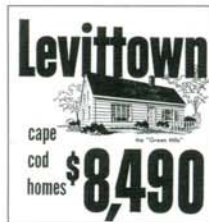


METROPOLIS

ARCHITECTURE < CULTURE > DESIGN

April 2003

The Metropolis Observed



Levittown, 1947



Stapleton, 2003

A New Development

planning

If Levittown epitomized postwar culture, what does Denver's Stapleton development say about America today?

The way developers view the blank slate of open space in America says a lot about us as a nation. For example, our understanding of postwar culture begins with Levittown, New York, where the Levitt family mass-produced almost 20,000 virtually identical homes in the late 1940s at a peak rate of 30 per day, transforming 6,000 acres of Long Island potato farms into the prototypical U.S. suburb.

If Levittown was a Ford, then Stapleton, a massive redevelopment project on the former site of Denver's airport, is a bicycle. Boasting its own "green book" of sustainable guidelines as well as an explicit effort to rectify virtually every postwar sprawl-related ill—economic stratification, air pollution, car reliance, community disintegration,

detachment from nature—Stapleton garnered the prestigious Stockholm Partnerships for Sustainable Cities award in May 2002.

By comparing the nuts and bolts behind Stapleton's departure from the Levittown template, it becomes clear that the more things stay the same, the more they require a paradigm shift. It remains to be seen whether any Stapletonians will actually investigate, for example, their new Central Park's distant past as an open plain, as its swaths of prairie grass are meant to suggest. But if nothing else the project comforts design nerds by at least considering that residents have minds of their own. Ultimately it's a 4,000-acre step in the right direction. —Eric Demby

LEVITTOWN

originally 1,200 acres; eventually 6,000 acres with 17,447 homes for 65,000 residents

houses rented for \$60 per month in 1947, converted two years later to sales only at \$7,990 for an 800-square-foot house

potato farms in the town of Island Trees

nine swimming pools constructed on the same concrete foundations as the town's homes; "village green" open spaces; curvilinear streets to slow traffic, provide a "country" feel, and allow for street play; a covenant prohibiting fences and front-lawn clotheslines

Frank Lloyd Wright; Navy Seabee construction teams

World War II GI families seeking affordable housing in the face of an acute postwar housing shortage; originally 100 percent white (a Caucasians-only policy remained intact until 1966)

TV built into living-room shelving unit; back-to-back fireplaces; double-glazed Thermopane windows (inspired by sliding windows at White Castle hamburger stands); floors heated by electric coils embedded in concrete foundations

Lewis Mumford, 1961: "Suburbs are just an expansion of a mistaken policy to build without industry. We have to build complete, well-integrated 'new towns,' not monotonous suburbs with great picture windows that look out onto clotheslines."

STAPLETON

4,051 acres (including 1,116 acres of open space), with plans for 12,000 houses and apartments for 30,000 residents, plus 3 million square feet of retail space and 10 million square feet of office space accommodating 35,000 workers

from \$150,000 for a 1,000-square-foot condo to \$1,000,000 for a 3,800-square-foot house

Stapleton International Airport, 1929–95

ten-minute walk to shopping, schools, parks, and offices; raised front porches to encourage social interaction; garages in back to de-emphasize automobile reliance; narrow streets and wide sidewalks to create pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods

Smart Growth, New Urbanism (master plan by Peter Calthorpe)

with the goal to attract a full range of age groups, economic classes, and ethnicities, the Workforce Housing Program creates housing for teachers, nurses, police officers, and retail clerks

neotraditional architecture in single-family homes, row houses, town houses, and carriage houses; all homes prewired with high-speed Internet access and intranet; wireless Internet capability in stores and outdoor spaces

Stockholm Partnership for Sustainable Cities: "The Stapleton airport reuse project breaks the old pattern... while calling into question 50 years of single land-use development and automobile-dependent design."

