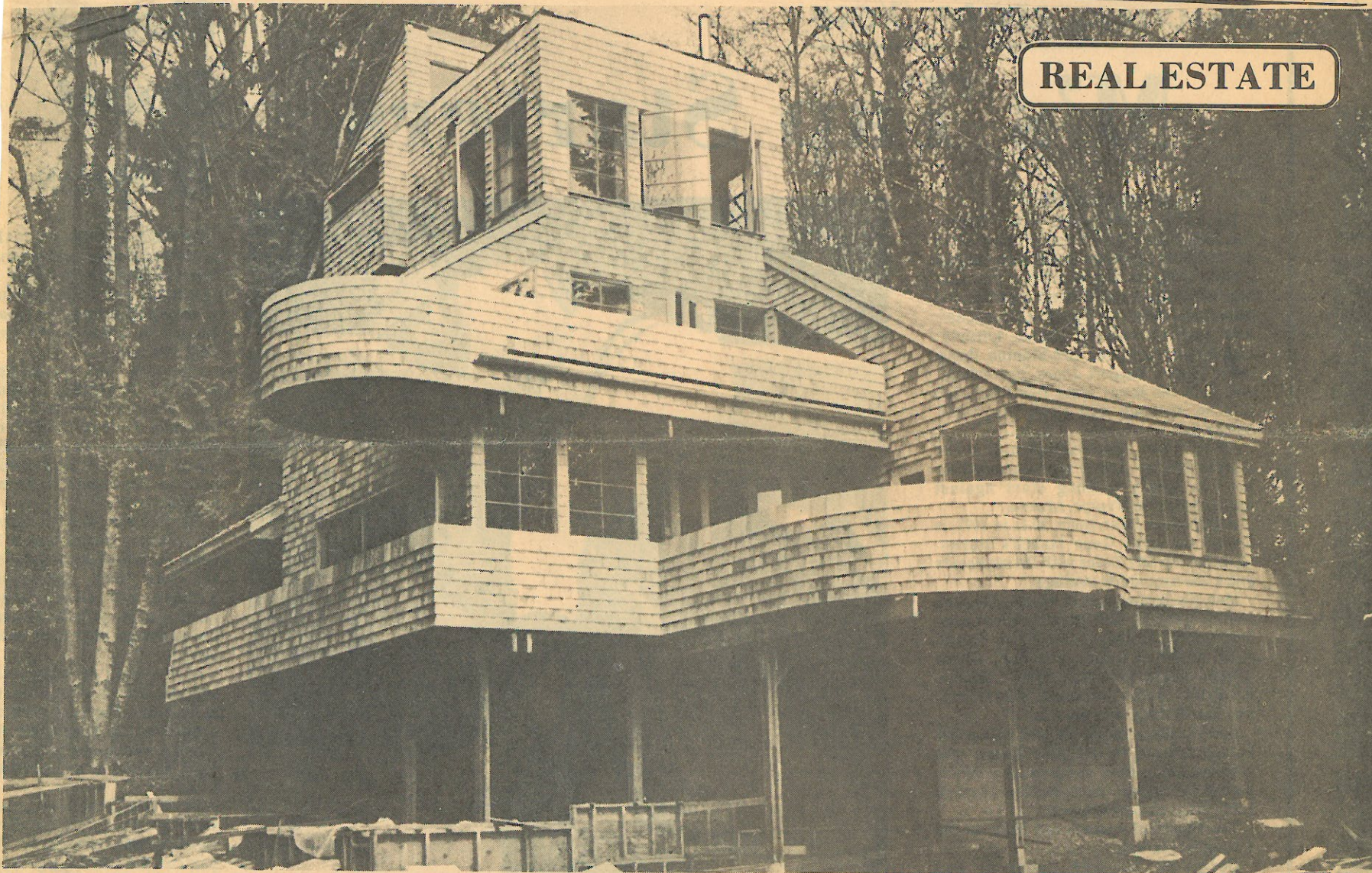


REAL ESTATE



Bill Isley's "Herbie" house stands on an imaginary circle in the Point White development, which may be a model for future projects in rural areas.

—(Sun Photo by Ron Ramey)

'I Wonder If Herbie's Home Yet': As Unusual As Its Name

By Max Kvidera
Sun Staff Writer

Building sites are circular. Parking, gardens and community activities are concentrated. The architecture of the houses is individual and striking.

Those qualities identify "I Wonder If Herbie's Home Yet?", a Bainbridge Island residential planned unit development which achieves many of the goals set for the PUD approach to housing. "Herbie" also represents a model which may never be duplicated and, at the same time, may be copied often in the future.

"I believe there is a better product derived from sharing property, rather than subdividing and creating fences between each parcel and having no control over the outcome of the landscape," says Bill Isley, one of the developers of the property and a homeowner there.

That statement is the concept of "Herbie" and other PUDs. Isley explains that the development was prepared to maintain the landscape while opening it to the use and enjoyment of the property owners.

Kitsap County passed a PUD ordinance in 1969 as a way of encouraging creative housing developments and providing common amenities while preserving the valuable land resource, especially in the rural areas. Since then 57 PUDs have been approved, including 12 mobile home parks which are required to have such a designation.

The PUD has allowed local government and the private developers to get some of the things they want. For government, the cost of services can be restricted because services are concentrated. At the same time control over design and open spaces, demanded by residents, remains in government hands to a certain extent.

While the PUD doesn't cost less to develop, it does offer cheaper economics of construction, according to Jim Svensson, a member of the county's planning staff. In many cases units are clustered to meet open space demands.

"There is a tradeoff," he says. "The developer of the PUD is allowed more potential development if a site will allow it. And the county has some discretion."

Gene Lobe, county commissioner, views the PUD as an alternative which will grow in popularity as the demand for housing increases.

"It gives a surrounding area more protection, and there's more acceptance by the residents," he says. "We're finding more and more people who don't want high density next to them."

It's popularity with government also is growing.

"No longer can government continue to provide all amenities," Lobe said.

"Herbie" (the name was taken from the title of a children's book) resulted from a vision of joint tenancy which Isley had in mind for many years. He wanted a living area where utilities and social activities could be consolidated while still maintaining the privacy of the residents.

The development is an eight-acre piece of land, about a quarter-mile long, located near Point White on the south end of the island. Seven circular building sites of about 8,000 square feet each have been placed on the property. Four houses, ranging in size from 500 to 2,800 square feet have been built or are under construction.

About 6½ acres of open space surround the building sites. Situated within that space are common areas for parking and gardens and a community building, which has space for arts and crafts. Trails lead to the houses.

Each homeowner owns his structure and the land it is on, while sharing in the ownership of the rest of the property. A homeowners' association manages the common areas. The covenants spell out insurance responsibilities, monthly maintenance fees and the manner for selling.

Isley, a Seattle architect, bought the land in 1971. He had nurtured a desire for the property since first seeing it while riding a ferry through Rich Passage as a boy.

The plan was designed in 1974 and started with three families. Two more families since have bought into the development and two sites remain. The members include architects, a teacher, a carpenter, a graphic artist and a Seattle television station employee.

Isley had an idea of what he wanted, but the final plan emerged after several changes.

"In the beginning we looked at several alternatives. One was to cluster all the houses in one area of the property and another was to space the houses evenly from one another."

The first approach was discarded because it didn't provide enough privacy, despite the advantage of a sizeable open space. The second plan seemed too regimented and dictated where the houses would be built. The dispersal design was chosen to attain advantages of both.

"In this case, the site required this approach," he says. "If it had been an open, flat site, I would have done it differently."

The 100-foot diameter circles were chosen for surveying convenience. It's less expensive to drive one stake and describe its location than four stakes, Isley says.

While most PUDs in the county have encountered minimal opposition, "Herbie" raised numerous complaints by residents,

says Isley. Island residents generally have been protective of their environment and rumors about "Herbie" seemed to threaten that environment. A few tales described the development as a hippy commune. A public hearing, required by the PUD ordinance, brought the controversy into the open.

"By the time we got to the hearing stage, there had been so many rumors and gossip that it turned into a hostile meeting," he recalls. "One family had put up a tent on the property before building and that freaked out some people."

"We went to great extremes preparing the design and it was very complete. We had to convince ourselves as a group of what we were doing."

The development gained approval last year. It has won the support of planners and the attention of other developers. Isley says many people have requested a look at the design.

"I'm still convinced that the PUD approach with common facilities and areas is an extremely beneficial way to go about it," he says. "The benefit is to several families rather than just one."

PUD interest appears to be increasing. Since the county's comprehensive plan was approved last August, nine have been approved, including four in the rural areas. Planners say they are seeing more creative designs.

But standards remain high. Marj Redman, a county planning commission member, wants more explicit guidelines established for PUDs.

"If we let people live in rural areas, then we have to develop in a way to preserve the area," she says.

"You can't stop growth via planning. You have to manage the growth and place it where it will do the most good."