

# THE NEW SCHOOL FOR *Traditional Architecture and Urbanism — Charleston is a Textbook*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRUMAN MOORE • PHOTO CAPTIONS BY JOHN MASSENGALE



"Looking up Church Street from the south, the curve of the road makes St. Philip's terminate the vista without stopping the street. The particular way it was done is unusual and inspiring." [Editor's Note: Alas -- This classic vista was recently vandalized by an intrusive parking garage.]

**T**he idea of a virtual school may seem very 21st century, but, in fact, the methodology dates to the 19th century. When many of America's most distinguished architects, such as Richard Morris Hunt, Charles McKim, Stanford White and Daniel Burnham, attended the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, there was no opportunity for a classical architectural education in America.



"The sight of Market Hall looking east from King Street is an excellent example of what we call a 'terminated vista.' It highlights the importance of the beautiful temple-like building, which was built for both civic and commercial uses."

When the Beaux-Arts trained architects returned to America, they shared their scholarship by setting up a virtual school via the mail. Assignments were sent out, and students given a time limit to complete them. Today the web makes such a virtual school much simpler.

A similar situation exists in America now. There are simply not enough traditionally-trained architects to fill the growing demand for higher quality, more sophisticated design. **Notre Dame University** offers the only thoroughly classical program in architecture in America and the **University of Miami** offers a traditional architecture program. However, most practicing architects are trained only in mid-20th century Modernism. To fill the void, the new **New School for**



"New Urbanists are interested in King Street north and south of Charleston Place because of the history of the regeneration of commercial life on the street. Not all New Urbanists will like the chain stores that have come in, but we're all interested in looking at the history of the process. It's interesting that many of the chain stores support urban design principles more than the older stores. J. Crew and the Gap do not want to be next to surface parking lots, because they have the sales figures to prove that their profits will suffer."

**Traditional Architecture and Urbanism** is being founded here in Charleston.

Charleston is already a mecca for traditional architects and an inspiration for developers of the hundreds of New Urbanist communities under construction and being planned in America. Developers, aware that people increasingly hunger to live in traditional neighborhoods with a sense of community and with the ability to live without total dependence on the car, are modeling new communities on the streetscapes, the traditional architecture and the mixed-use urbanism of walkable historic cities such as New Orleans, Savannah, Beaufort and, of course, Charleston.



"The openness of Charlotte Street is a counterpoint to the streets south of Broad. It was once the suburbs, and the lots are large. It's also a wide street, but the trees and houses are scaled to the width."



"The Battery. You have to include the Battery, where the city overlooks the park and the harbor."

Other cities have vigorously courted the New School. Charleston is fortunate that this visionary school has chosen to locate here. While Charleston has shown national leadership in the revitalization of its downtown, it has lagged behind other communities in the quality of new architecture, much of which is still mid-20th century Modernism and disruptive of the harmony of the city's streetscapes — see page 3, for a recent example. The New School can once again help make Charleston a center for architectural excellence, which it has traditionally been.

"We want to build in Charleston a think tank for traditional design, where the best people in the field can come to concentrate on their work and interact with others. The essence of traditional architecture and urbanism is the making of beautiful, durable and useful buildings, neighborhoods, towns and cities. In the traditional city, the city is more important than the building, because the public realm is more important than the private realm. We have to make all of these beautiful, because the soul craves beauty," says executive director **John Montague Massengale**, who has recently moved to **Ansonborough**.



"George Holt's development around Tully Alley is a work in progress. You have to squint your eyes a bit to imagine what it will be when it's finished, but the development of almost vacant lots with charming, intimate spaces and new construction that is often mistaken for old is worth a trip."



"Anson Street is another street in the Charleston grid that is almost straight, but not perfectly. It is wonderfully framed and enclosed by a mixture of trees and good vernacular buildings. Look from below Hasell all the way up to George."

"Charleston doesn't have many squares or public piazzas...the public realm is mainly in the streets. The space around the Cistern is a beautiful exception. The keys to its quality are the canopy of the mature trees, the size of the buildings in proportion to the space, the materials and Classical design of Randolph Hall and the archway, and the way the gate and the fence screen the space from the neighboring streets without shutting them out."



"The more picturesque designers in the Congress for the New Urbanism are drawn to the intersection of Church and Water Streets like flies to sugar. The intersection of the two, and the alignment of Church south of Water, are unusual interruptions in the Charleston grid. New Urbanists like the way the sidewalk on Church continues straight north to end in the stairs to a house, while the road angles to the right and goes around the house. Note that the curbs in the bend are straight, not curved."

Massengale will conduct the school from Charleston, with such acclaimed designers, thinkers and developers as **Andrés Duany**, **Ray Gindroz**, **Leon Krier** and **Dr. Richard John**, former Director of the Prince of Wales Institute for Architecture and the Building Arts, teaching courses. While much of the instruction will take place via the web, there will also be lectures, symposium and short courses held in Charleston. The school hopes to begin the virtual school in January 2003, may offer local classes by this fall. **For more information call (843) 722-0025 or email [info@traditionalarchitecture.com](mailto:info@traditionalarchitecture.com).**

Massengale is a graduate of Harvard, received a Masters of Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania and was in the **Michael Graves Studio** in 1977. **James Howard Kunstler**, author of *Home From Nowhere*, writes, "John Massengale is one of the best and strongest voices in the Congress for the New Urbanism." Massengale is writing *Do The Right Thing: Architecture, Urbanism, Democracy, the Zeitgeist & the Soul*, has co-authored two books with **Robert A.M. Stern**, and lectured widely on smart growth and architecture. He chaired the urban design **Charleston Council** held here last year and again last month. At that time he led a tour of those areas of the city that new urbanists feel are particularly appealing and inspiring. ■



"New Urbanists like Legare Street between Lamboll and Tradd Streets (at left) for a few reasons. It's a slightly picturesque exception in the Charleston grid -- almost straight, but not quite. The way the stately trees swell out into the pavement of the street is lovely, and there is an almost uniformly high standard for the houses. The Pineapple Gate house is one of the grandest in Charleston. It combines beautifully with neighboring houses that might be less grand but are usually distinguished."

"Meeting Street south of Broad (at right) is an excellent example of a wide, arrow-straight street with appropriately scaled buildings and trees. The public and private porticos over the sidewalk are a Charleston treasure. These straight streets can be hard to photograph, because we don't experience the combination of the buildings and the street as well as we do in person, but the experience can be wonderful."

