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PHOTO BY KATHLEEN DAVIDSON

MAYO WOODLANDS

Mayo grandchildren hope new residential community
lives up to family's heritage of innovation

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“As children we spent countless Sunday afternoons exploring the woods along the bank of the Zumbro River at Mayowood. We have a responsibility to maintain and preserve some of the things our family has enjoyed.” —Ned Mayo

DR. CHARLES MAYO CHERISHED the gently rolling countryside near Rochester, Minn. The co-founder of the famed Mayo Clinic left his heirs vital stewardship of 3,000 acres of forest, native prairie, and agricultural fields.

“As children we spent countless Sunday afternoons exploring the woods along the bank of the Zumbro River at Mayowood. We have a responsibility to maintain and preserve some of the things our family has enjoyed,” says Dr. Charlie’s grandson Ned Mayo.

One needs little imagination to see why Dr. Charlie loved this land. It is here that he built his own home, Mayowood Estate, in the nearby valley. It is here that he was inspired to write, “The cultivation of forest leads to other things ... recreation, fishing, hunting, study of plant life. It means long walks and better health. Why not put our energy into things that are needed, like health and enjoyment of nature.” It is here that his grandchildren, while planning to build a residential community of 123 homes called Mayo Woodlands, has set aside more than 50 percent of the land as a preserve for the “enjoyment of nature” forever.

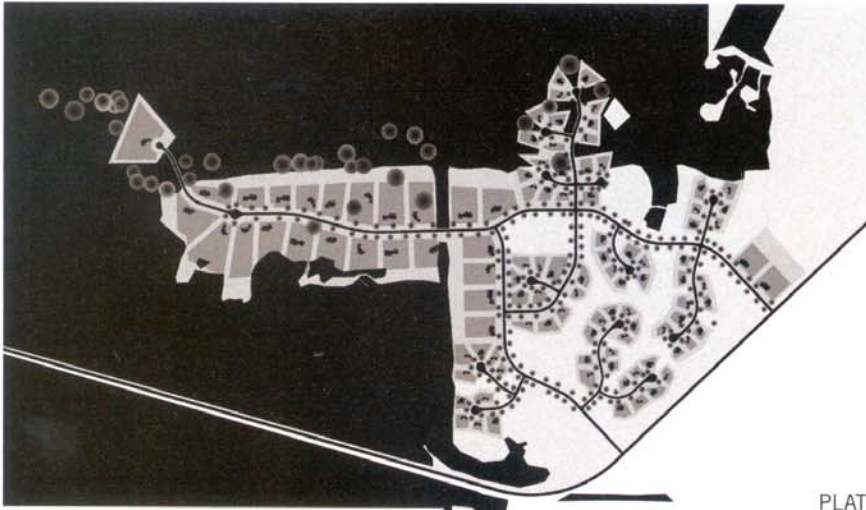
The grandchildren of Dr. Charlie wanted to build a residential community on 470 acres of that land near the Zumbro River Valley. After the Rochester Township approved the subdivision

plan in 2002, the grandchildren reflected on their family’s heritage of innovation. They wanted Mayo Woodlands to be as groundbreaking and long-lasting as the advances in medicine and experimental agriculture made by Dr. Charlie.

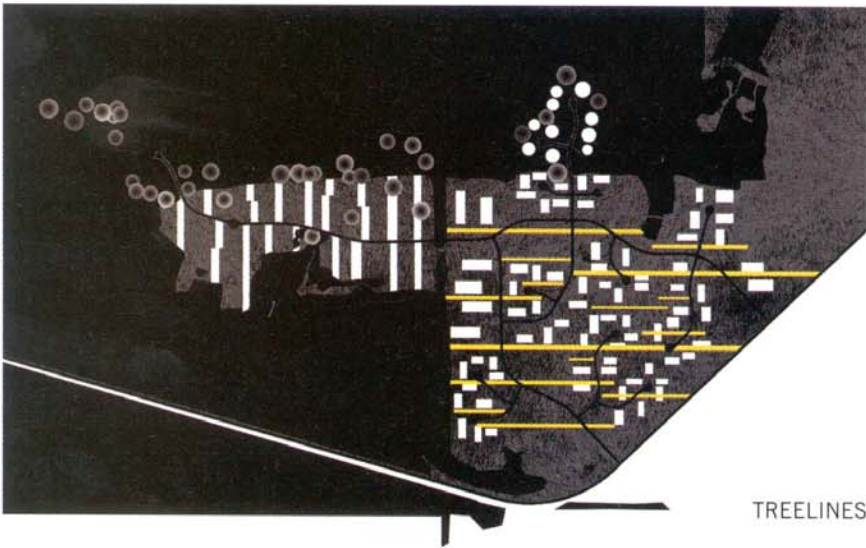
Family members were inspired by Jackson Meadow, an award-winning residential community near Marine on the St. Croix, Minn., which is uniquely integrated into its hilly environment. The project felt aligned with the conservationist ethos and progressive ideals of Dr. Charlie. So the family called on Shane Coen, founder of Coen + Partners and landscape architect for Jackson Meadow. Coen was asked to balance the demands of development with the protection of the natural resources of the historic land. The project was not given to Coen and his team from scratch. Roads, cul-de-sacs, right-of-ways, setbacks, and lot sizes and locations had been established and could not be changed.

Coen and his team were immediately drawn to the land, with its green pasturelands, waving cornfields, and mature trees. The first task, he says, was to transform the typical suburban plat into a progressive model that promotes the Mayos’ core values: community, health, and nature. The landscape architecture team respected the integrity of the landscape and divided the plan into three neighborhoods: the Village, the Prairie, and the Forest.





PLAT



TREELINES

RENDERINGS PROVIDED BY COEN + PARTNERS

Coen + Partners inherited a typical suburban plat, shown above, with roadways, cul-de-sacs, and lot lines already set. The landscape architects re-oriented the houses on the lots and skillfully used tree lines, farm fences, prairie grasses, and cut-out lawns to transform the plat. BELOW The model house in the Village neighborhood provides a warm glow on a frigid night on the prairie.



RIGHT The prefabricated stairs are made of folded sheet steel. Its treads are covered with wood, but any durable material, such as slate, glass, or stone, can be used. **OPPOSITE PAGE** The pergola made of Brazilian ironwood provides some cover from the sun for the floor-to-ceiling first-floor windows, as well as architectural interest to the exterior of the house.



The Village occupies the largest parcel on flat farm fields formerly cultivated in rows running east to west. This neighborhood will have the greatest population density, with lots that are less than one acre. But the houses will be staggered to protect views. Farm windrows, or windbreaks of a thousand red pines, are planted east to west to honor its farm roots and to add a sense of privacy. Wooden picket fences of vertical wide-board construction will add another rural tradition and contribute to the Village's sense of community.

For the Prairie, the houses will be situated on two- to four-and-a-half-acre lots on the sloping meadow-like land for houses looking out into a natural treeline. The neighborhood is bounded by forests with a small opening to the east connecting it to the Village. To emphasize the woods bounding the neighborhood at the north

and south ends, the yard "cut-outs" are long sweeping gestures that reach from the road to the forest edges. The homes are situated within these large sweeping gestures. Long, low stone walls will serve the same role as the fences in the Village.

The Forest neighborhood, which is a smaller heavily wooded secluded area with great views of the river valley below, is the smallest of the three neighborhoods, with only ten lots. Each lot has a circular zone containing the house and garage. This circular zone retains the forest canopy and is underplanted with native ferns. A small square yard is cut out of the ferns.

Tall native prairie grasses were planted throughout to create a uniform palette across the neighborhoods and erase lot lines. Each house will appear to be sitting in five-foot-tall grass, although each will have space for a clipped grass lawn. The



development of trails and parks helps create a sense of community.

Residential architecture was as important to the success of the project as the landscape architecture. To ensure the design of the homes worked in concert with his Village, Prairie, and Forest neighborhoods, Coen hand-selected a team: Jackson Meadow veteran, David Salmela, of Salmela Architects in Duluth, and Tim Alt, of ALTUS Architecture in Minneapolis.

The team members agreed on the importance of light. While houses in most standard subdivisions are oriented to the street, Mayo Woodlands houses are oriented to the sun. Every house follows the path of the sun from east to west for maximum daylight and is no wider than 24 feet. Salmela says all the houses are being designed to be long, low, and linear to respect this new

orientation. The designers preferred using flat roofs in keeping with the low-lying orientation, but some roofs have low gables added to respect some homeowners' affinity for more traditional forms. What is compelling, Alt says, is the transparency of the houses, the immediacy of the outdoors. That principle is apparent in the wall of south-facing windows in the model house in the Village, the only house completed so far.

All the houses will share common materials, using wood and stucco for exteriors with metal for roofs, but each will have a different exterior design and a customized interior. Sixty are being designed for the first phase of the development. Five modernist examples, some unconventional, will be built this year. The five planned model houses will integrate a Midwestern farm character with a modern sensibility marked by a lot of glass.



The first completed model home exemplifies this design. Situated on a three-quarter-acre flat lot in the Village, this new kind of farmhouse rises up two stories from the waving grasses. South-facing floor-to-ceiling windows on the main floor get some sun protection from a wooden pergola that covers the wraparound deck built of Brazilian ironwood. Five-foot-square windows frame east, west, and north views.

Interior design for this linear house is simple yet elegant. The eastern half of the main floor is designed like a great room, complete with kitchen, dining area, and family room. Light pours into this space, where an ultra-modern galley kitchen is outfitted with stainless steel appliances and sink, granite countertop and maple cabinets. Homeowners will welcome the many built-ins provided in the family room and dining room. A sun-filled space on the other end

of the house could serve as a future office.

The designers made the bedroom windows square to frame the picturesque views of the countryside. A carpeted recreational room in the basement does not share the same vistas, but it does get ample light, thanks to a lightwell.

Among the most unconventional features in Mayo Woodlands is the use of a detached garage, also known as the carriage house, which is stained a deep midnight purple. Salmela describes it as almost black so it can fade into the trees. The model's box-like three-stall structure has a sculptural white stairway leading up to the second level. There is something reminiscent of a barn loft in the discovery of the unfinished space at the top of the stairs. The designers say some of these outdoor stairways can be enlarged to form an airy deck.

Another feature defining the project is prefabricated systems. Alt was charged with finding

Windows are the dominant feature of the family room, left, and dining room, below, in the model house. Furnishings provided by Finnstyle complement the clean lines and understated color palette of the home.



ways to build things economically without compromising character. To that end, he collaborated with Charlie Lazor, of Blu Dot, to design a prefabricated stairway. It is constructed of folded sheet steel, and its treads can be covered with wood, slate, glass, stone, or any durable material. The design team designated other prefab systems, including modular elements to be used in framing the wall panels and roof trusses. The systems offer savings in construction time and building costs.

In the Prairie neighborhood, a second house is nearly complete. It is composed of three cube-shaped wooden-clad buildings that form a

courtyard. By homeowner request, the garage is attached and contains a guest room and bath along the transparent passageway to the main house. An exercise room sits atop the garage, which is stained a light grey. A smaller one-story stand-alone building in the courtyard is stained midnight purple and provides storage for recreational equipment.

This house, also filled with light, has a view of the woods edging the four-acre site. The U-shaped spacious kitchen with wonderful vistas is a modern delight with white plastic laminate cabinets, granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. Other features include a small

library/office and a cozy fireplace room with just enough space for two. A more typical single-story home with gabled metal roof is planned for construction in the Village this spring.

So far, reaction to Mayo Woodlands is mixed. The project won an Architecture magazine P/A award in 2003. The P/A awards are considered a bellwether of both design trends and schools of thought. Reaction from the Rochester area has been more reserved. Coen, a leader of this project, says many residents find it really interesting, while others question it. The designers are not discouraged. Rather, they feel it is their responsibility to educate the public about the philosophy,

design, and innovation driving the project. They hope it will appeal to longtime residents as well the influx of professionals from all over the world. If the development is successful, it could be a central part of Rochester's culture, Coen says.

As the project progresses, the builders, architects, and Mayo family hope to draw people to Mayo Woodlands. "This," says Alt, "is a celebration of place where you are invited to interact with the land." ■

Bette Hammel is a freelance writer who specializes in architecture.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 116.