

DESIGN EXCELLENCE

*at*  
***Intrawest Resorts***



For 30 years, landscape architect Eldon Beck, FASLA, energized the design direction of Intrawest Corporation, international developers of ski resorts including Whistler Blackcomb, British Columbia; Mont Tremblant, Québec; Mammoth Mountain, California and beach resorts such as Sandestin, Florida. With some of the finest ski slopes and golf greens, Intrawest's development signature is its pedestrian resort villages supported by year-round residents. The pedestrian village provides a baseline of activity that attracts thousands of visitors to visually and socially engaging places.

Intrawest villages begin on paper as broad vision statements about the character of the place. As the village master planner for many projects, Mr. Beck listens to and observes the site carefully. He finds what the site can contribute to the village form and character. They emerge from many places. The most important is views to the surrounding mountains and water features. Other sources include the local cultural and architectural history, stories and myths developed by generations of residents, topography and relief of the land and existing pedestrian paths and vehicular ways. According to Mr. Beck, "The fabric of the village emerges from the site analysis." Taken together, the analysis suggests locations and size for pedestrian lanes and plazas, hotels, condos, shops, restaurants, and entertainment facilities. These are sized to generate a local economy that sustains the resort.

Before Intrawest was a resort brand name, Mr. Beck worked with another visionary in the village concept for ski resorts, Terry Minger,

City Manager for Vail Colorado in the early 1970s. Mr. Minger saw the need to transform Vail into a four season resort from a winter-only ski destination. Mr. Minger introduced summer recreation programs, expanded the system of public and private parks, developed an ice rink and pedestrianized the village center. Mr. Beck supplied the landscape architecture and urban design to integrate these places and enhanced how residents and visitors experienced them.

In the late 1970s, Mr. Minger and Mr. Beck were involved as consultants in developing the village plan for The Resort Municipality of Whistler, British Columbia. Like Vail, Whistler needed to create a four season, family-friendly resort village. Intrawest purchased Blackcomb Mountain near the village and some building sites in the village in the latter half of the 1990s. With his involvement with Whistler, Mr. Beck came into contact with Intrawest executives Gary Raymond, Hugh Smythe and Joe Houssian. Through the influence of Mr. Beck, they realized that the village concept could generate visitors throughout the year and not just during ski season.

Mr. Beck provided the framework for expanding Whistler's emerging village, its social places and connected them by interesting paths. He set into motion plans that would be built over 25 years of development. The crowning compliment to the foresight of the Municipality and Intrawest for embracing the village concept will be from people from around the world who will experience the successful community at Whistler, host of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

The relationship with Intrawest grew to where Mr. Beck provided design development for Mont Tremblant, Québec and other Intrawest projects. The Québec resort was the first of several ski villages that emerged from an aggressive Intrawest business expansion plan in the early 1990s to implement the village concept in resort properties across North America. About a two hour drive from Montreal, Mont Tremblant is organized into three sub-villages that occupy the top, middle and base of the ski mountain. All three areas teem with people and social activities for all ages such that it has become a year-round vacation destination.

*All paths lead to the mountains: The village concept begins with pedestrian paths that open to the main feature mountains at Whistler Blackcomb.*



*The "in between" the pedestrian paths and buildings at Mont Tremblant create a third unique environment: stairs, walls and plants.*





*Trees, planters, low walls, awnings, cafés and building facades all define the edge of the pedestrian stream and entry points at Whistler.*

Mr. Beck creates the “streams” on paper first, i.e. the pedestrian paths and vehicular ways used by the public, then looks at what they touch. The size of the paths, their direction, their sun exposure, landmarks and social spaces in them are suggested by views, topography, site history and myths and existing buildings. New buildings are sized and located in response to the paths and the desired experiences along them. That’s where retail, office, residential and hotels mix to amplify the pedestrian experience along the paths, creating variety, a sense of place and excitement for the visitor, engaging them in the social opportunities of the place.



Mr. Beck concentrates design within the village path, roughly defined by buildings on both sides up to a height of about 15 ft (5 m). The expression of the floors, walls and ceilings within this corridor is the third environment between paths and buildings that attracts people. The walls and ceilings are transformed to frame mountain views and other unique site features, and to control sunlight and shadow for pedestrian comfort. Trees, signs, lighting, balconies, building facades and entrances help define and differentiate the walls of the paths.

For the floors, Mr. Beck notes that, “A successful village attaches people to places there so they can communicate. They have to slow down to do this. The texture of the pavement is a key element within this design space. Concrete pavers catch the light and generate patterns that help slow people down. The textures of concrete pavers help do this as well as contribute to the sense of each place for people. The pace of people must slow down so they can be attracted to and engage in social places.”

Mr. Beck emphasized that the village concept celebrates texture and light on every scale and at every turn of the pedestrian paths. Texture and light can be almost overwhelming in scale, like a pedestrian corridor framing a distant, snow-capped mountain with sunlight changing the definition of its ridges throughout the day. Texture can also come from something small like the sunlight accenting the paving patterns which suggest direction and the pace of movement.

Like a composer writing a jazz musical score, Mr. Beck lays down the design theme and physical structure of Intrawest villages. Other landscape architect musicians have carried the village concept into

According to Mr. Beck, the “in-between” spaces are critical in developing the village concept. He uses an analogy of a stream and its banks to explain this approach. The stream is full of water and life. The earthen banks contain and direct the stream’s course. They are two distinct environments. The meeting of the two creates a third unique environment, the riparian edges, filled with plants and creatures that live at the junction of the two. The junction creates a third environment energized by water, light and textures. Stones sorted by size in low-lying stream banks exemplify the result of these interacting systems.

Transferred to the context of a village, this analogy might be found where a restaurant meets a stream of pedestrians. Mr. Beck explores the design possibilities between the path of people and the restaurant. Design possibilities could include outdoor cafés reaching out to pedestrians, awnings and balconies that extend from the restaurant and suggest being in or over the stream. Planters and trees prescribe boundaries yet direct visitors to the restaurant entrance. Like the pebbles along the stream, the change in patterns and textures of concrete pavers could direct the stream of pedestrians toward the restaurant.

*At Mont Tremblant, pavers, steps and walls slow down and direct people to engage in social places like this outdoor theater or this intimate café.*





*Waves with texture and light are expressed through a fountain in Mont Tremblant's village center or from waves in the paver pattern.*

other Intrawest projects. They have filled the villages with their ideas and improvisations and work out the details expressed through construction plans and specifications.

One of those is landscape architect Richard Stevenson with Stevenson + Associates in Vancouver, British Columbia. His firm has worked on Intrawest projects in Colorado, Florida, Las Vegas and Canada. According to Mr. Stevenson, "Paving is a big budget item. We would like to use stone, but it's unaffordable. Pavers fit into the economics and still give design flexibility. We use concrete pavers with colors and textures that fit with the place."

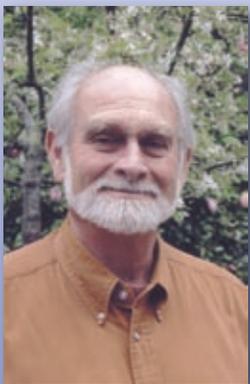
millennia. The connection to the village pleases the emotions. "This is the way it's supposed to be," might be the first feelings from walking through an Intrawest village.

The village concept is successful for Intrawest because it excludes no one. People of all ages (and budgets) can participate in a range of social and recreation experiences. Another reason for acceptance by visitors is it's not ordinary. A village environment presents an exciting and enjoyable vacation option. It beckons suburban dwellers away from the daily environment of mundane single-use neighborhoods and shopping centers. It gets them out of cars and onto their feet. The vil-

lage concept invites a higher level of social interaction, of living differently and better and concrete pavers are written on that invitation. ❖



*Concrete paver patterns direct the flow of pedestrians through Mont Tremblant and locate golfers on a miniature course.*



*Master Planner Eldon Beck, FASLA brought the village concept to life through Intrawest resort projects.*

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