

# A SENSE OF PLACE

BY ARNOLD PANITCH

**N**eighborhoods are that extension of family and household that create identity. As you are what you eat, you are where you live. As you are who your parents are, you live as your neighbors live. So, tied to the roof over your head, where you live connects you to how you live.

You can visit any Idaho town and find the original neighborhoods full of the same things, full of the same people, full of the same ways of doing things that came West with our foremothers. I like the intactness of plan and occupants in our neighborhoods. I like to know that there are homes built in the 1890s which are still occupied by the original families. I can take you to homes that have never been sold. It is a nice thing I like about Boise and about Idaho.

Let's talk about Boise neighborhoods. If you live in the central core of Boise, probably you live in the North End, the East End, or downtown. There are lots of things happening in these neighborhoods. There are old people and old schools. There are kids, rich and poor. In older neighborhoods, people actually walk. They walk to work and they walk to go shopping. They walk to the public parks and they walk to worship. In older neighborhoods, there are kids on

skateboards, and entire families riding bikes. Mostly, one-car garages are located behind the houses. After all, that's where you used to keep the horse.

Central city neighborhoods are the most integrated in Boise. Integrated racially, ethnically, and vertically, it is in the older parts of town where rich and poor, gay and straight, singled, coupled, married, and widowed live together.



Since we have not had the influx of immigrants, racial minorities, farm laborers or the like, Boise is one of those towns that has kept itself intact. We have not had that "white flight" that saw the middle class vanish from the core of urban America.

In our older neighborhoods, there is a psychology of hating anyone who builds above you. To move up in life is to stay in the flatlands, according to North and East end chic. If you move up in elevation, it is as if you've sold out your arid roots. Living downtown means living on straight-platted meridians upon soils you are sure will stay in one place. No curved streets and retaining walls for you.

Neighborhoods beyond the central core are the proximate areas you hear about but are not really sure where they are actually. When somebody says he lives "offa" Vista or "offa" Broadway, he lives "outby" the mall or "outby" the airport, or "nearby" the



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university, I'm not sure where his neighborhood really is. The people who live with this identity have been living in their cars or their pickup trucks so much they aren't really sure where they live. I mean, they've got an address from the post office but just didn't get a neighborhood with the deal. Here, walking means that your car didn't start, you had a wreck, or your tires are flat.

If you found happiness in the subdivisions halfway to Nevada, your kids ride the school buses or you are constantly chauffeuring them. Once in high school, the kids drive themselves to school where big parking lots have been installed. In these neighborhoods, teenagers must have a driver's license and a car plus the part-time-going-full-time two bit fast-food joint job to make ends meet.

Of course, out here approaching the outback, your car is your statement. It is also your life. There are no sidewalks, so where could you use your legs anyway?

And where do you get up a corner touch football game or play pickup basketball? There are no parks. And where can you



*They walk to work and to go shopping," says the author, who checks out one of the North End's famous landmarks—the Hollywood Market.*

swim laps if you're a simple soul? The YMCA is downtown. The mall is your recreation and you even have to drive to buy a bottle of milk or get a hamburger.

Now switch to Ultimate Boise. Here, we've got a collection of neighborhoods which are designed to exclude others. There are some elements in Lakewood, Somerset Ridge, River Run, Hulls Grove, Riverside Village and the like, that communicate another message. Again, where you live defines who you are.

It pains me to see their signs of exclusion. Boise is just too simple and too egalitarian for all of this pomposity.

These are the neighbors who live on private streets, maintained by their neighborhood associations. These are the little hamlets with electronic keycard gates guarding them.

These are the neighborhoods with those self-serving clubhouses, private parks with locks on the tennis courts, and even locks on the basketball hoops. As neighbors, the message is posted: Keep Out.

Restrictive covenants are also coming back into our neighborhoods. These once meant no dogs or Jews. In the 1950s in some neighborhoods in Boise, you had to promise not to resell to people of color. Those days are gone, but we've replaced them with other references to "neighborhood integrity."

When you get to Ultimate Boise, you sign away your right to determine freely what color to repaint the exterior of your home. They've a committee for that. You cannot install an outside television antenna. You cannot park a recreational vehicle on your property. Sorry, you cannot install a basketball hoop in your driveway. They have a tree committee to tell you where to plant which kind of tree. Here, old cars are definitely not patio furniture.

It doesn't matter whether high or low ground, they tailor their land to fit their lifestyles. Now think about living next to a vacant foothill and then having some developer put a flattop on it and plunking down a 7,500 square-foot palace on its top without reference to any of the natural ecology. Then,

top it off by driving a couple of matching foreign sports sedans into that castle through those automatic electronic gates and through those automatic garage door openers.

I'm sorry, folks, but that seems like a long way away from Boise to me. This is not living in a neighborhood with people and skateboards, and kids laughing on their way to the corner market. This just isn't the way folks live in neighborhoods where people look out for the older woman whose husband has Parkinson's or make sure the old man next door takes in his mail.

Boise is a special place because of its villagesque neighborhoods. We came to Boise to get away from freeway-exit America and to avoid living the suburban life-style.

Leave me out of that one; I can watch that part of it on cable. But, now that I think of it, can't we attract just one big-city transplant to fix me a decent pastrami on rye? □

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