

Creating PARADISE

Reality begins with fantasy

BY LESLIE MCKERNS



Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai, UAE

Successful architectural planning and design projects require the highest level of expertise and professionalism. Founded in 1960 by Edward D. Stone, Jr., the firm, now known as EDSA, has become recognized as one of the world's leading planning, landscape architectural and graphic design firms. EDSA is widely recognized for its abilities to deal with a variety of complex landscape architectural projects both domestically and internationally. EDSA's experience spans the globe across the United States to China, Latin America and other exciting destinations abroad.

Spinning majesty and fantasy in designing international resorts — EDSA is instrumental in the continuous shaping of Fort Lauderdale. CitySmart speaks with Doug Coolman, Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects (FASLA), Principal.

CitySmart: Do you link your work on the Fort Lauderdale Beach Revitalization to the area's turnaround as an upscale destination?

Coolman (EDSA): Yes, absolutely. In fact, the grounding mission for this project was to take the beach back for the residents. What makes a tourism spot popular is that it is popular for the locals first.

CS: Can you tell me about how you approached the design?

EDSA: Formerly, the beach area was buzzing during Spring Break and vacant for the rest of the year. A tourism area has to be economically viable for 12 months of the year, so we approached the project with that in mind. We created spaces where people want to be, with visual and physical access to the beach.

Access is through a wide pedestrian promenade styled like Rio de Janeiro, punctuated with a signature curving wall. Pedestrians can walk to the area from nearby parking, or use three or four vehicle pull up areas to temporarily unload.

CS: The fiber optic wave wall is short enough to hop over, but low and wide enough to sit on. Was it your intention to provide a continuous seating element?

EDSA: Actually, the primary goal of the wall was to prevent hatchling turtles from going onto the road. The wall was also designed for people watching — to gather, sit and have a good time. It has become a gateway feature to Fort Lauderdale, announcing the beach with its wave wall, curving colonnades and glowing fiber optic color at night.

CS: Can you pinpoint the economic result attributed to the project?

EDSA: A billion dollar economic growth in the area.

CS: Another transformation for the City of Fort Lauderdale is your design for the Fort Lauderdale Riverwalk — also instrumental in revitalization?

EDSA: For years, communities were using their rivers as dumping grounds. Now, with the Riverwalk, the river is treasured. It is a success story, sparking revitalization, and turning, essentially, what is a public right of way into a major draw to the area.

CS: I'd also categorize the Landscape for the 17th Street Bridge as revitalization. Can you elaborate on that?

EDSA: This project was founded on the idea that the Beach Revitalization work created a recognizable gateway to Fort Lauderdale. The Bridge was seen as a way to extend the identity of the beach. The railing is porous, so you can see through it to the views, and the lighting adds the linking characteristics. As you go under the bridge, the left over or unused space is used for people, with areas for water taxis, bus service and parking.

CS: The firm is known for ecological preservation or restoration in Florida. Can you tell us about that?

EDSA: The Kissimmee River Save Our Rivers Project is based upon the idea that we are stewards of the land, and therefore mistakes made with the land can and should be undone. In the Kissimmee River project we restored the natural flow pattern to the river, which had been channelized in an attempt to prevent flooding. In creating the channel, habitat, flora and fauna disappeared, and by restoring the natural flow, we were able to restore the ecosystem. Now, instead of seeing water as our enemy to be quickly drained away, we gather rainwater and store it for eventual use.

CS: Your firm is also known for resort planning around the world. Can you tell me more about your philosophy in creating resorts, and how they are designed to appeal to the senses?

EDSA: The experience starts with the very first moment; you must capture that exact moment and make it a sense of arrival. Often that comes down to the smallest sensory detail, and everyone must be involved in the creation of this experience.

What you hear, see, touch and taste are all involved in the experience of letting you feel you've arrived in a different place. With a resort, the sense of arrival can be achieved by changing grade; bringing visitors up to a higher level to see the view. You create view corridors such as to the pool or out to the water. It is a succession of impressions.

CS: One notable resort project, The Royal Towers at Atlantis, Paradise Island, Nassau, Bahamas, is founded on fantasy. Can you tell me about the fantasy?

EDSA: This project is one of three that I'd say deals successfully with fantasy, Disney, Las Vegas and Atlantis. The image is of the Royal Towers rising from the ruins of an Atlantean Palace. Carved concrete ruins, a life-sized Mayan temple, lush tropical planting, and 11 million gallons of saltwater lagoons give the illusion that this is the site of the lost city. And in fantasy, it is about

experiencing the magic without seeing the undergarments. We worked with the Cloward Group, now a partnership. EDSA/Cloward provides technical expertise with aquatic environments; you experience incredible environments without seeing how they are created or maintained.

CS: Another fantastic vision is Madinat Jumeirah along the coast of Jumeirah in Dubai, on the Arabian Gulf. Can you tell me about this exotic destination?

EDSA: The project has 940 rooms, a souk-style retail complex, a Six Senses Spa with over 30 treatment rooms, and over 40 restaurants, bars and cafes. All the areas within the resort are linked by over 3.5 kilometers of waterways, traversed by 30 abras, traditional Arabian boats used for fishing and transportation. It is incorporating the essence of the real that makes this a true fantasy destination.

CS: Is fantasy a major element in all resort design?

EDSA: The resort industry has evolved from sheer fantasy. People go to an area to experience its indigenous character, molded around local architecture, character and customs.

This experiential nature is combined with service. The biggest feature of luxury in a resort is service. It is up to us to design this into every area of a resort as a subtle element of luxury.

CS: Sandy Lane, British West Indies, is another beautiful example of regional design. Do you see regionalism as the future for resorts?

EDSA: Resorts are increasingly appealing to a variety of cultures. We are working extensively in the Caribbean and Latin America. Looking ahead, we see an interest in China, India and Russia, not only because of the sheer number of people, but because of their changing economies and customs. India is making great economic strides, and has no communication barriers. They share with many, the common language of English. China had no vacation until a few years ago, now they do, and with leisure, travel and tourism follow.

Historically, landscape architects were relegated to screwing shrubs in at the end of a project. That has changed. We are leaders of a team of experts — architects, engineers, interior designers and other specialties, working in concert on the theme from the beginning of a project. Fantastic resorts are a living entity, adjusting and updating to stay at the top. **CS**

EDSA is located at 1512 E. Broward Boulevard, Suite 110, Fort Lauderdale. For more information call 954.524.3330 or visit www.edsaplan.com.

Sandy Lane, St. James, Barbados, B.W.I.



Fort Lauderdale Beach Revitalization



Mayan Temple, Paradise Island, Nassau, Bahamas

