

TexasArchitect

JULY/AUGUST





Living High on the Coast

PROJECT *Coastal Living* Ideas House, Galveston
CLIENT Beachtown Galveston
ARCHITECT Michael G. Imber, Architect
DESIGN TEAM Michael Imber, FAIA; Brandan Moss
CONTRACTOR American Villas
CONSULTANTS Beachtown Galveston Corp. (project management); Susan B. Bozeman Designs (interiors); Aran & Franklin Engineering (structural)
PHOTOGRAPHER *Coastal Living*

by STEPHEN SHARPE

Though ravaged by periodic hurricanes and economic doldrums for over a century, much of Galveston's magnificent architecture survives. The island city's glory days, the three decades that preceded the devastating storm of 1900, are recalled in its richly detailed commercial edifices and stately Victorian-era homes. More than a collection of fine individual buildings, Galveston in the late nineteenth century comprised a tightly knit network of residential districts within walking distance of workplaces, cultural institutions, and public amenities.

Michael G. Imber, FAIA, and project manager Brandan Moss have conjured up those bygone days in a house designed at Beachtown, a New Urbanism development that is taking shape near the eastern tip of Galveston Island. Imber is among a handful of architects sanctioned by Beachtown's developer to either design houses for future residents or approve the plans devised by other commissioned designers. Three of Imber's creations have been built, including one designed as an "idea house" for *Coastal Living* magazine. Completed in 2008, the dwelling – stylistically defined as Carpenter Gothic – exudes Beachtown's carefully managed ethos of casual seaside luxury.

With its 4,000 square feet stacked on three levels, the house stands just inside the dunes on a corner lot that offers wide-open views to the Gulf of Mexico and to a large swath of greenspace next door. The site – indeed, all of Beachtown – is located several hundred feet outbound from Galveston's seawall, a concrete bulwark erected to protect the city from storm surges. On the inbound side of the 10-mile-long seawall, populated areas have been systematically elevated over time to avoid catastrophic inundation such as that which killed an estimated 6,000 people in September 1900.

Following in the wake of Hurricane Ike's direct hit in 2008, the City of Galveston toughened its residential code by mandating that the first level of occupancy of all new beachfront properties be built 19 feet above sea level. That revision adhered to FEMA's post-Ike recommendations for base flood elevation (BFE). The municipality's new height requirement posed a central challenge for designers obliged to create high-end beach houses for well-heeled clients. Yet, going even further to protect future homeowners from potential flood damage, Beachtown developer Tofigh Shirazi set the height requirement to three feet above BFE after Hurricane Rita in 2005.

So how does an architect resolve such an extreme requirement while accommodating homeowners who expect effortless movement from auto to abode? Elevators, of course, are essential. Additionally, Imber and Moss have integrated a vertical entry sequence that breaks down the ascent into a series of manageable intervals. First, one steps up to a raised porch to access the front door that opens to a utilitarian vestibule. Second, one either chooses the lift option or mounts a flight of stairs that wraps the elevator shaft. The program appears to be the model used throughout the development.

Similar to the additional height requirement imposed at Beachtown, says Shirazi, the rigorous construction methods exceed the recommendations of the Institute for Business and Home Safety. Materials include concrete piers and columns, steel framing, impact-resistant glazing, and exterior components that can withstand hurricane-force winds. (For the record, the Idea House withstood Ike's assault with only minor damage.)

As with the Idea House's cottage-like exterior, the interiors feature refined details reminiscent of earlier times along the Gulf coast. Twelve-foot ceilings accentuate the long and narrow floor plans of the two upper levels, each bisected lengthwise by a hallway. The traditionalist layout maximizes natural ventilation complemented by a linear cupola on the roof with operable vents that also bring in additional sunlight.

In addition to the house's indoor living spaces are several exterior ones, mainly the four commodious verandas as well as the ground-floor pool. From this breezy spot, a pair of wide doors offer access to the garage underneath the first occupied level. Strictly functional, the room is bounded on two sides with slatted walls designed to allow high winds and water to flow through when the inevitable next hurricane visits Galveston.

Stephen Sharpe is the editor of *Texas Architect*.

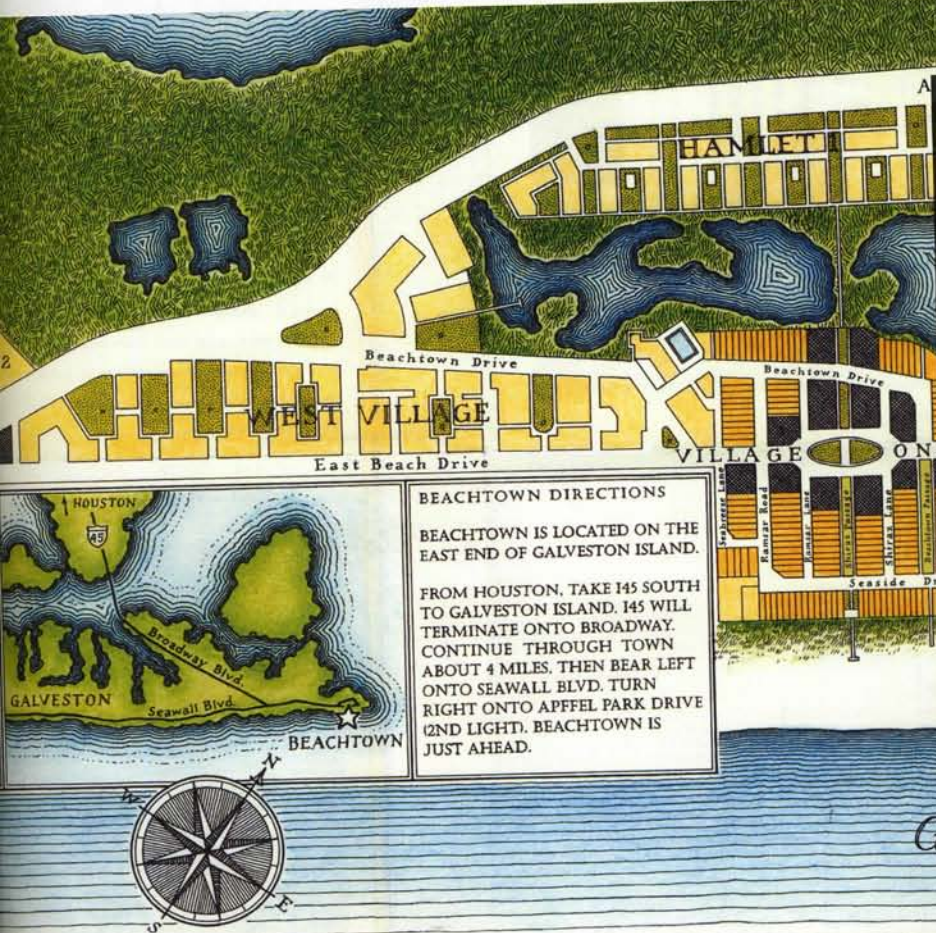




The Coastal Living Idea House was completed in mid-2008 just before Hurricane Ike's eye passed over Beachtown that September, devastating parts of Galveston Island and nearby communities. Beachtown emerged from the storm surge relatively unscathed, which the developer contributes to the high quality of construction and materials used. The Idea House, designed by the San Antonio firm Michael G. Imber, Architects, exemplifies the historical character that influences all the buildings at the New Urbanism enclave. Architects devising plans for Beachtown must resolve a significant design problem: how to create a welcoming entry that allows occupants and their guests to ascend from ground level to the first occupied floor, a height of 20 feet above grade (24 feet above sea level).



RESOURCES BUILDING MATERIALS: Galveston Wholesale; PAVERS: Belgard; CONCRETE COLUMNS: Coastal Columns; HOLLOW CORE CONCRETE FLOORING: Gate Concrete Products; LUMBER: Ideal Lumber; EXTERIOR MOLDINGS: Hayes Carpentry; EXTERIOR TRIM: MTZ Construction; INTERIOR TRIM CABINETRY: CCM Custom Cabinets & Wood Interiors; CUSTOM MOLDING: The Detering Co.; DECKING, TRIM & MOLDING: AZEK Building Products; EXTERIOR INSULATION: Energy Guard Foam Insulators; SIDING: James Hardie; METAL ROOFING: MBCI (Brinkmann Roofing Co.); WOOD DOORS AND WINDOWS: JELD-WEN (Grogan Building Supply); GARAGE DOORS: Overhead Door Co. of Houston; GLASS: MI Glass; TILE: Chico Tile; WOOD FLOORING: Total Floors; PAINTS: Valspar; FAUCETS: Kohler; DOORKNOBS: Schlage; COUNTERTOPS: Silestone of Houston; OUTDOOR CABANA: AAA Awnings; KITCHEN CABINETS: KraftMaid (Design by Dimension); LIGHTING: Bevalo Gas & Electric Lights; LANDSCAPE LIGHTING: Outdoor Lighting Perspectives of Houston; BLINDS, SHUTTERS: Hunter Douglas (Creative Blinds); WOOD PATIO FURNITURE: Agio; CUSHION FABRIC: Sunbrella; LIGHTNING PROTECTION: Bonded Lightning Protection; AV: Audio Video Rescue; AV WALL BRACKETS: Chief Mfg.; SECURITY CAMERAS: HomeWATCH Security Cameras/American Industrial Cameras; ELEVATOR: Waupaca Elevator Co.; CUSTOM WOODEN RETURN AIR GRILLES: Worth Home Products



New Urbanist Outpost

In 1993, developer Tofigh Shirazi bought the land where he would eventually build Beachtown. A self-professed "super-modernist kind of guy," the Iranian-cum-Texan brought Andres Duany to the site four years later. Duany, one of the founders of the New Urbanism movement and a principal of Miami-based Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, was then commissioned to master plan a 260-acre mixed-use community. His scheme comprises several "villages" featuring pedestrian-friendly streets, protected wetlands, and slender lots to encourage densely packed rows of residences separated from the beach by a strip of grass-covered dunes.

Similar to Seaside, Duany's master-planned development in Florida, the architectural character of Beachtown is rigidly prescribed to capture the flavor of historic Galveston and land-owners wanting to build a house must submit plans for approval. Shirazi even produced a limited-edition 182-page pattern book that illustrates the range of aesthetic options available to potential designers. As a result, all the buildings exhibit decorative elements that are intended to evoke the region's late-nineteenth-century heritage.