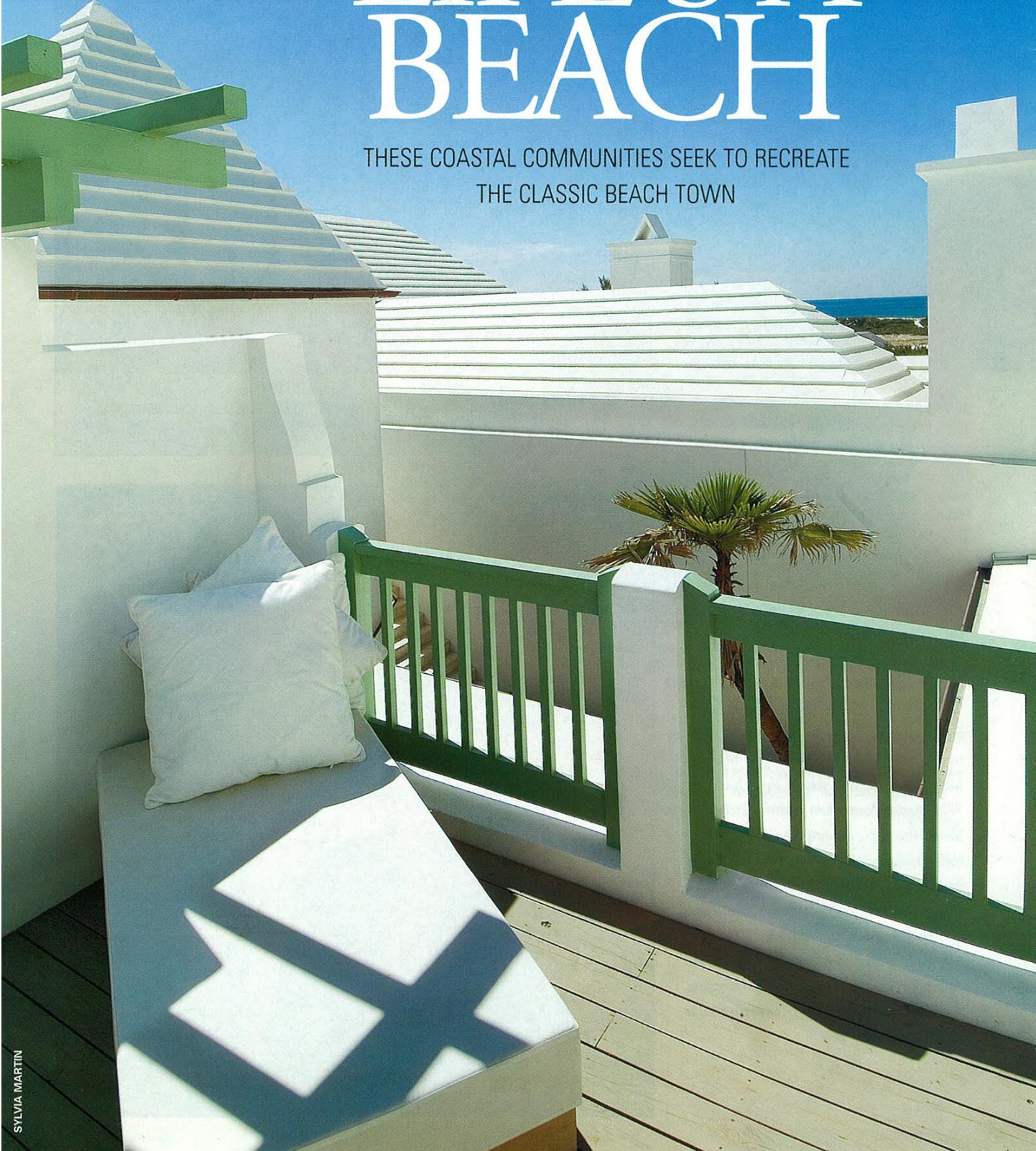


beach communities •

LIFE'S A BEACH

THESE COASTAL COMMUNITIES SEEK TO RECREATE THE CLASSIC BEACH TOWN



SYLVIA MARTIN

FACING PAGE: Sand castle forms in white stucco reach up and out over Alys Beach. Comfortable outdoor furnishings in wash and wear fabrics edge up to balconies with views for miles. **THIS PAGE, LEFT:** In addition to publications from across the globe, the Alys Beach Fonville Press Newsstand serves up coffee, ice cream, pastries, imported wine and beer. **THIS PAGE, TOP RIGHT:** The breezeway leading into the home's courtyard is flanked with large terra cotta urns teamed with bamboo stalks. **THIS PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT:** Whether you choose to curl up with a good book in the built-in window seat or to take a sleek seat in front of the plasma-screen television, this home has something to accommodate every pursuit—as long as it's a leisurely one.



Alys Beach

Birmingham special education teacher and artist Robby Bellah fondly recalls his first and only encounter with Alys Stephens. The setting was the mid-1980s at an art show where Robby was displaying his pen-and-ink watercolor cartoons.

Alys, the high-profile wife of EBSCO founder Elton B. Stephens, complimented Robby on his work, and then introduced him to her husband, for whom one of Birmingham's primary freeways is named.

"I said 'I've heard of him,'" Robby says. "And she whispered in my ear 'From the freeway.' I just remember being very flattered at how gracious she was. She was very nice."

Robby's impression echoes the description of Alys on the Alys Beach Web site, which explains how the Stephens family decided to name their Florida development after the family matriarch, who is now deceased.

When complete, the resort town, under construction along County Road 30A in Walton County, will include 599 homes centered on a community center, which will house a newsstand, various shops, a fitness club, a market and restaurants.

Alys Beach houses are somewhat unusual in that they are constructed of concrete and covered primarily in white stucco, with an occasional colored accent wall. The architecture leans on influences from Antigua, Bermuda and Guatemala, and the structures are designed to last.

"The whole idea is to have them fortified so the structures can sustain hurricanes and that sort of thing," says Troy Rhone, a garden

and courtyard designer who is working on Alys Beach.

"They are trying to build the community in such a way that it's going to be there forever. My job is to soften it up."

Another distinct characteristic will be the layouts of the homes, which typically center on an outdoor courtyard accessible from various rooms.

"It is very common not to walk from one room to another without going through the courtyard," Troy says.

Covered areas, or galleries, over the courtyards provide shelter to dwellers when they travel from one room to another. Another of Troy's main tasks is to select flooring and paint colors for the courtyards that complement the homes' interiors.

"I have to make sure that the inside architecture of the house flows outside—that the two work together," he says. "You don't want to have a type of floor on the inside of the house that clashes with the floor on the outside."

The community landscape will include several gardens, a nature park and lots of native plants such as fruiting trees, edible plants and wax myrtles, Troy notes.

Likewise, individual courtyards will include fruit trees and other tropical plants.



by Alison L. Ketcham
photography by Sylvia Martin



Alys Beach:

P.O. Box 61-5500
Alys Beach, FL 32461-5500
866.732.1760
www.alysbeach.com