


When a Town is like a Tree

“When a single human mind or a group of *minds* together *conceive* a building, they naturally conceive it as a whole, and its parts then fall into place...

But when *a town grows*, it does not grow in one human mind, nor in any coherent group of minds. A town is made up from millions upon millions of individual acts of building.

Can the structure *emerge, simply* from the *spontaneous interaction* of the parts? Can it be created by a *free* process, in which people *locally* do what they want, and still create the *whole* successfully?

Or must it be *planned*, by a hidden hand, according to a blueprint or a master plan? Must there be some kind of *control*, some kind of *totalitarian order, imposed* from above, which restricts the freedom of the individual acts, and forces them into a large-scale order?”

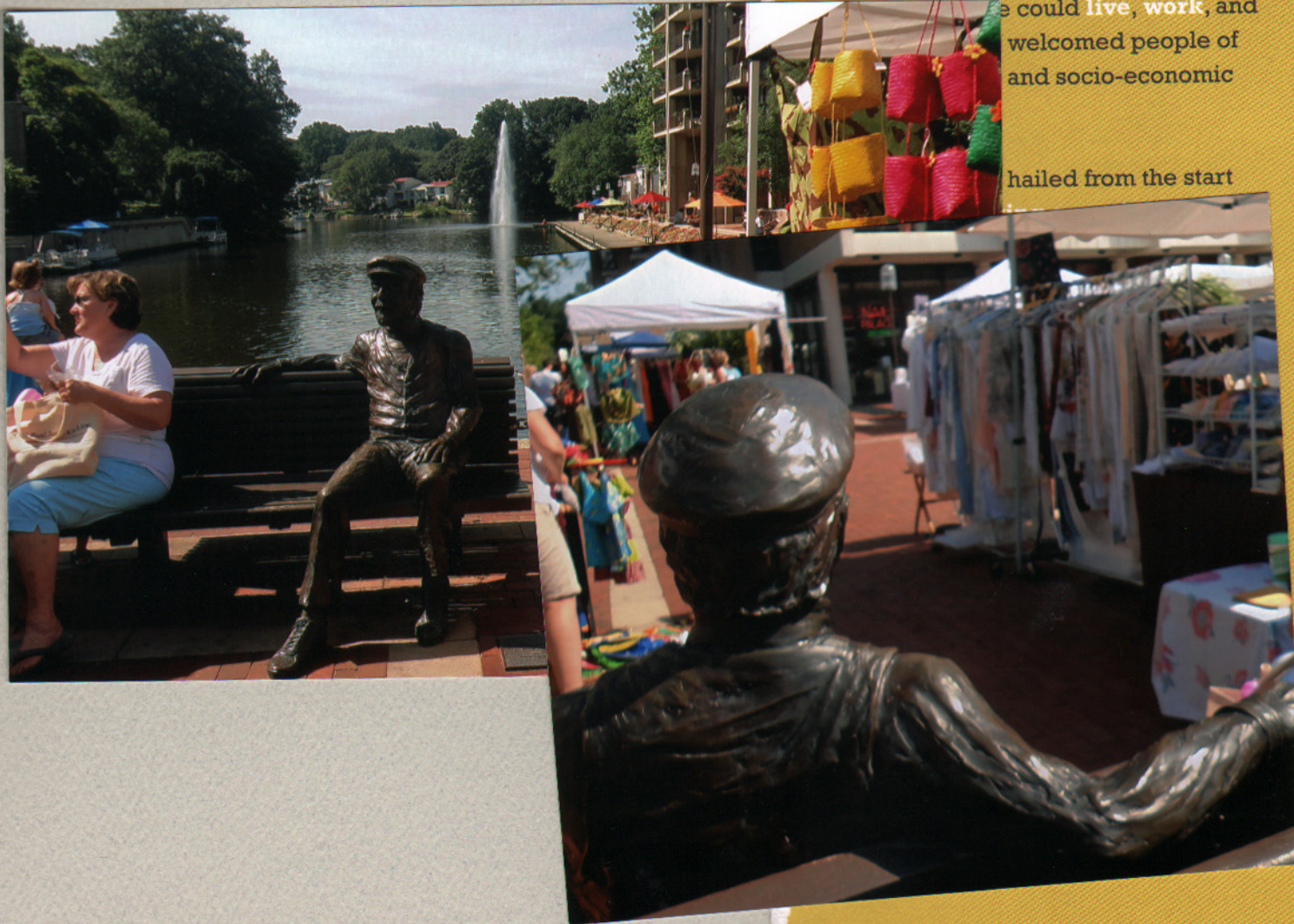




**Robert E. Simon** founded Reston in 1964 with a grand idea and a 6,750-acre tract of rural Virginia land. He envisioned a

community where people could live, work, and play. He welcomed people of all ages and backgrounds and socio-economic

backgrounds. Reston has hailed from the start.



Reston Historic Trust | Reston Museum [www.RestonMuseum.org](http://www.RestonMuseum.org)

# City Builder

By BENJAMIN RUHE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD BRAATEN

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HOW does it feel to build an entire city? How and why does one go about such an enormous undertaking?

Robert E. Simon, the New York real estate investor who is putting up the handsome, much-publicized city of Reston on an 11-square-mile tract in Fairfax County, answers these and other questions in the following interview.

Reston has been called an instant city because all major services are provided from the beginning. Totally planned, it has an unusual stress on humanistic values. Over 80 percent of the eventual 75,000 population will live in townhouse and apartment clusters, making available for joint recreational use the land which in another community would be used for small, separate lawns. Because of this policy, the rolling woodland in which the city is rising is being left largely untouched.

Reston will be dedicated May 21, and among those attending will be Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, Housing Secretary Robert Weaver and Gov. Mills Godwin of Virginia.

Simon, 51, son of a realty tycoon, a Harvard graduate, ex-Army captain, father of two and stepfather of four, an enthusiastic outdoorsman, is a man who has built up a realty empire said to embrace \$50 million in properties. He is known for his patronage of the arts, and served as president of the massive Carnegie Hall concert stage and studio complex for 24 years, until it was purchased by the City of New York.

Simon spends most of his time at Reston these days. Each Thursday he catches a 7:30 a.m. airliner in New York for Dulles Airport; he is at his desk in Reston by 8:45. "Marvelous," he says of this unusual personal travel arrangement. After putting in five days at Reston, he returns to New York on a Monday night so he can devote two working days to administering the affairs of the rest of his real estate empire.

The following interview—one of the few he has ever given—was conducted in his office in a converted farmhouse at Reston:



- Q. Building a city is one of the profoundest creative acts possible. What have your emotions been while planning and building Reston?
- A. It's been exhilarating, wonderful—trying at times, frustrating. Nothing ever gets done as fast as you'd like to see it done. I think the most heart-warming part of the entire almost five-year period now has been the magnificent way in which the officialdom and citizens of Fairfax County have welcomed us and have helped us. This was quite a revolutionary concept, it required a substantial amendment to the county zoning ordinance and we came into a part of the county which is basically rural. Yet at the many, many public hearings there was not a single voice raised in opposition to what we were doing by anybody living in this area and there was only one voice in the entire time that was raised against us and that voice is now one of our staunchest champions.
- Q. How would you characterize the first people to move here?
- A. It took exceptional people to decide to move into a community that was just beginning, people with self-confidence and people with faith, which is, I guess, a corollary of self-confidence. These FFRs as we call them—first families of Reston—are a wonderful group of people who have been able to endure with great poise and good humor some of the hardships of moving into a new community and some of the exasperating experiences that come from dealing with a new and growing organization. They haven't lost their genuine enthusiasm for what we're trying to do.



Q. How has Washington reacted to Reston?

- A. What impressed me most about this was how long it took for Washingtonians to know that Reston was here and to have an idea of what it was about. For a while, whenever I got into a taxi I would ask the driver, "By the way, how long does it take to get to Reston?" And it was only within the last eight months that I found my first taxi driver who knew what I was talking about.

Q. Have you had many visitors?

- A. This is astonishing, we weren't prepared for it. As a matter of fact, we're working on a plan right now to have a regular guided tour service. We have an enormous influx. There was a guy from New Zealand yesterday, an engineer from Sweden today—people from all over the world. The State Department is sending people out here. The Voice of America has done long reports on Reston, and we've been on Swedish television, we appeared in a three-language publication from Geneva, books in England, periodicals in France, Germany, Russia.

Q. Is Reston America's first satellite city?

- A. I'm a little puzzled. In a sense it's not the first, yet it's called the first. I think probably that it's the quality of the planning and architecture which distinguishes Reston.

Q. Reston was reportedly turned down by more than 70 corporate and lending institutions and it is said that in 1963 two attache cases were packed and waiting in your home; one was the "go-ahead" for Reston, the other contained dismissal notices for the staff. A substantial loan from Gulf Oil came through at the critical moment and made Reston a reality. Can you tell us about this crisis?

- A. The use of attache cases is a figure of speech, but we definitely were within a week of dismantling our organization. It was a tense time. Very tense.

Q. What of the future? Will you devote yourself to Reston for the next 10 or 20 years, or branch out?

- A. I've had several flattering and attractive opportunities to take on another city but we're a long way from knowing enough to think we should start another. We've got a great deal to learn here and furthermore, since I'm really dedicated to this five-day-week business, it's going to be quite a few years before I would want to spend more than two days a week away from Reston. So 10 or 20 years is a good guess. I don't know.



## BRONZE BOB

Structures representing the human form encourage one to relate physically to the built environment. Bronze Bob is a role model for inhabiting Lake Anne. He sits unassumingly on a bench by the lake and smiles as he watches fellow Restonians go about their days in the town he originally conceived of. Everyday, countless people share the bench with him and look at the village center through his eyes. He is always present, like a proud parent, embodying Reston's history, reminding of its values.

