

Southlake STYLE



**NEW KID
ON THE BLOCK**
(THE ART OF STARTING FROM SCRATCH)

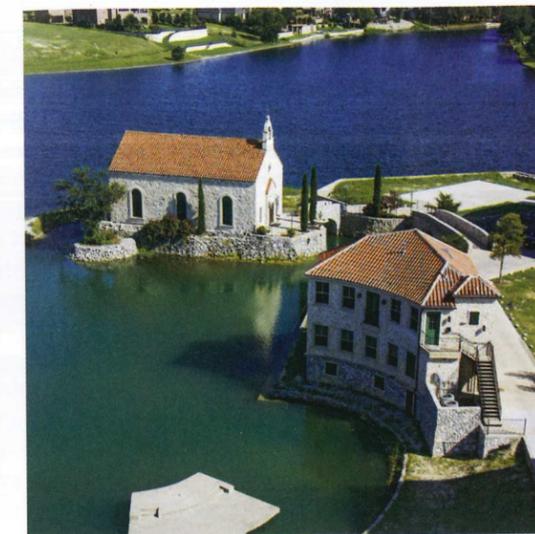
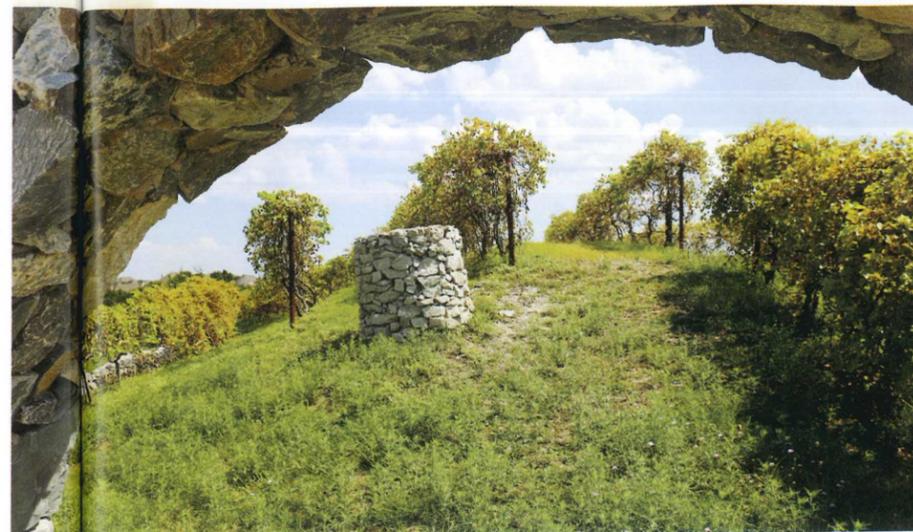
PLUS
CROSSING PATTERNS
(TODD DODGE DOUBLE TAKE)

PLUS
ENTER ENTRADA
(WESTLAKE GOES GLOBAL)

DINING GUIDE: 13 AREA EATERIES

RENAISSANCE MAN

Jeff Blackard has found a way to combine the old-world culture of a European village with a new development in Westlake - Entrada.



By Amy Reisner

The Bell Tower seemed bigger before I entered from the outside through the heavy wooden door. But then as I sat on a small bench inside, I noticed the maximum occupancy sign read only 18. I wondered how accomplished developer Jeff Blackard could run a company like Blackard Global from such a small space.

Unable to call the elevator to Jeff's office on the 7th floor, I dialed the phone number on a plaque sitting on a table. I was surprised that Jeff answered the call himself, and even more surprised when I shook his hand. Expecting a boardroom and a man in a suit ready to tell me about his life's work, I got a Bell Tower and a laid-back guy ready to tell me his plans to change the way society — and perhaps the world — thinks about real estate.

Adriatica

I climbed the narrow staircase to his "treehouse," as he calls it — the top of the Bell Tower — and looked out over Adriatica. A European-like village set in the valley of McKinney, Adriatica, with its picturesque red clay roofs and stone buildings, looked and felt like something out of a travel brochure. Anyone would be hard pressed to enter the village blindly and not think they had stepped into Old World Europe.

Adriatica was created to become more than just aesthetically pleasing though. It's Jeff's vision for a self-sustaining, ever-growing and changing place. Bringing this old-world way of life, which has existed for centuries, to the present-day United States can best be described in his own term, neo-retroism.

In residential terms, Adriatica has a property type to fit any need, including single-family homes, townhomes and condominiums. But because a village is self-sustaining, goods and services providers have their place in the village as well. Within the village, Jeff's vision of having one bank, one florist and one bakery to meet the needs of the village is unfolding. Currently, notable tenants such as Starbucks, Independent Bank and Keller Williams Realty call Adriatica home.

Determined not to replicate, but instead build on what he has learned and accomplished at Adriatica, Jeff found himself ready to build his village again — this time in Westlake. But the idea to come to the affluent small town was actually not Jeff's. In reality, Westlake chose him.

Entrada

The half-billion dollar, master-planned project in the works for Westlake is a Spanish-inspired village named Entrada. But if you're thinking it's just another residential community — you'd be right. There will be 1.5 million square feet of residential space. Or, if you're thinking it's just another commercial real estate project — you'd also be right. There will be 550,000 square feet of office space and the same amount allocated to retail. Entrada is a mixed-use development. And that automatically sets it apart from many area developments. Just like Adriatica, there will be residences built among retail shops, and offices built among restaurants. But they won't be arbitrarily placed.

"I'm trying to find out the needs of the people in [Westlake]," Jeff explains. "Entrada isn't a retail development or a housing development; it's not an office development. Entrada is as close as I can make a real village that serves the people in its area." And according to WestlakeEntrada.com, Jeff already has a few things in mind. Plans include a 3,000-seat amphitheater, a chapel, a signature bell tower, a town hall and other government buildings, and a boutique hotel featuring 320 rooms.

The proposed land for Entrada is located at the northeast corner of Solana and Davis boulevards. The 85-acre tract is under the ownership of Centurion American. Mehrdad Moayedi, owner of Centurion American, contacted Jeff to develop the area.

Jeff's vision for Westlake — supported by Mayor Laura Wheat — is that of a Spanish harbor village. Aesthetically speaking, the village will have the look and feel of Spanish architecture sitting next to a small harbor — which Jeff considers to be the heart of the village.



It Takes a Village

To put his philosophical 180 into perspective, two years ago Jeff was master planning more than 4,000 lots a year, but he gave it all up. Honestly, Jeff didn't know where this new path would take him. He just knew that where he was currently headed was not going to benefit society, and that was his ultimate goal. "Most of my career was based on doing master-planned communities," Jeff explains. "I developed thousands of single-family home sites, condos, industrial parks, retail restaurants—almost anything you can think of."

It wasn't until — by a "fluke" — he met the Croatian Ambassador to the United States and was asked to visit the country, that his new journey began. He ended up becoming the owner of a resort portfolio in a small island town of Croatia called Supetar. According to Jeff, during that time resorts came with a portfolio — 10 percent of this and that — and this resort in Supetar came with various parts of a village.

During his initial stay in Croatia, Jeff heard first hand the story of a young man from the village who had obtained his law degree from outside Croatia, only to return to the village — and not necessarily to practice law. Fascinated, Jeff went on to have similar dialogues with many other people in the village. "I consistently asked young people why they don't leave this little island or village. Why do they stay in the village? Why do they not go to Paris or wherever? I realized what a village really was, so I set off on this journey," Jeff says.

Over the next two years, Jeff spent a lot of time in Croatia studying what the word village really meant. He wasn't out to learn the architecture or aesthetics of the village. What he wanted was to learn about the people and how they interacted with each other and their surroundings.

"I started taking more pictures and asking more questions, more about the village," Jeff says. "I was constantly thinking about the village and how it evolves over time, how people are dependent on each other. I was passionate trying to figure it out," Jeff remembers. Thinking it was a unique scenario, Jeff traveled to other villages along the coast and then to Italy. He was studying why people did what they did within the village. He realized everything they did was based on their way of life, not tourism.

"I shut down everything in the United States," Jeff says. "I started selling all my assets. I was onto something that was much bigger than I was. And I thought, Over all these years I've done all these things wrong, and I decided I wanted to figure out how to build a village."

What he wants you to understand is that he didn't give up

being a traditional developer to pursue a more lucrative journey. It was a more fulfilling journey based on pursuing a better way to develop real estate, such as his village in McKinney and soon-to-be Westlake, that Jeff was after.

He picked a piece of property and spent two years trying to get zoning approval, because a village really has no zoning, meaning it doesn't fit into any one zoning category. A village evolves based on the needs of the people and it grows. This property became Adriatica. Next came the call for Entrada in 2012, and now two years later I am sitting with Jeff in Adriatica's Bell Tower having this conversation.

A Passion for Conviction

Meeting the needs of the people is not necessarily the direction real estate is headed, Jeff explains. It is up to the developer to make sure needs are met, and this is not a current practice among his breed.

"It's very hard and it takes time, and the developer has to be the leader," Jeff says. "We've come to a point where developers aren't leaders. They have to have a place they are going, a vision of what it's supposed to be. And that vision should be to meet the needs of the existing people."

Perhaps Jeff's leadership qualities are a derivative of what he has learned over the years from fellow businessmen. Although he had a hard time pinning down all the influential people in his life whom he considers mentors, he mentioned one he didn't know personally — Walt Disney — and others he did have a chance to work with. Jeff describes these individuals as "living by their convictions, no matter the cost."

Fellow developer Chas Fitzgerald worked with Jeff on the Lakes of Legacy development in Frisco in the late '90s. According to Jeff, Fitzgerald taught him a lot about history and the reason certain things are done wrong in master planning, and how it should be done right.

Successful businessman Nathan Sheets gave up his life and business to pursue helping the world know Jesus through I Am Second, says Jeff. His philosophy is to be real with the struggles. Sheets took him around the world to at least 50 countries to see how they could help with those struggles.

Jeff's personal goals go hand in hand with his professional ones these days. To him, the real estate development process is much more than planning and building. He wants to gain from the experience of creating these villages. "I need to do a better job to learn how to be a great servant," Jeff says. "That is my goal. Being a servant right now would be me building villages." ❧

