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Avalon's Success, Our Good Fortune

The expression goes, "If you're lucky enough to be at the beach, you're lucky enough." If you happen to be in Avalon you are luckier still. The seeds of our architectural firm's success were sown in that good fortune. Through countless new homes and renovations, the borough became for us a familiar home base. As we now work further and further afield, Avalon is still the place we love the most.

But success is not all based on good luck. Avalon formats the page for us. It is a wonderful place to work and a remarkably user-friendly town in which to build. In an often over-regulated environment, one has to travel and work in other towns to fully appreciate the pleasures of building here. The Avalon zoning code is strict but fair, and it is easy to use. The code enforcement office reviews the plans in a timely professional manner and they have the common-sense approach lacking in so many municipal offices. I mention this here because we often don't realize how good we have it until we compare it to others. Many of the other towns in which we work could learn a thing or two from Avalon.

Avalon also has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to the building trades. Once it was thought that building a high quality home required an out-of-town builder. The local reputation was, and I would hear this time and time again, when the weather was nice, the contractors went fishing. If this were ever true, it certainly is not my experience. Today I am more likely to bring a coastal builder to an inland project rather than vice versa. There is an incredible pool of conscientious builders and sub-contractors working in Avalon. We are all the beneficiaries of this talent pool and this good fortune. Popular culture would have the architect and builder as adversaries in the building process. Truly it is not that way, indeed it is quite the opposite. This is not a comment specific to Avalon, but here I can count on a seamless team effort as the rule and not the exception. It is a phrase I have come learn in Avalon, "good builder, good project." We have more than our fair share.

Avalon's success has an impact on the larger housing market. Almost without notice, there has been a quiet revolution in the quality of building materials. Most are familiar with the evolution of housing along the coast, from cottage to beach house to the substantial homes we see today. But the last decade has also seen a transformation of materials and the fundamentals of how a house is constructed. Imagine the car you may have owned 20 years ago and compare it to the modern car today. Air bags were just coming into use, a GPS system was the stuff of science fiction. Houses are similar things. The custom coastal home of today is a technical marvel compared to that of just a decade ago. Building codes now force us to a much higher structural design standard. Mechanical systems are ever more sophisticated and efficient; the houses are tighter and quieter. The synthetic trim materials that were suspect 15 years ago are perfected today and are used without apology. In the harsh coastal climate,

these houses and materials become the proving grounds. The designs we test here today become the standards for the larger industry in five years.

All towns get a reputation for good or ill, and Avalon's is one that many would covet. Avalon has been an economic success story. While not entirely unscathed by the economic downturn, it was protected from the stronger winds buffeting the real estate market. And while our location as a coastal resort is paramount, I believe these other intangibles reinforce Avalon's success. It is a user-friendly environment; there is a pool of talented builders and architects, and a dedicated view towards quality first. A culture has evolved here that seems to ask, how well can you build rather than how cheaply can you build. There is a competition to see how well we can do something. I know in our own work we are often designing homes for families, for generations. These are heirloom houses. Visitors may come for the beach and the bay. But it is the built environment that makes us stay and makes us return again. That simple idea pays enormous dividends to Avalon and to us all.

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