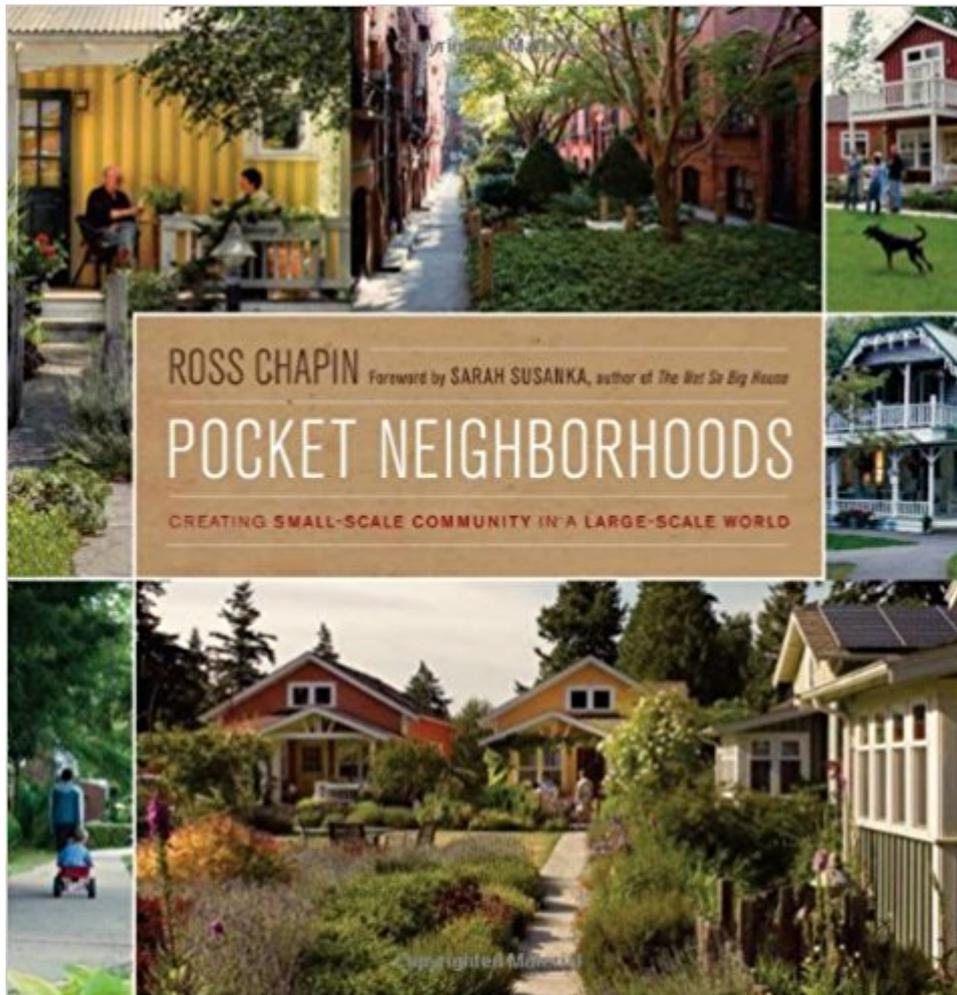


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Pocket Neighborhoods: Creating Small-Scale Community In A Large-Scale World



Synopsis

AA 2012 Nautilus Silver Award Winner "Pocket Neighborhoods: Creating Small Scale Community in a Large Scale World" introduces an antidote to faceless, placeless sprawl -- small scale neighborhoods where people can easily know one another, where empty nesters and single householders with far-flung families can find friendship or a helping hand nearby, and where children can have shirt-tail aunties and uncles just beyond their front gate. The book describes inspiring pocket neighborhoods through stories of the people who live there, as well as the progressive planners, innovative architects, pioneering developers, craftspeople and gardeners who helped create them. Sarah Susanka, author of the best selling "Not So Big House" series, wrote the Foreword to the book, placing pocket neighborhoods within context of the contemporary trends in housing and community. Ross Chapin begins the book by outlining the shifts in the scale of community and the American Dream over several generations, leading to super-sized houses in a sea of development, then describes a solution to help restore healthy, livable communities. The first section of the book looks at historic precedents of pocket neighborhoods, from 15th century hofje almshouses in the Netherlands, to a 19th century Methodists Camp Community on Martha's Vineyard, to early 20th century Garden City models and Southern California Cottage Courtyards. The second section covers a wide range of contemporary pocket neighborhoods, including New Urban communities, affordable housing, houseboat communities, eco-neighborhoods, and Ross Chapin Architects' own pocket neighborhood examples. The third section focuses on 'cohousing' communities, from Danish origins in the 1960s, to examples across America, Australia and New Zealand, including a chapter on senior cohousing. The fourth section looks at retrofitting pocket neighborhoods within existing communities. Throughout the book are series of "Design Keys" that highlight the essential principles of pocket neighborhood planning and design, and short stories about "Pocket Neighborhood Pioneers" who blazed new trails. The book is filled with rich photographs, drawings, illustrations and site plans, and a Resources section at the end provides leads for the reader to explore the topic in further detail.

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Customer Reviews

Okay, first off, the disclaimer. I live in a Ross Chapin home in a neighborhood of Ross Chapin homes. My wife and I both had extensive conversations with Chapin during the design process. Does that make me biased? Or does it show that I appreciated the concepts that Chapin details in his terrific book before he fully articulated them in print? Probably both. Ross Chapin is a thoughtful person who has spent decades considering how our homes, both individually and in aggregate, shape our interactions with our neighbors, with our stuff and with how we go about daily tasks. That's a long-winded way of saying that this book is about community. How does having an inviting front porch affect your willingness and ability to interact with neighbors? We sat on our front porch this afternoon and had coffee. In 15 minutes we had three conversations with passers by. It's not just the fact that Chapin's houses all have front porches that makes this possible. He has considered the door placement in relation to the porch width. He has considered the construction and optimal height for the porch railings, so we can see out to the sidewalk. And so on and so on. Each room in the house has been considered, its relation to the other rooms, to the light from windows, to the flow of traffic, to the size and shape. But in this book, he's gone beyond the single dwelling to consider how homes work in relationship to each other to facilitate the creation of true neighborhoods, not just adjacent buildings inhabited by near strangers. And we don't get only Chapin's ideas in the book. He has done a lot of research about neighborhoods, examining what has worked in the past and why, as well as what hasn't worked and why not.

Pocket Neighborhoods, by Ross Chapin, is one of those books that just may well have the power to change the world, and change it for the better. Currently our culture is struggling through the aftermath of the collapse of a housing bubble in which the goal of owning a home for many may now seem out of reach. The inspiring message of Pocket Neighborhoods is that smaller houses skillfully designed and efficiently grouped together around a public commons, in a setting where the automobile has been corralled and contained, has the potential to result in communities where life is

better , more sustainable, more satisfying and yet also less expensive. It sounds amazing and it is amazing, yet the many projects used to illustrate this book, including several by the author, demonstrate that beyond all doubt, it really works. This is a book that first drew me in through the gorgeous pictures and illustrations, which appear throughout. Then as I began to read the text I was intrigued by the story of how Ross Chapin rediscovered the concept of the Pocket Neighborhood in a much early project which he remembered visiting. While he describes several important precedents, it also becomes clear that Chapin has brought his own unique talent as a designer to his own efforts to build new Pocket Neighborhoods, giving them new life in the process. A wide range of factors that play a role in the design and success of these projects are described in detail and in terms that make sometimes potentially challenging insights readily approachable. For example, keys to design describe the use of vegetation and other elements that Chapin uses to layer the spatial experience in these developments helping to explain how these compact developments end up feeling much larger.

The Good:- The architect has created very desirable 900-1300sq ft. homes.- The designs are straightforward and very nicely detailed.- The front porch and the rest of the house are reoriented to a "street."- There is more density.- This is a decent argument for small infill projects in the suburbs.- The discussion of different types of housing - co-housing, garden apartments, etc.

Not-So-Good: The site plans, as presented, have a lot of front-back issues. Is the front the actual public street that the houses/cottages abut? Or, is the front the private green or mews that the front porch faces? This is a big issue, as these developments are as insular as common suburban subdivisions. There are one or two points of entry, the focus is internal, and what the person walking or driving by on the street sees on two to three sides is the backs of the houses. The bedroom faces the public street, which then causes people to either fence or plant (or both) the true public part of the house. People interested in pocket neighborhoods should look at the 1733 plan of Savannah, Georgia. The city is full of pocket neighborhoods, without the front-back issues the author/architect presents. Further, downtown Savannah is denser than the designs the author presents; and, as it is configured, it is connected to commerce and jobs. People can walk to work and shops. I know everyone will point out that in Radburn, NJ or the large-scale pocket neighborhood of Davis, California, there is a town center. My argument is that those centers offer very little in terms of options. They are isolated and aren't part of a bigger whole - a city or town. Are there multiple grocery stores? Dry cleaners? Is there commercial space to house jobs?

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