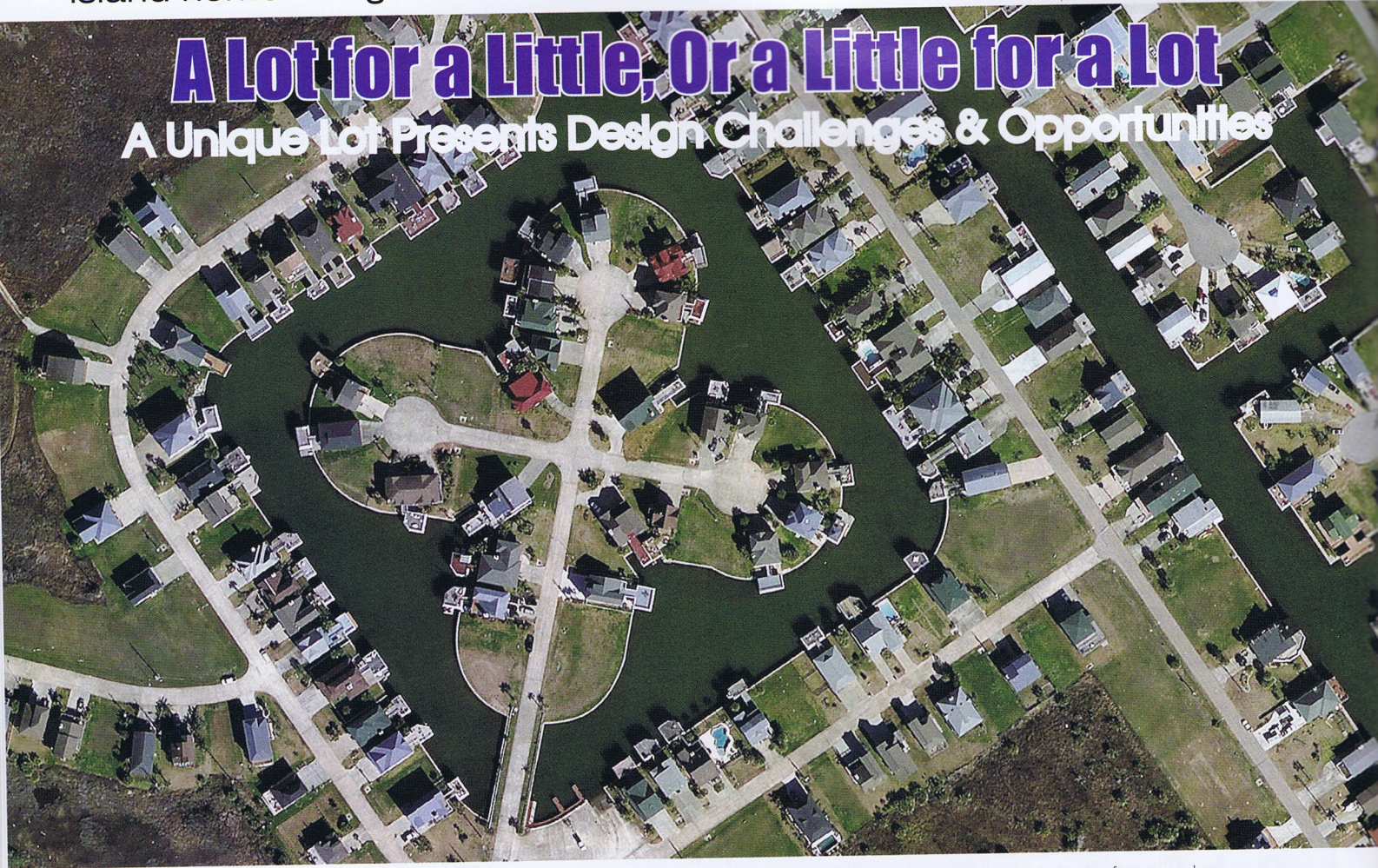


A Lot for a Little, Or a Little for a Lot

A Unique Lot Presents Design Challenges & Opportunities



On the west end of the island, Isla Del Sol and other neighborhoods offer unusual lot shapes, providing boat access for many homeowners.
Courtesy Photo

By Carolin Santangelo

How exciting! You've been informed that a residential lot just hit the market in a location where you always dreamt of building an island home: It could be on a canal within a short boat ride to the bay and intra-coastal waterway, within walking distance to the Strand in the midst of the Historical district, or beach front to behold the beauty of each morning's sunrise over the water. And to make it even better, the price is within your budget. You're not going to let this one get away – a quick call to the real estate agent and off you go, with check book in hand, to make an offer and sign a contract.

When you first see the lot, maybe it's not quite as large as you hoped. But remember, "Location – Location – Location", and this location is what you have hoped for. The realtor shows you the plot plan and you realize the lot configuration is a geometric shape that probably does not have a name – maybe a pie with a curve and a couple of extra sides. No wonder the price is below market. And to make matters worse, the neighbor walks over, introduces himself, and tells you that you probably can't build on it because of its size or odd shape... Or can you?

Before you pass up this deal in paradise, take another look, and remember that with a little imagination, careful thought, and good planning, the perfect home can be designed for an imperfect lot. This challenge may provide opportunity for a unique and special home just for you.

Homes can be designed to fit just about any shape and size residential lot; a rectangular shape is not required, and sometimes not even as desirable. It may be necessary to take tree locations into consideration to ensure their preservation on the site. The design process starts with the

property survey plat; certainly you'll want full knowledge of the city and subdivision setbacks. Thoroughly review subdivision covenants; which define restrictions, and can be different throughout, sometimes specific to each lot and block. Building side setbacks can range from as little as three feet, up to ten feet, on either side of the building footprint. Additionally there are likely to be front and rear building setbacks. The city has its own set of restrictions which are the default in cases where a property is not otherwise defined.

Setbacks are developed to preserve your neighbor's view as well as your own, and also to permit access in cases where the setback includes drainage easement or other utilities. It doesn't matter how wide the remaining available area may be, once you start dreaming, it's never enough!

Homes can be planned around the smallest of lots: It is not unusual for water front lots, especially canal lots, to be divided into the minimum square footage that the city will permit, so a developer can make the most of that very valuable frontage and the cost of its expensive bulk-heading. It is also fairly normal to encompass a curved or angled lot line at the end of cul-de-sacs, and/or along canal frontage.

Where a lot is particularly narrow in one section, your first thought may be that a narrow rectangular house plan is the only option. When necessary, a house can be designed to take up almost every inch of the buildable footprint. The design can start with the buildable footprint (lot minus all setbacks), blocking in room spaces; orienting public rooms and bedrooms where possible to accommodate views. If the location is fortunate enough to enjoy adjacent palms or other nature scenes, these may be highlighted.