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Architect's urban living guide doesn't include cars

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Andres Duany

Want to be green? Dump the cul-de-sac. Ban the mall. Leave the Prius at home. The best thing you can do for the environment is to push for dense, compact, attractive and walkable urban neighborhoods that mix homes, shops and offices, just like we used to.

That, in a sharpened nutshell, is the message delivered by *The Smart Growth Manual* (McGraw-Hill Professional, \$24.95), an intentionally slim, readable, well-illustrated and portable how-to guide co-written by Miami architect, planner and pioneering anti-sprawl combatant Andrés Duany.

“The bumper-sticker problem of environmentalism is one of the things we're trying to mitigate, the search for the silver bullet,” Duany said. “The idea that we just make all the buildings green, or make every car electric, and we'll be OK -- it's not enough.”

Duany, of course, is most closely associated with Seaside, the radically neo-traditional Florida Panhandle town he laid out 20 years ago with his wife, University of Miami architecture dean Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk.

Since then, their firm, DPZ, has designed towns and neighborhoods across the world that put people ahead of cars, even as the couple broadened their reach to retool urban neighborhoods and, now, with the new pedestrian-friendly Miami 21 zoning code, an entire major city.

Along the way, they helped foment a movement, the New Urbanism, which has spread their ideas worldwide and provided the underpinnings for Smart Growth -- the movement for sustainable development that gives Duany's new tome its title.

The Smart Growth Manual comes almost 10 years after Duany's influential *Suburban Nation* forcefully argued that the dominant mode of automobile-dependent, strip-mall and cul-de-sac development in America has denuded our cities and suburbs of street life and vitality while

despoiling the countryside.

Some New Urbanist ideas that seemed radical a few years ago are suddenly mainstream, adopted in some of the most conservative places. Virginia, for instance, earlier this year enacted rules to curb the suburban cul-de-sac, requiring that subdivision streets connect to adjacent homes and commercial areas to foster walkability -- one of the key lessons in the Smart Growth manual.

The new tome, co-written with planners Jeff Speck and Mike Lydon, is in some ways *Suburban Nation's* user-friendly sequel, with tips on how to properly design cities, neighborhoods, streets, homes and buildings boiled down to clear, easy-to-digest tidbits. There are no charts or jargon, and lots of photos of examples good and bad, many drawn from Miami and environs.

It joins a spate of books, like David Owen's *Green Metropolis*, which tout urban living as the most effective weapon against global warming, for a simple reason: People who can easily walk or bicycle to lots of places tend to use cars far less.

But Duany's new book is meant to be *used*: Designed as introduction and battlefield guide, it's made to be carried to planning meetings and hearings, with a sturdy cover and rounded corners so it's easy to flip through.

The book is printed on all-recycled paper using ecologically friendly inks -- expensive alternatives that will cut into any profits, especially since they persuaded the publisher to drop its price, initially pegged at \$39.95.

The higher price tag, Duany said, would have put it out of reach of the people he and his co-authors want to reach -- ordinary citizens wanting a say in how their communities are designed but unschooled in the intricacies of urban planning.

That aim, Duany said, comes from years of eye-opening, and sometimes disappointing, experience with one of the linchpins of the New Urbanism -- the public planning sessions, or charrettes, democratically meant to give a voice to residents of a community. Increasingly, he said, the process has become unwieldy, a forum for people who simply want to derail change of any kind.

Duany cites Miami 21, which took four years of revisions and controversy before it was approved -- only to be delayed by new Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado.

Q: So what led you to do this book?

A: It was actually born about eight or 10 years ago, when we were doing a master plan for Onondaga County, where Syracuse is. We were educating people. They were asking for materials. But they didn't exist. This was all new.

So we began working on a book. I instinctively stopped it. I realized we didn't know enough. About eight years later, we knew what was going on. We reviewed all the literature, from dozens of organizations. It took two years.

The idea is to make the public planning process more intelligent. The attempt here is to

make the full complexity of it clear but also at a level where regular people can become experts.

Q: *Why a manual format?*

A: It's really an instrument. It wasn't about selling books or doing it for professionals. It's one idea per page, so you can get through it and understand it and become an educated participant in the public process.

By the way, it was pretty hard to keep things down to one page. The danger was, we knew too much. I was the enforcer. I did six full edits. Jeff and Mike wrote it, the young people. To give it its tone.

Q: *Why do you use 'Smart Growth' and not 'New Urbanist' in the title? Is there a difference between the two?*

A: Smart Growth has always been the more popular title. It's not correct. Smart growth is government-initiated. New Urbanist is market-initiated. Smart Growth is almost entirely New Urbanist propositions but repackaged with a more effective name. But the book is balanced (between the two).

Q: *Who did you have in mind as user, and how do you foresee its being used?*

A: I like to think people would read it in their spare time, a little bit at a time, regular people who are nonprofessional.

Look at Miami 21. Decisions were made by regular people who were not experts. But just because you've showed up doesn't make you an expert. As a result, too often the decisions are random. They could be good, but it's often bad. So we need to *make* them experts.

If I did a public process like Miami 21 again, I would be handing it out by the dozen, the idea being, 'Read this before you talk.'

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