



Eclectic Style Alys Beach

THIS 30A BEACH TOWN IS A WHITWASHED NEW URBANISM WONDER



SOUTH WALTON Driving along Scenic Highway 30A on Northwest Florida's Gulf coast, it's hard to know where to look first. Gape at sugar-white beaches that hug the 20-mile road or stare in awe at the loveliest collection of beach towns you've ever seen? Among the architecturally inspired towns on this two-lane road, there's one that stands out from the others: **Alys Beach**.

Jaw-dropping moments come along often here, especially when you first glimpse the whitewashed rooftops that distinguish the homes — many of them vacation rentals a stone's throw from the turquoise water of the Gulf. Architecturally, Alys Beach is a wonder. It marries “the patio house from Antigua with the simple look of Bermudan masonry” and has “touches of Moorish influences,” explains Marianne Khoury-Vogt, the town's architect. One of the youngest communities along this popular coast, Alys Beach fits within the design movement known as New Urbanism, which by definition embraces the notion of being able to live, work and play within your community. No cars required; bicycles preferred.

Surprises come at every turn: Dominican shell-stone pathways covered with moss and shells lead to rows of white houses whose wood-slatted doors offer peeks into secret courtyards. The sound of trickling water fountains is ubiquitous. “We deliberately have gates to tease you without revealing too much. It's private but inviting,” Khoury-Vogt says.

The community's Caliza pool — a great spot for swimming and socializing, and even dining at the poolside restaurant — has an imposing four-turreted, lighted tower and massive, billowing curtains. “We immediately envisioned an elliptical pool arranged in a symmetrical pattern reminiscent of Roman piazzas,” Khoury-Vogt explains.

Alys Beach's striking vistas will make you do a U-turn, and the neighboring beach towns also have signature looks. Not one emulates another's palette or style, and yet there's a collective appreciation for art. Galleries, art events and even an artist colony in Seaside add to the area's energy. “The artistic mentality invades every nook and cranny,” says Laura Granberry, owner of the **Art of Simple** gallery in Seaside's **Shops of Ruskin**.

In June the creative crowd descends on Alys Beach for **Digital Graffiti**, an event that combines art, architecture and technology. The signature white walls become the canvas, with kaleidoscopic pictures wrapping around balconies; images are even projected on chimneys. Which means, of course, that your jaw might just drop even more. alysbeach.com — VICKY HODGES

the arts

➔ **SLEEP** Rent a house in **Alys Beach** and wake up to a shady vine-covered courtyard with French doors opening onto green Moroccan tiles. Enjoy the sound of trickling fountains. alysbeach.com

DO Alys Beach lights up June 8 and 9 for the fifth annual **Digital Graffiti** festival, when the town opens its unique courtyards and paths to groundbreaking digital artists. digitalgraffiti.com

The largest concentration of galleries on Highway 30A, the **Shops of Ruskin** in Seaside brings art lovers to its First Friday ArtWalk from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. monthly. ruskinplaceartistguild.com

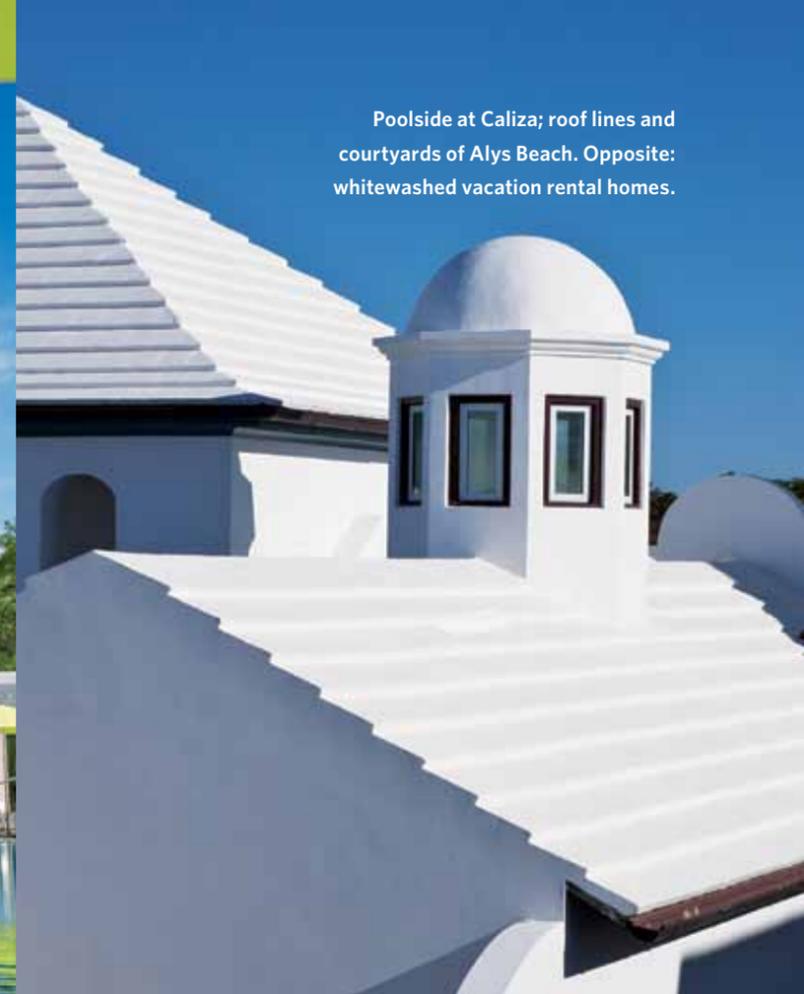
International artists take up residence through **Escape to Create**, holding intimate workshops and performances (fall through spring). escape2create.org

SHOP Browse **Justin Gaffrey's Studio-Gallery** in Seaside and Blue Mountain Beach. Marvel at the local painter's highly textured acrylic work (below). justingaffrey.com

EAT Dine waterside at the Alys Beach **Caliza** pool restaurant and see the stunning architecture firsthand. calizarerestaurant.com



PHOTOGRAPHY FROM TOP: COURTESY ALYS BEACH; LARRY NIGHSWANDER; ZACH STOVALL; OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY ALYS BEACH; LARRY NIGHSWANDER; ZACH STOVALL; TOM TAVEE



Poolside at Caliza; roof lines and courtyards of Alys Beach. Opposite: whitewashed vacation rental homes.