

# THE 20-MINUTE GOOD LIFE

Imagine a life where everything you need  
is only 20 minutes from your doorstep

BY ALLISON PRETT PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS J. STORY



## 2. PLAY WITH TEXTURE

**EXPERIENCE WITH GROUND-CLIPPERS** The lumpy zoysia (at right) is a creeping, fine-textured grass that needs little mowing, feels bouncy underfoot, and goes dormant in winter. Other low groundcover choices include creeping thyme, *Dymondia margaretae*, and Scotch moss.

**FOOL THE EYE** For the illusion of a meandering trail, plant lavender in sensuous curves rather than parallel to the straight central path. *Abelia*, ornamental

grasses, salvias—any plant with a billowy habit—would create the same effect.

**CHANGE HARDSCAPE TO SUIT THE MOOD** As it approaches a grove of oaks, the path changes from grass and pavers to more casual decomposed granite, suggesting a move from city to country. Switching the palette of plants along the path, to 'Little Ollie' olives, heightens the sensation.



Velvety green zoysia contrasts with spiky lavender.



Clean lines and a fringe of green ferns make this space simple and uncluttered.

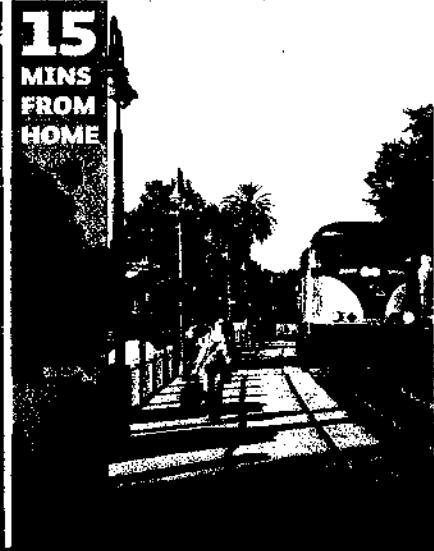
## 3. SIMPLIFY

**REPEAT PATTERNS** For example, incorporate horizontal lines and rectangular shapes. Use them in pavers, gravel design, benches, and fencing.

**ADD A TOUCH OF WATER FOR A BIG SPLASH** It's a cooling element and a playful, calming detail.

**PALETTES** You don't have to learn how to tend a hundred different plants. Design your garden so it can take care of itself for the most part.

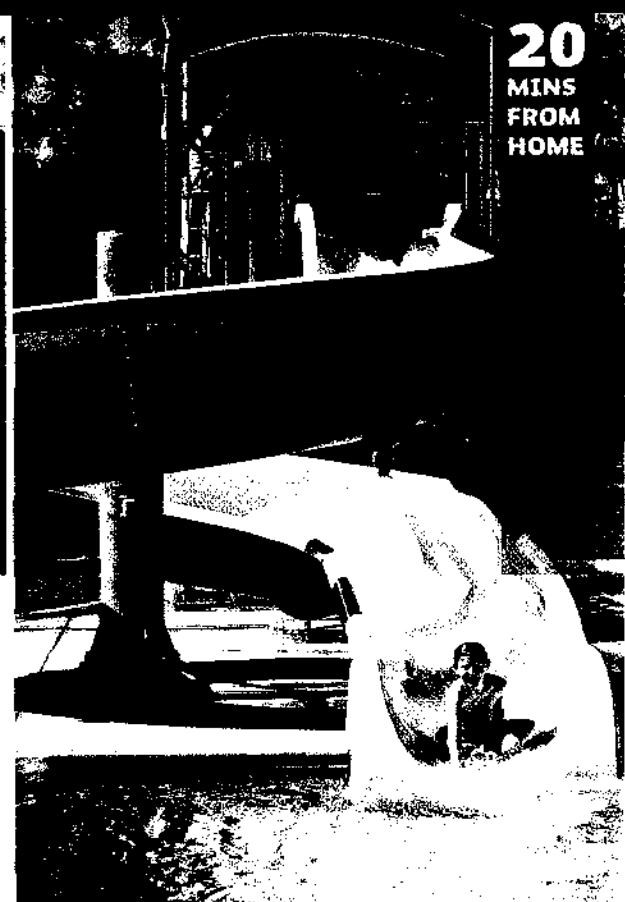
**INFO** Dry Design, Los Angeles ([drydesign.com](http://drydesign.com) or 323/954-9084) ■



**THINK OF IT AS YOUR REALITY.**

You step out your front door, and life's conveniences are a short walk or bike ride away. The office. The train station. The grocery store. Even the movie theater and your doctor's office would be within 20 minutes of your home. Though called by many different names (New Urbanist, Pedestrian-Oriented, and Mixed-Use), these sorts of communities are the antidote to unchecked sprawl and its related problems—from air pollution to car crashes.

Portland-based real estate development firm Gerding Edlen coined the term "20-minute living" to describe these neighborhoods. The key? "Planning and development that meet human needs in a district accessed primarily via walking, followed by biking, mass transit, and cars," says partner Dennis Wilde. The result? Less time in transit means more time for family and friends, and less wear and tear on you and the planet. Or, as we like to call it, the good life.





On the road between Earth and  
 a full-on experience and a modern  
 alternative lifestyle.

*Otto Wright, about Davis*

## 20-MINUTE TOWN LIFE

### WHO: THE WRIGHTS

Mornings at the Wright home are pretty typical. "We're all scrambling around the house with Legos and capes, goofing around, making coffee, looking for clothes," says Otto Wright, an aviation services executive who lives in Davis, California—the perfect 20-minute city—with his wife, Erin, and their two young sons. What's different is what happens next. "If we get out the door early enough, we all four go by bike. Ulee's school is two blocks away. We drop him off and then take our younger son, Ace, to his school 3 miles away. Then my wife and I stop at Starbucks on the way home, and I can actually sit down and start working by 8:45."

When the family moved to Davis from Oakland six years ago, this kind of morning was a big part of the draw. "We liked the lifestyle," he says. "We can go for days without touching our car. For my wife and I, spending time in the car is just death, it's the worst thing in the world."

But it wasn't only being able to bike around town that appealed, it was the emphasis on being outdoors, the community socializing fostered by the many parks, and the ease of getting out and about. "My wife and I, and a lot of our friends, work from home, but when we need to get to the city (Sacramento or San Francisco), we can just jump on the train," he adds. "It's very accessible. There's an airport 20 minutes away, there's a train station, but when I'm home, I can really be home, and we can do stuff together."

## The surprising benefits of 20-minute living

75  
 calories

A 150-pound person burns 75 calories walking at 3 mph for 15 minutes.

10 minutes | 68%

For every 10 minutes a person spends in a daily commute, his or her time spent in community or social activities falls by 10 percent.

Walkable towns promote shopping at locally owned stores, so 68 percent of your dollars stay in the community, according to a study.

## WHERE: DAVIS, CA

Jeff Loux, director of the Land Use and Natural Resources Program at the University of California at Davis Extension explains that Davis's pattern of smart growth and commitment to quality of life did not come by accident or easily. "It took over 40 years of community dialogue, planning, design, and investment," he explains.

But here's what they got for it:

1. The Village Homes, a 1970s subdivision notable for its attention to ecological innovation and social interaction (think small-scale houses, numerous gardens, and a community center), put the agricultural town on the smart-planning map long before sustainable was a buzzword. It remains one of the best examples of an eco village in the world.
2. Cutting-edge commitment to lively, walkable communities like Aggie Village, a 12-acre mixed-use development at the edge of downtown and, soon, West Village, a proposed 205-acre mixed-use development for UC Davis faculty, staff, and students.
3. A bike population thought to be larger than the human population (65,000), and 115 miles of dedicated bike paths and lanes (with more to come).
4. A dynamic and compact downtown with restaurants, a food co-op, bookstores, and movie theaters. As Otto Wright explains, "You can't walk for five minutes here without hitting a bike path, playground, or dog park." ■



# 4 hours

Eliminating commuting by car would leave the average American with 4 extra hours a week.

# 145 gallons

Cut the miles you drive a year by 25 percent, and you could save 145 gallons of gas and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2,863 pounds.

## 10 more places that are getting it right

**COTATI, CA** A small city that's preserving wetlands and farming with small-scale homes and projects like the FrogSong Cohousing Community. [cotaticohousing.org](http://cotaticohousing.org)

**DENVER (LODO)** A vital mixed-use historic district with galleries, restaurants, and shops near Coors Field. [lodo.org](http://lodo.org)

**FORT COLLINS, CO** New Urbanist projects like the north end of Mason Corridor make this town a regular on Best Places to Live lists. [masonstreetnorth.com](http://masonstreetnorth.com)

**LOS ALTOS, CA** Its new Green-Town Los Altos program has resulted in a bike-to-school program and a community-wide commitment to reduce waste, water use, and vehicle miles traveled. [greentownlosaltos.org](http://greentownlosaltos.org)

**LOS ANGELES (SOUTH PARK)** Nearly 1,500 condominiums in LEED-certified buildings are part of Gerding Edlen's modern high-rise community in downtown L.A. [exploresouthgroup.com](http://exploresouthgroup.com)

**MISSOULA, MT** It's not just about wide-open spaces: This small town places near the top of rankings on walkability. [ci.missoula.mt.us](http://ci.missoula.mt.us)

**PORTLAND (BREWERY BLOCKS, PEARL DISTRICT)**

Another Gerding Edlen development that implements the "20-minute living" philosophy perfectly. [breweryblocks.com](http://breweryblocks.com)

**SACRAMENTO (METRO SQUARE)**

A single-family housing project 1 mile from downtown, with homes set up for photovoltaic retrofits. [magnat.com/architecture/residential/metro](http://magnat.com/architecture/residential/metro)

**TUCSON** The city is pursuing a green agenda that includes an urban village and neighborhood hubs connected by bike paths, trails, and public transit. It's also establishing a solar ordinance. [www.tucsonaz.gov/planning/prog/proj](http://www.tucsonaz.gov/planning/prog/proj)

**VICTORIA, B.C. (DOCKSIDE GREEN)** A New Urbanist community using clean energy that broke the North American record with its initial LEED Platinum rating. [docksidegreen.com](http://docksidegreen.com)