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ST. LOUIS, MO.

STL-Style & Substance

Visitors to the Web site of St. Louis T-shirt makers STL-Style will find a civic advocacy campaign promoting the preservation of the city's historic landmarks. It's right there, tucked into a catalog of 20 or so T-shirts, hats and stickers adorned with slogans like "St. Louis: The Perfect Ghettoway" and "Highway Farty." In the eyes of STL-Style's founders, brothers Jeff and Randy Vines, this is no mixed message.

Part of the grassroots movement to re-brand cities ravaged by failing industrial economies to younger, hipper constituents of the rapidly expanding creative class, the Vines use T-shirts to transform St. Louis's public image in ways official PR campaigns never could. Downscaling creative class economists' prescriptions to redesign skylines and building facades, STL-Style redesigns the facades of the Rust Belt creative class itself, filling the city's streets with smart, well-designed reminders that St. Louis is a cool place to be.

If the estimations of such economists are correct, projects like STL-Style could actually have an impact on their city's future. STL-Style's first-year sales quadrupled to some 1,700 units in 2007, indicating a healthy market for their product.

The Vines brothers aren't too worried, however, about the quantitative measures of success. As Randy says, "When we're at a store that carries our shirts and we hear people laugh or say 'that's fresh,' that's how we know we've succeeded."

—Nick Lalla



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BLOOMINGTON, IND.

New Urbanism Takes Hold of the Hoosiers

The rainbow of autumn colors enveloping local maple trees have nothing on the brightly hued houses in one of Bloomington, Indiana's first New Urbanist neighborhoods.

The neighborhood's grid design and narrow streetscapes encourage pedestrianism, giving locals a reason to gloat. "Having the option of public transportation, and not needing to drive is a huge advantage," says Dr. Amy Berndtson of her family's decision to move into the neighborhood.

But Bloomington was once more wary than hospitable to the development. Matt Press, the developer, won over the community by engaging them in the design process. "I started the public phase of my project by announcing a series of workshops where the site plan and the design criteria for the project would be decided upon in a cooperative process," Press explained.

While the city's planning director Tom Micuda is pleased with the resulting project, and expects New Urbanism developments to spread in the area, it remains to be seen how quickly South Dunn Street will capture the old-town business economy that its architecture encourages. At the end of the street sits a row of commercial shops built with apartments just above them, like the mixed-use developments on 20th-century main streets. While all of the apartments are occupied, no commercial business has moved into the shopping area as of yet.

—Kevin Michael Pozzi



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NEW YORK, N.Y.

Free Floating

When a floating pool docked in Brooklyn during the summer of 2007, it was the latest feather in that borough's hip, progressive cap. Residents of Hunts Point — an industrial, working-class neighborhood in the South Bronx that is best known for its view of Rikers Island prison, were jealous. Swimming in their neighborhood usually meant a belly flop in the Bronx River — an estuary that occasionally receives sewage when the city's sewers overflow.

But after community groups lobbied to bring the barge to the Bronx, the 5-million-pound swimming pool, romantically named "The Floating Pool Lady," anchored this past summer at Barretto Point Park, where it will stay for the next three summers.

At the turn of the 20th century, New York City had more than a dozen "floating baths" — rectangular structures that were moored along the East and Hudson rivers that allowed river water to flow through them. Often located near tenements, these baths not only offered an escape from the stifling city, but also gave kids a chance to learn how to swim.

Jonathan Kirschenfeld, designer of this 21st-century floating bath, notes, "Hunts Point is an underserved community in many ways. Moving the pool there was an opportunity to offer the neighborhood a badly needed recreational facility." The design and amenities have been so lauded, the pool has moved once more: to an exhibition at the 2008 Venice Biennale.

—Holly Otterbein