

Prize Weekend

SEASIDE Institute™ hosts leaders
in New Urbanism

By Christy Milliken,
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The SEASIDE Institute™ celebrated the 31st SEASIDE Prize™ Weekend by honoring Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson. The theme of the weekend was Retrofitting Suburbia.

The Seaside Prize is an award that recognizes individuals or organizations for contributions to the development of walkable, sustainable communities. Established in Seaside, Fla., through the Seaside Institute, the prize typically highlights projects that embody the values of community, sustainability and design excellence. The core values of prize recipients embody the mission and tenants of the Seaside Institute in the town that began the New Urbanism movement forty-four years ago. Prize recipients are nominated by the Seaside Institute Board of Fellows and final votes are decided by the Seaside Institute Board of Governors.

Thursday, Feb. 6, sponsors and VIPs enjoyed a red-carpet welcome with an evening at SOWAL House in Rosemary Beach for an Escape to Create art show curated by Anne Hunter Galleries and a music experience with 2011 Escape to Create artists, Vanessa Olivarez and Elizabeth Elkins of Granville Automatic. The evening included a little tambourine back up featuring Robert Davis on one song.

The weekend kicked off on Friday, Feb. 7, at sunset with an outdoor soirée reception at 87 Central, a Chef Jim Shirley establishment that included paella, charcuterie, seafood, olive tapenade and goat cheese, mini brisket sliders, mini tuna poke and desserts. The C-Bar, also a Chef Jim Shirley establishment, created a specialty cocktail, “Pinky and the Brain” to celebrate the female winners this year. This was a perfect way to welcome Prize attendees to experience the town of Seaside in the heart of Central Square. When the reception came to an end, to ensure no food waste, the leftover paella was donated to the South Walton Fire Department.

The evening reception was followed by a welcome at the Seaside Lyceum from Daryl Rose Davis, founder of The SEASIDE Style®, co-founder of Seaside, and the Seaside Institute. Introductions were delivered by Lisa Burwell, Chair of the Seaside Institute and Christy Milliken, Executive Director of the Seaside Institute. Prize recipients, Ellen Dunham-Jones, Professor, Georgia Institute of Technology and June Williamson, Professor at The City College of New York, delivered a keynote lecture titled, “Adventures in Retrofitting Suburbia.” The talk delivered a light-hearted look at the history of their work together and an in-depth look at the need to consider the repair of sprawl through the methods of the suburban retrofit work they are known for.

The Signature Seaside Saturday Symposium began with coffee provided by Amavida Coffee Roasters and a breakfast set up by Black Bear Bread Co. Before we kicked off the morning symposium speaker lineup, we took a moment to honor and remember 2023 Prize recipient, Donald Shoup, as we just learned of his passing that morning.

The first lecture of the morning was delivered by Galina Tachieva and Marina Khoury of DPZ CoDesign as they focused on the Walton County Comprehensive Plan (PlanForWalton2040.com). This talk highlighted varying zones, land conservation, land use and mixed-use development suggestions while also looking for ways to repair sprawl, retrofit suburban areas and connect communities.

Our second lecture was delivered by Becky Nicolaidis, Suburban Historian and Author, and Rachel Heiman, The New School. Becky’s family lost their home and community in the Palisades fires in California just weeks before the Seaside Prize weekend. This conversation was raw with emotion and engaged the audience in discussion regarding disaster recovery, climate resilience, how to honor the lost history and how to tackle the overwhelming task of rebuilding an entire community from the ashes.



The Institute honors Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson during Prize Weekend. Photos courtesy The Seaside Institute



Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson take advantage of the beautiful Seaside Post Office for a photo op.

Saturday continued with a walking tour of Seaside led by Robert Davis, Micah Davis, and Dhuru Thadani. We also had optional tours with our partners at the Cultural Arts Alliance of Walton County for their Tour of Homes. We resumed afternoon symposia with Dolores Hayden, Yale, and Emily Talen, University of Chicago. This conversation was followed by a closing panel that included all the speakers and was moderated by this year’s prize recipients, Dunham-Jones and Williamson. All panel speakers signed books at a signing hosted by Sundog Books.

The award ceremony was commemorated in The Chapel at Seaside, designed by Scott Merrill with millwork by E.F. San Juan. The interfaith chapel was also accepted into the permanent Historic archive at the Library of Congress in 2004. Reminding us that newer architecture can be considered as a historical landmark. The key ceremony offered inspirational words by Devaki Kesh, Principle U.S., and Veronica Rivas-Plaza, Street Plans. They shared heartfelt experiences about their mentors and prize recipients. Robert and Daryl Rose Davis awarded the “key to the town” to Dunham-Jones and Williamson.

The Prize key was designed by Dhuru Thadani and cast by Manish Waghdhare. The key is housed in a mahogany box handcrafted by E.F. San Juan. The evening flowed into the night for the Awards Dinner at Bud & Alley’s Waterfront Dining where attendees were able to mingle and engage with prize winners. The tablescapes were elegantly curated by Rose & Co. Flowers.

We wrapped up our Prize weekend on Sunday with a Sustainable Coffee Tasting Experience: Brewed Awakenings by Amavida Coffee Roasters, breakfast by Black Bear Bread Co. and a Talk of the Towns – Green by Design by Senen Antonio, DPZ CoDesign. The talk was followed by various tours, including a tour in Rosemary Beach led by Larry Davis, Seaside Community Realty, and Bret Azzarelli, RB Town Architect, and a tour in Alys Beach led by Marieanne Khoury-Vogt, KVA. An inaugural bike tour to Grayton Beach was introduced and sponsored in-kind by Yolo Board and Bikes and led by Micah Davis and Christy Milliken. Hosted with a talk about the history and growth of Grayton Beach by Billy Buzzett. Examples of tactical urbanism, recovery of public spaces for people, and pedestrian priority was a primary exploration. The bike tour included refreshments (Pedaler’s Punch) by Beach Better Co., a beachside concierge company and sponsored in-kind by Half Shell Vodka, a locally crafted vodka in a 94% sustainable cardboard bottle distilled at Distillery 98.

The night ended with a retrospective art event at Anne Hunter Galleries featuring Alex Name, Patricia Anderson, and Dave King where a portion of the proceeds benefit the Seaside Institute.

The key to a great community is the people that occupy it. This is why the mission at the Seaside Institute remains steadfast on advocating spaces that are designed for people.

Congratulations to Ellen and June, the newest members of the Seaside Institute Board of Fellows. 🌊



A panel discusses the Walton County Comprehensive Plan, one of two lectures of the weekend’s events.



Seaside town founder Robert Davis led a walking tour as part of Prize Weekend.