



Walking Places:

An Exceptional Quarter Mile



Old San Juan
Puerto Rico

Volume 7 Edition

Timeless Places

For those who have wandered upon or grew up in early settlements such as Old San Juan, there is an unmistakable sense of appreciation that you are in a very unique place in space and time. Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting Old San Juan and took a short sojourn through its timeless streets (many of which have been elegantly restored). Character and charm are not enough to describe the many cobble stone paths, its buildings, and details that take one through a maze of discoveries at every turn. Deep down we get the sense that this place is built for us—the secret is maintaining the integrity of *human Scale*. A mastery of landscape, views, paths, open spaces, and building forms merging to create a unique place for people.

But this is not Disneyland. We know Old San Juan was not built in a day, and Disneyland is a idealistic false representation (a stage set) masterfully created in the mind of its creator and expressed artfully in a way that tries to mimic what we know about ourselves and our environments. As such, we respond to places like these with much enthusiasm, amazement, and even wonder. Even for those who did not grow up or live in settlements like these, (Old San Juan, Havana, Georgetown, Alexandria, Savannah) the connection to human scaled environments may be on a deeper level. To successful theme parks this notion is worth the price of an admission ticket to not only see its attractions but also actively participate in it—mostly by the simple timeless act of walking!

“Doesn't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got 'till its gone...”

“(They) pave paradise...and put up a parking lot”

-Joni Mitchell

Big Yellow Taxi
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1970



Urban Design Form

Urban Design is the art of creating and shaping cities and towns, giving form and character with the design of buildings, public spaces, streets, transport systems and amenities like parks and public places, neighborhoods and districts, and entire cities, to make them more functional, attractive, and sustainable.

So how much better is the saying, “if you build better cities, perhaps many more will come.”

A Walking Tour:

San Juan, Puerto

Historical places are relevant places.

Old San Juan is a vibrant, thriving place (perhaps a living museum) where people live, work, shop, and eat. You don't have to walk very far in Old San Juan to see for yourself.

Follow the thousands of visitors who walk through its streets from all over the world and know it is not just a tourist trap. Old San Juan

is as real as it gets and although you may have to pay to arrive there, you don't have to pay to walk and take in all it has to offer.

If walking tours aren't your thing, perhaps its enough to say that the most important activity that we all share is eating. For visitors and residents alike, places to eat and drink are at the top of the list for any place to be successful. Authentic and local are the key words in best describing people's appetite. Secondly, as important is atmosphere.

Streets are the essential life blood for cities and neighborhoods. Their doors open to activities that we all share. Streets that are maintained, clean, and safe are essential to fostering and attracting people.



Of course, the ability to make places walkable will undoubtedly contribute to its longevity and success over time.

Our Notion of Complete Streets.

In modern times its hard for us to imagine our cities and streets not made for cars. After all, a car dependant society is what America has been built upon for the last 60 years.

When we think of streets designed for people perhaps we are thinking of a theme park where we pay to park and pay to walk.

As urbanist's we want to change paradigms and encourage people to think about streets as networks for all modes of transportation options such as rapid bus, bus rapid transit, street cars, trollies, and walking, bicycles, and even cars.

When considered in the context of dense mixed uses—(housing, retail, and/or commercial development and amenities) the idea is to ultimately create transit oriented developments (TOD's) that can transform and sustain thriving vibrant communities.

The challenge is being met across the United States thanks to many organizations and agencies. Learn more.



Old San Juan, Puerto Rico

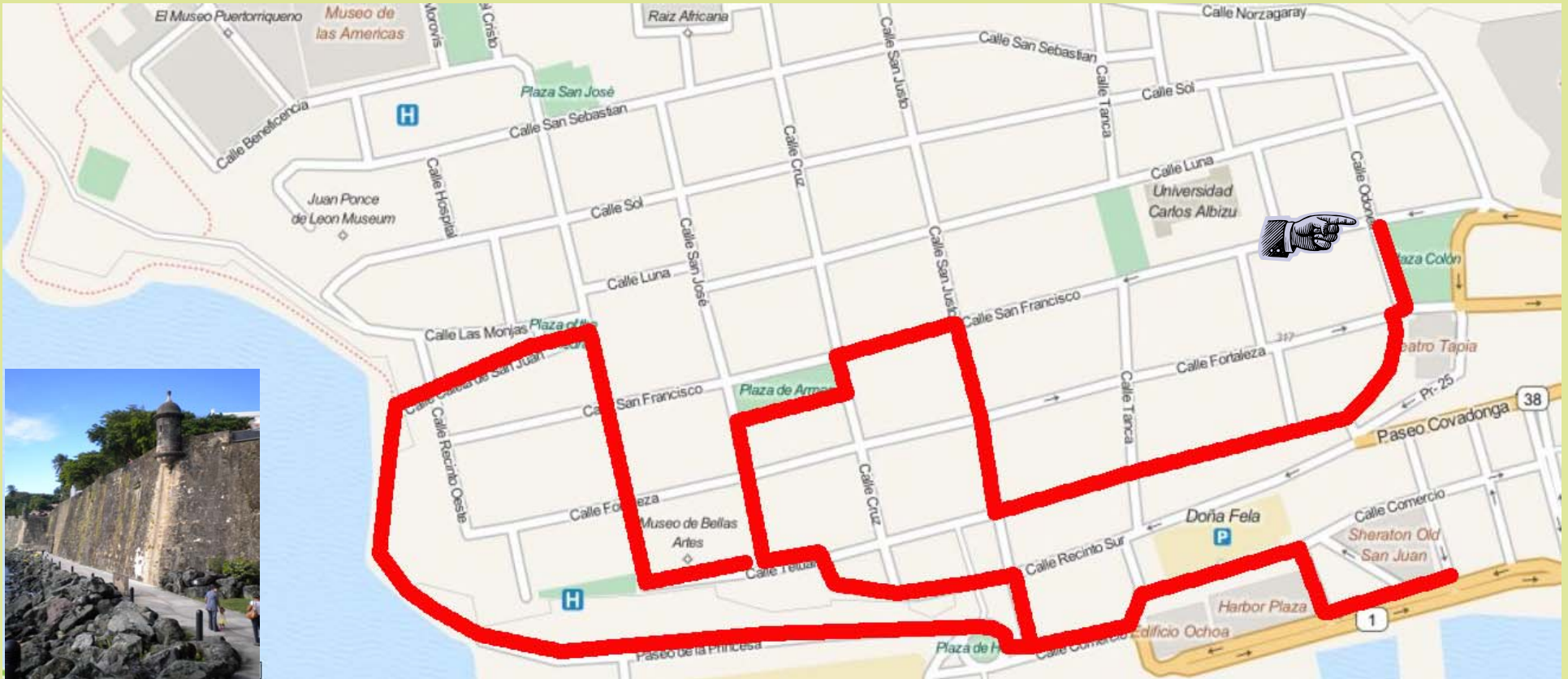
In 1508, [Juan Ponce de León](#) founded the original settlement which later in 1509 was abandoned and moved to a site which was called at the time "Puerto Rico" (meaning "rich port" or "good port"). In 1521, the newer settlement was given its formal name of "San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico" ("San Juan").

"By the late 1940s, disrepair in the old city was evident and local authorities took measures in considering development proposals for renovating the old city and incorporating modern architecture on new constructions." "Anthropologist [Ricardo Alegria](#) vehemently advised against the idea of razing old colonial buildings in favor of contemporary building designs." "His father, a local civic leader had successfully prevented the demolition of the *Capilla del Cristo* in favor of a traffic redesign." "He advised mayor Rincón de Gautier in changing local zoning laws to favor building remodeling and incorporate Spanish colonial motifs in any new constructions. This essentially preserved the city's architectural character traits, which has been essential to San Juan's current status as a tourist destination."

Old San Juan serves as a model to remodel and revitalize cities like Havana, Cuba. Excerpted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_San_Juan

Old San Juan

San Juan, Puerto Rico



A Walking Path of Discovery.

Old San Juan is a revitalized historic district with many narrow cobblestone roads, tree shaded streets and public plazas, side walk cafes, restaurants, bars, specialty boutiques and shops, book stores, museums, historic buildings, and an abundance of Spanish Colonial Architecture.

As cited: "The San Juan National Historic Site was established in 1949 to preserve historic buildings and other fortifications in Old San Juan. The historic site was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. La Fortaleza and the San Juan National Historic Site were declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983." We must be grateful to the work of Ricardo Alegría, Luis Muñoz Marín, and many more visionaries, organizations, agencies, public figures and concerned private citizens who contributed in making Old San Juan the wonderful place it is today for visitors and residents alike.



Sol Architecture + Partners LLC

Javier F. De Juan R.A., NCARB, MBA, CNU-a

Co-Founder and principal of Sol Architecture + Partners—NCARB certified Florida registered architect and urbanist with over 20 years of experience in Florida in a variety of public and private architectural projects.

SAP LLC is a Florida native practice offering a full range of professional architectural and interior design services including planning and urban design.

Our Vision: “To serve our communities and support them by advocating and developing sustainable, livable, walkable, and diverse compact mixed-use neighborhoods, towns, and streets.

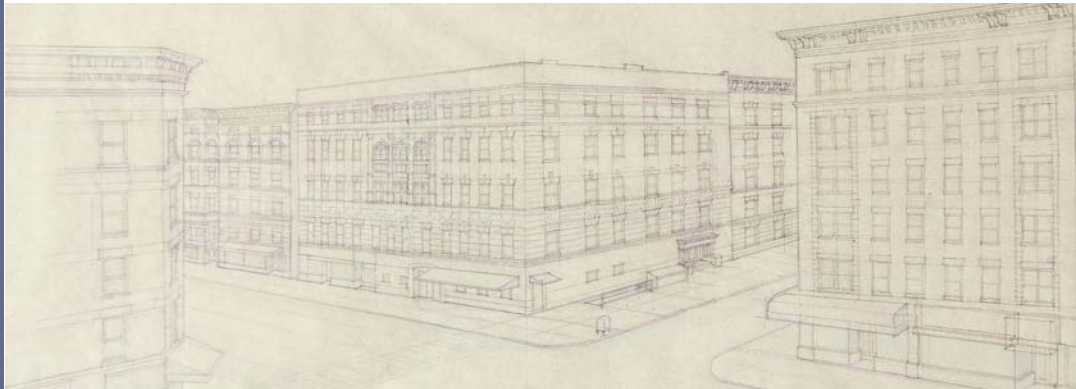


Illustration: Javier De Juan



WALK

BARCELONA, SPAIN

“Every hour of every day more than 3000 pedestrians walk through Portal del Angel.”

Dedicated to our beloved Josie.

“We need better places for our community and our future generations.”



ACT NOW! Expect more! Support better places and streets.

Donate and Learn more:

The Congress for the New Urbanism CNU.org

SmartGrowthAmerica.org

Reconnectingamerica.org