

IN STYLE?

Judge for yourself on this Sunday's Urban Life + Style tour

"There were no trees anywhere—it was as though [it] had been nuked or had been the brainchild of the logging industry maybe—and each house was exactly the same except that some had powder blue vinyl siding and others had desert tan. There were elaborate wooden playgrounds in the backyards and mini-satellite dishes on every roof, and each driveway was a smooth carpet of blacktop and there wasn't a sidewalk crack to trip over because there were no sidewalks, and each house had a garage that was so oversized it could have been its own house..."

—**Brock Clarke, An Arsonist's Guide to Writers' Homes in New England**

As readers had a lot to say about Lexington's "urban life and style" (and sometimes the lack of it) in this year's Best of Lex Readers' Poll, on stands last week. This weekend's upcoming Urban Life and Style Tour seemed like a perfect opportunity to continue the discussion.

Last week, the readers had their say. They...

- voted loft living the best thing to happen to downtown this year;
- voted 500s on Main the best new building;
- voted Old Tarr Distillery Best old building rehab (it's on this weekend's Tour);
- voted the old Lexington Mall carapace the best spot for a permanent farmers market;

The readers wanted to see more green-friendly development (see also next week's Green issue); they wanted to hold the line on expanding the urban service area; and they wanted to see responsible, clever, creative, imaginative, contemporary infill.

Joy Lynn Moore, principal broker for properties like Main and Rose and the Nunn Building Lofts (on this weekend's tour), says, "After commuting for almost three hours daily in San Diego traffic, I moved to Lexington four years ago and have added three hours to my day by living and working downtown. I can not begin to explain how great it is to be able to walk everywhere and really enjoy life by being immersed in the downtown culture."

She says, "all thriving cities have ACTIVE and ALIVE



Artek Lofts

downtown cores," and adds, "in order for us to arrive as a progressive city we need many things to happen." On her wish list, she includes "more downtown housing; more businesses and retail returning downtown; the return of the trolley system; more Yellow Bikes and better roads to use them on; two-way streets; transportation that makes sense for people; and more public art."

Elaborating on the transportation issue she says, "Bringing the trolley system back to downtown Lexington will help businesses thrive, create an easy way for people to get from one end of downtown to the other and add another point of interest for tourism."

Moore asks, "Do you want to see a grocery store downtown? I sure do! Seems like a no-brainer, but unless we have two way streets it's not going to happen anytime soon."

"It's The Economy Stupid"

Lexington Vice Mayor Jim Gray says "Lexington is just beginning to emerge as a place for creating and producing music and visual and performing art. That's a very big deal. We're just beginning to enter the arts economy, to appreciate art and entertainment as an industry, not something that's frivolous and extravagant...but essential to our economy."

Tapping into the community's thoughts on Lexington's room for improvement, he says, "A doctor friend of mine

told me recently, 'You know, Jim, I'm a doc and work 60-70 hours a week. Which means when I've got time off, I want to use it efficiently, which means high quality entertainment, art, music, great restaurants. Quality is a big deal. And Lexington has a good start but still a long way to go.'"

Gray adds, "So this whole deal is really about the economy. About creating a new infrastructure. The equivalent in the 21st century to what an industrial park was in the mid-20th Century. Sure it's about art and music and quality of life. But at the end of the day, it's about the economy. About creating economic opportunity in the 21st century. And that's a very big deal."

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—artist/activist Bruce Burris



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—Lexington Vice Mayor Jim Gray



An artist's rendering of the Old Tarr Distillery District

“all,” highlighting downtown’s affordability issues when he says, “The considerable hype surrounding the rebirth of downtown Lexington would have us believe that we are well on our way to creating a sort of Utopian hub here, but very few can actually afford to buy their way into the utopia which is currently under construction.”

As for the “arts community” headquartered in downtown Lexington, Burris says, “I know of artists and art organizations who have had to move out of downtown due to rent increases or conversion of rental space to condos.” He adds, “With respect to a recent *Saturday Night Live* sketch, ‘Don’t even get me started....’”

He has a point.

Tate’s take is that this is “an exciting time not only for downtown but for all of Lexington to see that we are able to take underutilized areas and buildings in our downtown area and make them viable projects that contribute to our community and allow people to be drawn back into the downtown area.”

He has a point too.

And for the price of a ticket, you’ll get an opportunity to give downtown Lexington a report card. ■

4th Annual Urban Life & Style Tour
Sunday September 23, 12pm - 5pm.

Come on Down (and bring your wallet)!

“[a]cquisition of new things, any new things, in a person’s life should be subjected to hard standards. Our present cultural imperative is that all new things are better than all old things; in service of this conviction we’re racing toward life on a deforested stinky junk pile. We should reconsider. Anyone can see that a remarriage, however happy, still contains in its history some nugget of death or divorce; we could recognize some smidgen of similar tragedy in the act of marrying ourselves to new possessions. Something is getting thrown into the world’s dustbins, which are already groaning. We should quiz the new candidates fiercely, asking them to prove themselves worthy in measurable ways: smaller, kinder, cleaner, more helpful to our communities.”

—Barbara Kingsolver, “The Art of Buying Nothing” in
Wendell Berry: Life and Work

Not all urban downtown projects are created equal. Some are straight out of the lustrous pages of *Dwell* magazine (the luscious equivalent of contemporary real estate porn for many of us), while others obviously belong in a tired, wilting A.A.R.P. pamphlet. The tour gives Lexingtonians a chance to view for themselves. What works? What doesn’t? What is part of a sustainable legacy for the community, and what’s a simple variation on those wretched

cheap-yet-overpriced pre-fab housing projects for those rich which already clutter the Bluegrass suburbs? This is an opportunity to exercise those critical thinking muscles.

If one were to judge downtown living solely by the constant proliferation of misty glowing front-page stories in the daily paper interviewing roving bands of creaking elderly loft-dwellers who rhapsodize (often for dozens of pricey column inches) that they retired and traded their suburban McMansions for downtown lofts so that they could walk—yes, walk!! (and sometimes bike)—from their front door to a restaurant, the outlook for downtown would seem rosy indeed. (Somebody in the business sections along the way forgot to mention Lexington’s over-built condo boom of the ‘70s—and the occasional similarity of a few loft developments which suspiciously resemble...well, condos, having simply ditched the unfashionable moniker).

Some of the infill development downtown is exquisite, and some is just ex-queasy. The tour, as an annual celebration of the best Lexington has to offer, presents the exquisite.

Harold Tate, of Lexington’s Downtown Development Authority, says this weekend’s tour “will give people the chance to see that there is a new way of living, working, and playing downtown. In the last three years we have seen many new residential, mixed use and retail project open their doors to all of Lexington.”

Artist/activist Bruce Burris might quibble about the

A Sampling

Tickets for the Urban Life and Style Tour can be purchased on Sunday at the tour headquarters in the Victorian Square atrium.

A sampling of what will be featured on this year’s tour includes the Bluegrass Cigar Building—soon to be transformed into a contemporary modern adaptive-reuse residential community.



Old Tarr Distillery

Old Tarr Distillery—home to the BeauX Arts Ball and the LexArts Ball earlier this summer, as well as Ace’s upcoming annual Bluegrass Bachelor Ball on November 1—it’s the eastern anchor of the proposed Distillery District, bookended by the Old Pepper Distillery to the west, also on this year’s tour. Proposals call for residential, office, dining, entertainment space, along with authentic industrial lofts, retail, and event space.

Retail spaces to be highlighted on this year’s tour include the marvelous enclave at Greentree (Greentree Tearoom and Antiques; L.V. Harkness; and Belle Maison Antiques).

Complete tour maps and pamphlets will be available at Victorian Square. ■



Gay Reading (l) and John Martin (r) of Greentree Tearoom & Antiques.