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THE ITALIAN INFLUENCE
CASUAL, LIVABLE & WARM

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A Brilliant Shade of Blue

Paradise Found at Rosemary Beach

By Elaine Warner

Sometimes decisions are so tough. The sky is a brilliant blue, the ocean shades of sapphire, aquamarine and emerald, the sand looks like powdered pearls. A walk on the beach? Or how about a trip to the pool? I could just stay where I am, stretched out on a comfy couch with a good book. Living a life of luxury isn't easy. This was me in October, ensconced in a carriage house beside an elegant home in Rosemary Beach, Florida.

Now it's winter in Oklahoma. The excitement of the holiday season is over. Valentine's Day is a hotel warm glow



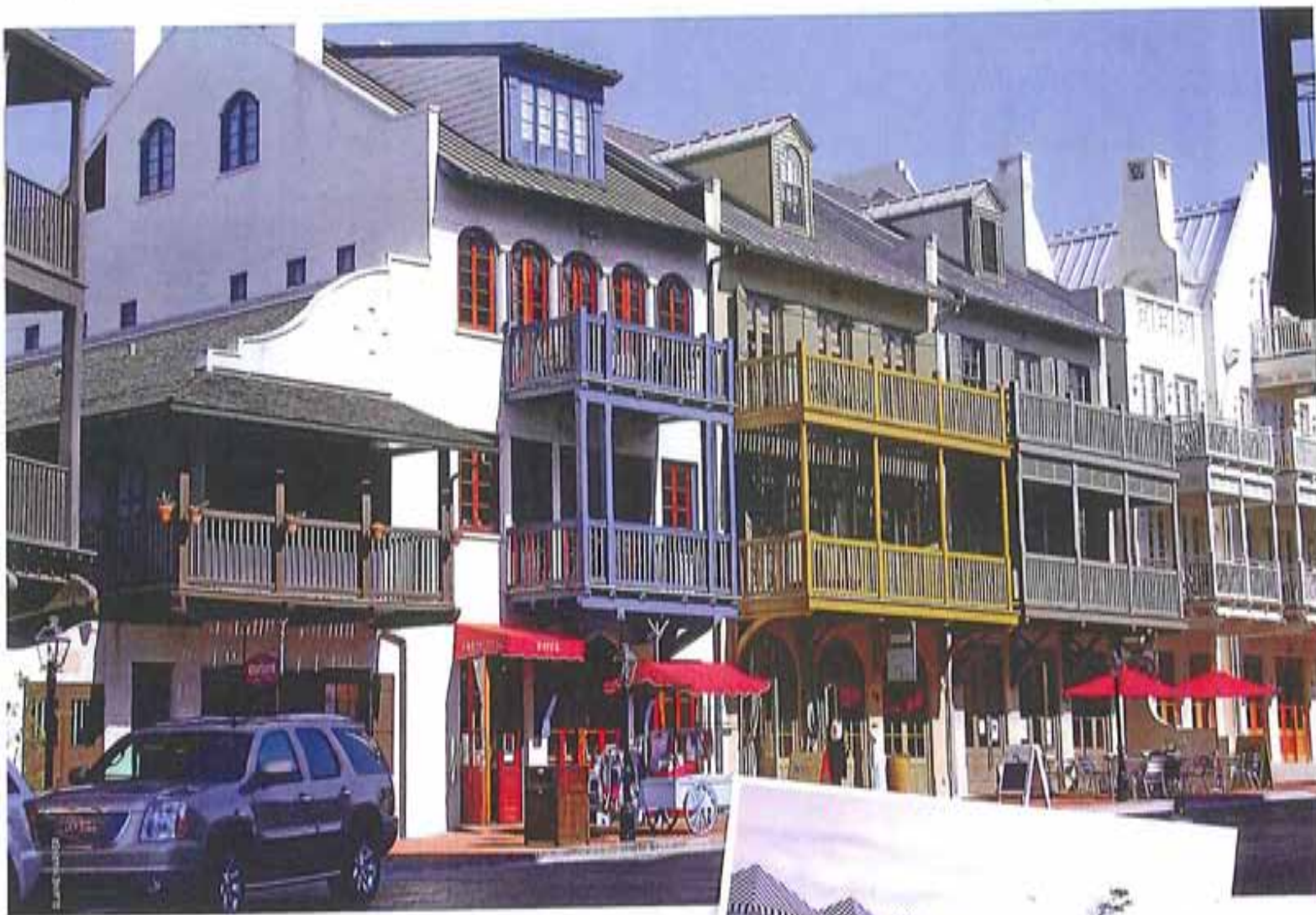


in a cold time. Spring's blossoms and breezes are still a way off. What to do? Start dreaming about a return to Rosemary Beach, Florida.

Rosemary Beach, a planned town, was established in 1995, created by the same firm that masterminded the legendary Seaside. There are some distinct differences. The homes are larger and, rather than the New England-y look of Seaside, offer an air of more exotic climes - Bermuda, New Orleans, the Dutch West Indies. Each home is individually



Diversions Where to Go



designed but the use of approved architects insures a harmonious blend of styles.

On 107 acres, the community was designed for walking. Cars stay parked in garages as residents and guests walk or bicycle around town. No home is more than a five-minute walk away from town center. Every street, which includes main roads, boardwalks, pedestrian lanes and footpaths, leads to a public space – parks, tennis courts, swimming pools, the beach or the central business area where shops provide everything from sunscreen to fine art.

I was especially appreciative of the attention to environmental concerns. Landscaping is dependent on native plant materials. Pervious paving materials are used to manage water run-off. Though there are several lovely lawn areas, individual homes are xeriscaped so lawn mowers are used only on public greens. Streetlights



Diversions *Where to Go*



are designed to minimize light pollution and to protect hatching sea turtles. An elaborate network of boardwalks, stairs and ramps protects the fragile dune system.

Housing construction materials are chosen for durability and safety with impact-resistant glass and well-reinforced walls. All exterior color is produced by staining rather than painting – using natural earth tones for the color palette. There's a 50-foot height restriction, so you won't find towering buildings looming over your home.

These details I learned on an escorted tour of the property. But, unlike most press trips, the schedule on this one was not a hectic race from place to place. I felt as pampered as a Roman emperor at a grand banquet. Everything was available to me – along with the time to savor it. And this is a hallmark of the place, whether you are a resident or, like me, a casual visitor.



Though between 160 and 170 of the homeowners live here full-time, most of the 680 finished units are second homes. They range from comfortable townhouses to palatial mansions with carriage houses like the one I stayed in.



In less fancy environs, my digs would be called a garage apartment – but carriage house definitely applies here. No chauffeur ever had it so good. The décor was the epitome of south coastal style. Lots of natural fibers were used in the furniture and a woven grass area rug covered a portion of the dark wood floors. Oyster white fabric was used in slipcovers, and chairs and sofa were accented with pillows in shades of chocolate and sea glass. A graceful spiral staircase led to the loft and the master bedroom. The kitchen was compact and complete, although I only used it for a couple of breakfasts and some late-night cocoa.

If you don't want to cook, there are plenty of choices in the neighborhood. I had a great breakfast taco at the Cowboy Café. Everything at Rosemary Beach is relaxed, so casual dress is fine, even at the Onano Neighborhood Café where dinner features Northern Italian cuisine and fresh seafood specialties. For an elegant evening out, try the Café Thirty-A, a few miles east in Seagrove Beach.

Rosemary Beach is a great destination, whether you're a Type-A or



a Type-ZZZZ. In addition to the beach, residents and guests have access to the tennis center and its eight Har-Tru clay tennis courts, four beautiful swimming pools, a butterfly garden, shops, restaurants and a fitness center with an assortment of classes. And if you need more activity, sport fishing, kayaking, even parasailing are just a short drive away. But the true beauty of Rosemary Beach is in just relaxing in such a gorgeous setting.

Come to think of it, why wait to go? Prices are at a low now and the February daytime temps are usually above 60. Even if a cool front dips down this far, the beach is still great for walking and the Sky pool is comfortably heated. This is one decision that's easy – a trip to Rosemary Beach makes a great Valentine's present any time of year!

Visit www.rosemarybeach.com for more information. ■

