

Some of Collier County's newest communities are forgoing gates and guards, welcoming the public with open arms. Made popular by Fifth Avenue South and Bayfront in Naples, The Esplanade on Marco Island and The Residences at Coconut Point in Bonita Springs, mixed-use developments offer residences over retail space.

Instead of rolling golf course fairways and a sprawling clubhouse, these communities favor an urban setting that combines homes, stores and restaurants, allowing residents—and Joe Public—to shop, dine, and even work where they live. Local developers say mixed-use or Main Street communities appeal to older buyers who want the convenience of the doctor's office and dry cleaner within walking distance, and Generation Y, who crave a high-energy vibe.

"A mixed-use environment appeals to people who are tired of traffic and the suburbia style of living," says Dougall McCorkle, vice president of commercial development for The Lutgert Companies. "It's attractive to people who come from big cities like Minneapolis, Washington, D.C., and New York, and is a national reaction to the sprawling of suburbia."

The Lutgert and Barron Collier companies have created Mercato, a 53-acre Main Street development at U.S. 41 and Vanderbilt Beach Road that will offer 175 homes, 350,000 square feet of retail space, 100,000 square feet of office space and the area's first Whole Foods store. The first phase, The Strada, is expected to open in late 2008.

The D'Jamoos Group likes the concept so much, its next two communities are mixed-use developments. The company is building the 224-condo São Grato on a 22-acre site on the old Buckley Nursery property on Orange Blossom Road, and Estero on the River, an 85-acre project along the Estero River that will offer 530 homes, a children's learning institute, retail and medical space, restaurants, a boutique hotel and two theaters.



Rendering of São Grato

Gate Busters

Now there's no need to wonder what's behind the gate.

BY NANJI THEORET

Also on tap for Estero are the under-construction Art District at Rapallo, combining 292 homes, a 500-seat performing arts center, restaurants, galleries and shops, and Midtowne Estero at Corkscrew Road and Three Oaks Parkway, with commercial space and up to 234 homes.

GARAGE GLORY

It may be just a garage, but one recent trend in home design is long overdue. One-car garages with direct access into the master suite mean no more traipsing through the house after a late night at the office or out on the town. Until now, most builders' floor plans clustered three- and four-car garages near the kitchen—often on the opposite side of the house from the master suite.

"We've had several clients ask for a split garage plan if their homesite is wide enough," says Jill Bresnahan of Bordeaux Homes, whose new Shiraz model in Grand Arbors at TwinEagles has a garage opening onto a vestibule in the master bath. "Besides giving the owner direct access into the master suite, they also create an entirely updated front elevation to the home. For years we've been putting all three garages on the same side. Splitting the garage gives the home a more balanced appearance. It's an entirely different look."

Harwick Homes has taken the private garage concept a step further, says Kathy Harwick, sales and marketing director. "We've given guest houses a private garage as well," she says. *NI*