Spiritual Renewal in an “urban sanctuary,”

...for a mere \$100/hr.

I had to ask my wife what an “aesthetician” is;





And, if the wine and the
massage, and the make-
up does work,

They get the evening
spent,

on them...

I'm sure it's a very nice
hotel.





Everything here is for sale, including the fantasy that, with enough money, you can park anywhere you want.





Here is one thing I like about Santana Row: If you spend enough money, you can actually have a **real** balcony that can legally support your weight without need for a safety line or an attorney on retainer (although the one upstairs on the right might actually need one).

I say that with one precaution: I cannot make out how they are attached. If it is merely with wood screws to the window trim, I wouldn't trust them for very long.

The "view" is of course of a similar place across a very narrow street, but heck, what are fantasies for?

On one of these connections to the outside world, you can actually spot a **real** flower pot!!! OK, I got excited; it's the first one I'd seen. For which I applaud the tenant for the desire to own a real outdoor plant to care for among all this overpriced glitz.

Rents here for a two-bedroom apartment are between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per month, going up to \$8,500 for a four bedroom suite.

At that freight, one doesn't laugh at goofy plastic chairs.



Here we have the entry to “The Mall,” yet another retro-memory of older cities now fading into NETFLIX.

These trees are perhaps the only thing that survived the construction of Santana Row. Being oaks, they lend legitimacy to the sense of age and permanence being sold here.

Interestingly, I once knew the owners of Santana Row. My second ex-step mother went to college with the wife of the guy who bought this property in the 70s and built the previous Town and Country Mall, right here. We used to stay at their digs in upper crust Lafayette while they were on vacation. I have to credit Russ Bruzzone for the foresight not to cut them down for his parking lot that long ago, because they were not exceptionally large trees, back then.

As to his children...





The trees are now just another architectural feature (albeit very valuable). Accordingly, they are expected to stay the same. Why? They are Natural "old" oak trees, therefore we think they are permanent and static. The problem is that trees grow (although at only about 60 years old, these two are not growing very well). When they do grow, this carefully-fitted Philippine Apetong decking will kill them unless it is cut away.



Those who remember the late 60s may recall a unique TV series that resembles this scene: **the Prisoner**.

It was a show about a British spy who had had quite enough of it. He had quit his job in disgust (with which I can identify) and was then kidnapped to a very special prison, a very special high-security prison... where everything was **simply lovely**. There, they tried to break him by every psychological means imaginable, and then some.





His jailors wanted to know,

“Why did you resign?”

He wouldn't tell them. Perhaps he didn't really know, but he wasn't going to tell them anyway. It was a matter of principle, you know.

Everybody was happy.

Everybody was polite.

There were pleasant diversions everywhere with freedom of movement... within limits of course.

Everybody was spiritually dead, having given up their individuality, with the exception of our hero, Number 6.

The prison was called, **the Village**.

The setting for the show (the resort of Portmeirion in Wales) is so eerily similar to this place that one has to wonder if the architects of Santana Row derived some sort of macabre inspiration from the show, right down to the striped umbrellas.

I mean, with all that instant relationship, instant intellect, instant hip, instant history, instant small town ambiance, instant class, instant landscaping, instant relationship, instant permanence, and instant physical spirituality oozing about, all in search of money,

How else could the designers explain...





This?





OK, I guess I should apologize for having had so much fun with this one. Writing this book in a year was a killer and I got a bit loopy near the end. So, if this story got irritating, I must admit, it was more than somewhat intentional. But as I am sure you realize there was a series of very important points hidden among all this banter for about what might seem to be only a matter of taste. It is not.

I understand why a good many people like such developments: Low maintenance and central location leaves them time for other pursuits. It's not that it is urban (I was raised in San Francisco, which I loved until the depravity became overwhelming). The problem is the cost they present to everybody, not just the land.

How long could these people survive a serious interruption in critical services? When you were looking across the valley, did you notice the lack of water storage? Most of it is under what was once all that beautiful farmland; it takes pumps to get it out. Where is the stored food? Other than supermarkets, most of the warehouses are in the Central Valley over 50 miles away. One could bring Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Peninsula into chaos by blowing two rail lines, an airport, a few pipes and transmission lines, and a half dozen freeway bridges. It is that fragile, and it becomes more so each passing year.

It is *Sustained* Development, one that never stops growing at others' expense. It cannot support itself.

The people who live in these "communities," having no sense of what taking care of land or each other requires or how much they depend upon both, pretend to be smart enough to call the shots on **all** land use, public or private. To these greedy busybodies, my place is a mountain lion refuge, or a place to ride their bicycle in the country. They drive up to visit, and don't pay a dime for the upkeep or pull a single weed, and leave, feeling "renewed." To them, it's all Natural.



So besides the survival implications, what is bad about Sustainable Development is the alienation of the people from the land, the belief that leaving the management of the land surrounding the city to the Open Space District is all that is necessary to care for it.

Our land is not “open space.” It is full of life that demands care.

It is not their desire for contact with the wild that is evil; it is the desire to **take** it from others as if control of the land in the manner that suits them would fix their ennui. It is the will to collectivize ownership without responsibility for the outcome. If these people realized that they live on what was once far more precious habitat than the residue they wish to control, if they understood that their preferences are so terribly destructive, if they had ever taken the time to actually live and work with someone who does care for land, they would have a good bit more respect for what it takes.

So you see, these people need to keep Shemitta for their own sanity and survival just as much as the land needs animals to rebuild its fertility. Else they will exert their collective will over its owners and kill it with their ignorance while setting themselves up for easy conquest. Two weeks' vacation just isn't long enough for the demands to sink in, but it is a start.

What you see in Sustainable Development is a social problem that manifests itself as this obsession with symbols of what the people truly lack: stable families, stable communities, self-control, and contact with their surroundings, learning to work with their hands tempered by the love of something greater than themselves.

This is a matter of human relationships, with each other and with the land. It is a matter of obedience to observable laws; else we pay the terrible price of our own vanity.