



Ross Chapin's smart-  
and-small neighborhoods

# COTTAGE KING



In the mid-1990s, Ross Chapin found himself increasingly frustrated with the state of housing in the United States, particularly the growing trend of urban sprawl and the mediocre designs implemented by many builders. "Instead of just moaning and groaning about it, I decided to do something," says Chapin. That something was teaming up with developer Jim Soules of The Cottage Company to create the nation's first cottage development: Third Street Cottages in the town of Langley on Whidbey Island. Featuring eight small, exquisitely crafted detached homes (the largest measuring 975 square feet) grouped around a shared courtyard, the development struck a chord with people tired of oversized, shoddily made houses. "[Third Street Cottages] demonstrated that there was a need and a market for this

type of housing," says Chapin.

Since then, Chapin has designed several cottage developments for The Cottage Company, including the Greenwood Avenue Cottages in Shoreline (winner of a 2005 AIA Housing Committee Award). One project currently underway is the Neighborhood of Umatilla Hills in Port Townsend, a blend of cottages, bungalow homes and custom single-family residences on two and a half square blocks. Another is Danielson Grove in Kirkland, a pocket neighborhood mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom homes, ranging in size from 1,500 to 1,700 square feet, clustered around a grassy courtyard.

Chapin's ultimate goal for every project is to "create an environment that supports healthy relationships and fosters a sense of community," he says. Not only does knowing your neighbors have strong social benefits, explains Chapin, it also makes for a more secure home. "Security is not just about locks and gates, but also having a web of good neighbors. It's about people looking out for one another."

One of Chapin's latest endeavors is to make his small, thoughtfully designed homes available outside of the Northwest. On rosschapin.com, prospective homebuilders can check out plans for more than 20 cottages, cabins and small houses, ranging in size from 350 to 1,500 square feet. The plans, which cost from \$500 to \$800 each and can be built for approximately \$150 to \$200 a square foot, recently were lauded in *This Old House* magazine as "a better breed of stock plans." Says Chapin, "They use standard, easily found materials, put together in thoughtful ways. There is a lot of attention to detail. We've tried to incorporate vitality and richness everywhere." Those who are apprehensive about living in a not-so-big abode should keep in mind that bigger doesn't necessarily mean better, says Chapin. Of his designs, he says, "There is no wasted space. Every home lives larger than its size."

■ **ROSS CHAPIN**, 195 Second St., Langley; 360.221.2373; rosschapin.com.

■ **TEAM:** Karen Delucas, project manager; developers Jim Soules and Linda Pruitt, co-owners of Seattle's The Cottage Company. "Jim and Linda are the development side of the team. We work very closely together."

■ **FAVORITE ARCHITECT:** "Since 1974, when I first came across his work, I've been inspired by Christopher Alexander. He provided a structure of form and community that relates the physical environment to our human and social environment."

■ **FAVORITE PROJECT TO DATE:** "Third Street Cottages in Langley. This was the first contemporary project of its kind in the country, and a true labor of love."

■ **DREAM PROJECT:** "A mixed-use project that combines the intimacy of well crafted, sensibly sized houses in the context of a neighborhood with shared green spaces. [It would be] a place where people of all ages could live, work, socialize and create."

■ **INSPIRATION:** "Simple buildings and small towns."