

# New Town, Old Soul

A new neighborhood west of St. Louis redefines the American suburb.

BY REX PERRY, PHOTOGRAPHY MATTHEW GILSON



All streets in The New Town at St. Charles end with a view of the water. The central canal and lakes are also practical—they contain storm water. Soil removed during the lakes' creation was used to raise the neighborhood above the 500-year floodplain.



### Town Vibe

The New Town at St. Charles isn't for the suburban dweller looking for a big yard behind a privacy fence. The location is the suburbs, but it has the know-your-neighbors feel of a small town combined with inviting public spaces like those in Charleston or Savannah.

- **Can I afford it?** A 626-square-foot, 1-bedroom, 1-bath loft has a base price of \$99,500. A 4-bedroom, 2½-bath detached single-family home recently sold for \$417,000.
- **Where's the old town?** Historic St. Charles, less than 5 miles south of The New Town at St. Charles, is popular with tourists strolling its Main Street.
- **Where's the best place to relax?** "Almost half the homes have two-story porches," says town architect Tim Busse. "The upper porches give you a private tree house feel."

## Is it the people or the place that creates a neighborly community?

Residents of The New Town at St. Charles are discovering that you need both in order to build the idyllic neighborhoods that seem to be part of the American psyche. Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TNDs) aren't a new concept, but New Town is one of the most successful large-scale New Urbanist communities built on the edge of suburbia. "If you just want to drive into your garage and stay in your house, this town isn't for you," says resident Elizabeth Kinney. "I'd rather sit on my porch and chat with the neighbors."

**Unexpected Design** "We wove water through the neighborhoods, orienting the public squares, shops, and homes to the lakes and canals," says Marina Khoury, project director for town planners Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company. "Many suburban developments pipe storm water into hidden back ponds," adds town architect Tim Busse. "We made it into a defining landmark." The interconnected waterways speak to the importance of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers that converge nearby. Just as those rivers help connect a nation, New Town's lakes, sidewalks, footbridges, and public greens are conduits for a tight-knit community.

"The developer, Greg Whittaker, spared no expense on the public spaces," says Marina. "Even the smallest home is grand when you can step off your porch into a beautiful park." New Town is divided into five pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, each with a distinct town plaza, waterfront lots, and acres of green. Residents and visitors alike share the open-air skating rink in winter and stroll the plazas in summer. "You meet people when you have a tiny yard," says Elizabeth. "We don't just know our neighbors—we went on vacation with them last year."

**LEFT:** The public dock draws people to the water. "Take a two-block walk, and you hit a lake," says homeowner Brad Reed. **RIGHT:** The mercantile district has a vibrant mix of shops, outdoor dining, and residential lofts.



**BELOW, LEFT:** Like the Southern town square, the public spaces in New Town are the place to meet your neighbors. **BELOW, RIGHT:** A local market is vital to the urban mix of a neighborhood. Marsala's Market co-owner Mark Hohenshell knows many customers by name.



## What To Do

- **Bonnidell's Ice Cream Shop:** Stop at this kiosk on the amphitheater's grounds for a sweet treat.
- **Domain Street Wine Bar:** The locals claim it as their own, but they're always willing to share a glass of wine and their love of New Town with strangers. [www.domainstreetwinebar.com](http://www.domainstreetwinebar.com) or (636) 916-2092
- **Katy Trail:** Run, bike, or hike on America's longest rails-to-trail project. [www.bikekatytrail.com](http://www.bikekatytrail.com)
- **Historic St. Charles:** Lewis and Clark began their exploration of the West from this Missouri River town. [www.stcharlescitemo.gov](http://www.stcharlescitemo.gov)
- **Marsala's Market:** Pick up sandwiches for a picnic lunch, or sit outside to enjoy the town scene. (636) 724-8833

**Mix and Mingle** New Town shares roots with historic St. Charles but has its own active, outdoorsy vibe. The summer social scene revolves around free movies and music at the lakeside amphitheater on weekend nights. The town trucked in white Gulf Coast sand for beach volleyball courts and reserved a public green for the Bocce League.

Brad and Brenda Reed moved their family from another suburban St. Louis neighborhood to an Arts and Crafts-style cottage near the outdoor amphitheater. "In our old neighborhood we told our kids not to cross the street. Here, it's just the opposite. In the summer they walk to the amphitheater to watch movies, and in the winter our son lives for hockey on the canals," says Brad. "Once you get into a rhythm for this style of living, you learn to be more neighborly."

**A Sense of Place** Critics point to Traditional Neighborhood Developments as being artificial and overpriced, but New Town's beauty runs deeper than a row of flashy facades. "Southern towns, and especially the town squares, have a charm," says Tim. "We toured neighborhoods in St. Louis and across the South to tie ours to places that make people feel good."

The neighborhood market is modeled after a popular mercantile that burned to the ground many years ago in historic St. Charles. New Town's row houses are based on similar homes in a well-established St. Louis neighborhood. The organic farm near the edge of the community preserves a portion of the original river farmland.

**Plan a Visit** Think you might want to live in a community like New Town? You don't have to move here—almost all of the amenities are open to the public. Wide sidewalks and narrow streets encourage you to park the car and explore. You'll feel like a local before the day is through. ●

Find community information and events at [www.newtownatstcharles.com](http://www.newtownatstcharles.com).