

# Living HOME

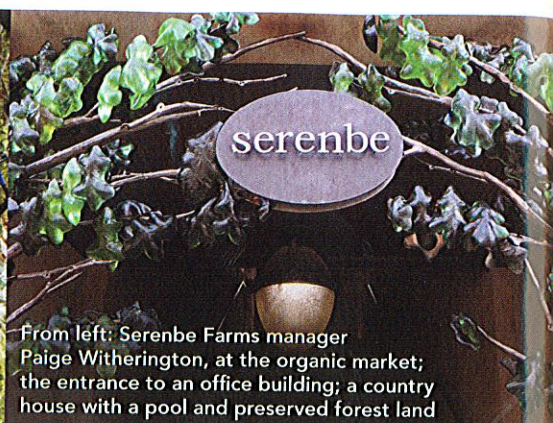
## THE NEW PLANNED COMMUNITIES

From rural Georgia to a Bahamian harbor, new projects are challenging conventional ideas about what it means to live in a development.

There's no shortage of truly gorgeous planned communities these days, enclaves that buck the *Truman Show* stereotype of cookie-cutter homes arranged along identical, tree-sparse streets. Yet even the most tasteful and idiosyncratic planned community can feel artificial, like a prefabricated town created to exist separate from and unmolested by the world around it.

Now a new planned community is offering an alternative to the cliché. Fearing the encroachment of subdivision sprawl on their farm in the Chattahoochee hill country, 45 minutes outside Atlanta, Steve and Marie Nygren bought up more than 900 acres surrounding their land in 2000. Over the following decade they built a New Urbanism utopia they've dubbed **SERENBE**: four connected residential communities clustered around historic English village-style town centers. What's unique is that the communities take up only 30 percent of Serenbe's total acreage, leaving the remaining 70 percent as protected farmland and wilderness.

"Every house opens in the front to what is clearly a village but backs up onto meadow, farm, or forest," says Steve Nygren, who adds that Serenbe's homeowners range in age from



From left: Serenbe Farms manager Paige Witherington, at the organic market; the entrance to an office building; a country house with a pool and preserved forest land

their twenties to their eighties. "It's funny—all the things about us that seem so progressive are actually not much different from what things were like 70 years ago, when people grew their own food, walked to school and local shops, and knew everyone in their community."

Serenbe's towns are living, breathing, quietly bustling centers containing shops, art galleries, an inn—and even, come fall, a charter school. The 30-acre working organic and biodynamic farm provides food for Serenbe's three acclaimed eateries—the Farmhouse, the Hil, and Blue Eyed Daisy Bakeshop—which attract, along with the development's 270 residents, culinary tourists from Atlanta and beyond.

The Nygrens owe much to Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, pioneers of the movement to create walkable mixed-use communities. Under the banner of their urban planning firm DPZ, Duany and Plater-Zyberk have developed such projects as Windsor in Vero Beach, Florida, a Caribbean-colonial-style enclave whose residents include Selfridges and Holt Renfrew chairman Galen Weston and Blackstone's Peter Peterson. But their latest venture goes a step further. **SCHOONER BAY**,



an in-the-works development on Great Abaco Island in the Bahamas, is scheduled to be operational at the end of 2011, with the first phase completed in 2013.

It will employ a plethora of environmentally friendly practices (collecting rainwater, exploiting natural breezes to reduce air-conditioning use, and growing all landscaping plants on-site), honor the architecture and flora of the area, and feature shops and restaurants serving—what else?—food produced on a 100-acre farm next to the community. It will also offer lots ranging from \$100,000 to \$4 million, in the hopes of creating a place where foreign second home-owners and local Bahamians will live side by side.

Orjan Lindroth, a Schooner Bay developer who works regularly with DPZ, notes that in most developments with \$4 million homes, the low end of the spectrum is usually about \$1 million. "That creates a monoculture," he says. "We have buyers in their twenties and in their seventies. We have American vacationers, Canadian fishermen, Swiss bankers, Bahamian professionals, local artists, environmental engineers, musicians, writers, marine scientists. One of the flaws of most developments is that they target a certain group. Real places have a diverse population."

DANIELLE STEIN

