

Part 3 REAL ESTATE

West Islip Developer Uses 'Smart Growth' Principles To Preserve The Past

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By Linda Kessler



Paul Aniboli, developer of True Harbour Estates in West Islip, is converting the former Edwin Thorne property into a subdivision of 13 upscale homes — ranging from \$750,000 to over \$1.5 million.

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Hometown Dreams

This is the second in an occasional series dealing with the concept known as "smart growth."

By Linda Kessler

AS A YOUNG BOY growing up in West Islip during the late 1960s, Paul Aniboli would hang out with his friends at what was formerly the Edwin Thorne estate, an idyllic, 14-acre property surrounded by views of Gardiner Park and the Great South Bay. He dreamed of living there someday.

Over the years the estate became dilapidated and graffiti-ridden. Still, Aniboli envisioned bringing it back to life, and now, at age 44, the lawyer-turned-builder is about to realize his long-sought dream.

As the developer of True Harbour Estates, Aniboli is converting the former Thorne property into a subdivision of 13 upscale homes — ranging from \$750,000 to over \$1.5 million — while taking pains to preserve the beauty and historical significance of the estate. The first homeowners are slated to move in late this year or early 2002, with four lots set aside for Aniboli's family and three cousins who grew up with him.

"I want to create a community and bring every-

body back," Aniboli said.

True Harbour follows Aniboli's first hometown development project just a quarter mile down the road — the restoration of Arnold Manor, built in 1906 and one of the few Gatsby-era mansions left standing on Long Island's South Shore.

In the mid-1990s, Aniboli and business partner Gary DeRosa worked out an unusual agreement with the Town of Islip: The town agreed to rezone the area adjacent to the mansion to allow Aniboli and DeRosa to build South Country Estates, 14 townhouses, now priced at \$210,000 to \$269,000, that matched the architectural style of Arnold Manor and were clustered off to one side of the mansion. In return, the developers — at their own cost of \$600,000 — renovated the decaying mansion-turned-apartment building while preserving many of its distinctive features. Today, the manor is a historic landmark.

For both his upscale homes and moderately priced townhouses, Aniboli's signature style encompasses many of the components that comprise the movement known as "smart growth": most notably, the clustering of new developments around historical buildings, safeguarding scenic vistas and the environment, and a collaborative approach toward plan-

ning that addresses the community's needs from the inception of a project.

The smart growth concept, an approach being touted by real estate and planning experts nationwide, has begun to sprout up on Long Island as officials search for innovative techniques to meet the growing need for housing, while curbing suburban sprawl.

"This is exactly what clustering is used for — it's what smart growth principles embody," said Daniel Gulizio, commissioner of planning and development for the Town of Islip, referring to Aniboli's projects.

"I know it can be done," added Aniboli. "You have to be creative and resourceful enough to make things happen."

In the case of True Harbour, located off Oak Neck Lane, Aniboli's approach was exactly what the community was looking for, said Michael Peck, the secretary of the Oak Neck Lane Association, which encompasses 156 houses.

"We want to maintain what we have — wide open spaces, scenery and various style, size and shaped houses," making for a "more interesting community," Peck said.

Aniboli describes True Harbour as a "passionate re-creation" of the historic South Shore. The Thorne property consisted of a turn-of-the-century mansion

COVER STORY



Arnold Manor, left, built in 1906, was restored as apartments as part of an agreement between Aniboli and the Town of Islip. South Country Estates, right, 14 townhomes built near the former mansion, were done in the same architectural style. Far right, Alice and Peter Finnerty in their Arnold Manor apartment.



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The converted barn, now a house, and gazebo at True Harbour Estates in West Islip, far left, which was restored by Paul Aniboli, left, with Paul Elhoff, center, and John Dicio, his partners in the project.

strategically placed throughout True Harbour to help preserve its ambiance.

Observers who have worked with Aniboli note his passion for perfection and his willingness to work with the community and address their needs up front.

"Paul is probably better at that than most I've worked with, as far as getting the community involved before the application is filed with the town," Gulizio said. "And [he's] very pragmatic at addressing the town's concerns, balancing everybody's interests."

Both Aniboli and his wife, Barbara, grew up in West Islip and have close ties to their hometown. Aniboli graduated from West Islip High School and spent his undergraduate years at Boston University and New York University. After earning his law degree at Villanova, Aniboli decided to come home and loved the sense of community and pride he felt.

"I will make this place a better place," Aniboli recalled thinking at the time. He practiced commercial law for 15 years, was an assistant district attorney and dabbled in politics along the way, running unsuccessfully for Congress in 1984. In 1992, he served as the political director of the National Republican Committee.

Coupled with his knowledge gained as a zoning attorney, along with the realization that his law practice was "not satisfying the need for creativity," Aniboli became increasingly interested in real estate development.

The turning point came in June 1997.

While at home with two of his three children, Aniboli had a transient ischemic attack, or TIA — in essence, a mini-stroke. It was then that Aniboli vowed to change his life and made plans to leave his law practice within the next three years.

That was the impetus last year for the creation of the real estate development firm, Ramco, named after Aniboli's children, Rebecca, Amanda and Michael. The day-to-day operations of Ramco are now handled by its staff of six.

In renovating Arnold Manor, the basic idea was that "there must be a way to build outside the envelope and create something to be proud of," Aniboli said.

Aniboli renovated both the interior and exterior of the manor, which was once the country estate of Annie and William Arnold, who owned the once-renowned specialty store, Arnold Constable, on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. Aniboli seamlessly blended the manor house with the townhouses through a continuity of architectural features, including dental and crown moldings, exterior shutters and traditional columns.

Residents of both Arnold Manor and South Country Estates say they take pride in their new surroundings.

"The neighborhood looks at the main house as the centerpiece," said Peter Finnerty, who, with his wife, Alice, has lived in the Arnold Manor for the past 23 years. "The changes are magnificent."

Randy Augustiewicz, president of the South Country Estates Homeowners' Association, noted that "there's a total mix of people living here." It was the homeowners' association, Augustiewicz said, that added another decorative touch — the gazebo that sits on the manor's front lawn.

Aniboli is now working on other projects, including a 342-unit senior citizen apartment dwelling in Sayville and a mixed commercial-residential development in Hollbrook, both adhering to his signature style.

Donna Periconi, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Bay Shore, believes that more Long Island residents are beginning to realize the value of saving their history — and "that's the importance of smart growth," she said, pointing, in particular, to Aniboli's effort in saving Arnold Manor.

"Paul in good conscience could not demolish the mansion," she said. "He did not want his children to know that he had destroyed a piece of Long Island history."

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and stables, acres of specimen trees, a freshwater pond which encompasses a small island with a gazebo, and Trues Creek.

When the Carroad family bought the estate in the 1950s, the mansion had already been destroyed in a fire. Kenneth Carroad, a prominent attorney, converted the stables, also referred to as the barn and now the centerpiece of True Harbour, into his family's home. Carroad built carriage houses for visiting friends and further enhanced the landscape.

During the 1990s, the property, which had been used as rental units for about two decades, began to fall into disrepair.

Through close work with the Town of Islip and the support of the surrounding community, Aniboli was able to gain the town's approval for cluster zoning which provides him flexibility as to where to place the 12 new homes on the property.

"If you can demonstrate to the town a public purpose for clustering, they will allow you to do it with a great deal of latitude," said Aniboli. He adds, "If you have a working relationship with the town, if they know the product you produce, then they trust you, that's gold."

Hundreds of trees on the property were surveyed for health, age and likelihood of survival and then, using nature as a buffer, the plots have been clustered around the trees. Views of Gardiner Park, the bay and the gazebo are maximized.

The converted barn, approximately 10,000 square feet, also will be sold as a home, and scenic easements — protection from further development — are



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