



Welcome to  
ARVERNE by the SEA

718 - ARVERNE

## Above The Board Walk

Beach blankets in New York? Bingo.

By **BUILDER Staff**

**DUPLEXES ARE A REAL ESTATE** staple in New York's outer boroughs, where owners typically live in one half and rent the other half to generate a return on investment. When Benjamin-Beechwood (a partnership of Benjamin Development Cos. and the Beechwood Organization) got the green light to move forward with Arverne by the Sea, an \$800 million urban renewal project in Rockaway, Queens, there was no question twin homes would factor into the site plan. But the brawny brownstones one might have expected of a Big Apple project were not on the menu.

Bringing a fresh perspective to the 127-acre site—a derelict parcel that had been sitting vacant for more than three decades—was a challenge. Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn Architects pulled it off with a breezy vocabulary that eschews the grit of Gotham in favor of a seaside vernacular. Attached two-family homes in shades of bisque are articulated with covered porches, trellised overhangs, screened balconies, bay windows, and rooftop terraces. As a testament to the architecture's coastal authenticity, movie producers recently used the site as a backdrop for a beach scene (starring Robin Williams) meant to take place in the Carolinas.



**DIVERSE COMMUNITY:** Slated for completion in 2008, Arverne by the Sea will constitute New York City's largest new residential development, with 2,300 dwelling units. Housing types include stacked duplexes, detached homes, and 900 mixed-use condo apartments.

With its abundant selection of two-family resort homes (made even sweeter by 10-year tax abatements), Arverne by the Sea has brought new optimism to a once depressed area. As a complement to the pioneering two-family homes, construction is now under way to carve out a thriving retail corridor with 900 mixed-use condominium flats, a 30,000-square-foot YMCA, a charter school, and a day-care center. The community promises to be self-sufficient but also plugs into the city's massive transit infrastructure, with walking proximity to the Beach 67th Street subway station.

Tackling the nation's largest piece of vacant oceanfront land within city limits was no small undertaking. Arverne by the Sea was preceded by numerous false starts, including failed initiatives ranging from housing developments with triple the density to a massive indoor entertainment complex dubbed the "Technodome." At one point, the city entertained thoughts of adopting casino gambling on the shore to rival Atlantic City.

But with the two-family homes of Phase I sold out (in four months, no less) and Phase II on a similar sales trajectory, the partners at Benjamin-Beechwood are pretty certain they've hit on a winner with the community plan for Arverne by the Sea. "Two-family houses are the backbone of the middle class in New York," says Les Lerner, co-founder of the Beechwood Organization. "They tend to sell no matter what the economy is doing.

"Our vision is that the life span of this project will exceed the housing boom we are currently experiencing. [Duplexes] are impervious to economic fluctuations because the tenant is usually paying up to 75 percent of what it costs to live there. It's always an advantageous investment for the homeowner."

**Project:** The Breakers and The Dunes at Arverne by the Sea, Rockaway, N.Y.; **Size:** 2,422 to 3,888 square feet; **Total units:** 1,230 units in 615 two-family buildings (Phases I and II); **Price:** \$395,000 to \$586,000; **Developer/Builder:** Benjamin-Beechwood, Jericho and Garden City, N.Y.; **Architect:** Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn Architects, New York