



Julie Moir Messervy
author of *Outside the Not So Big House*

HOME OUTSIDE

Creating the Landscape You Love



GOOD FENCES, GOOD NEIGHBORS

If you live close to your neighbors, a good fence can feel like a security blanket around your entire property. But if you are uncomfortable walling yourself off completely, the fences shown here suggest a variety of ways to allow partial views in.



PUBLIC TO PRIVATE

When you live in a close-knit community, creating a sense of privacy between you, your neighbors, the commons area, and the street is crucial to your sense of well-being. In this charming neighborhood of 16 cottages on the outskirts of Seattle, Washington, the feeling of seclusion is created by careful layering from the most public zone to the most private, with fencing, plantings, and the utmost care given to the delineation of exterior and interior spaces.

Architect Ross Chapin has crafted each unit with meticulous detailing, open floor plans, and sizeable porches that are oriented around a common green where gathering is encouraged and movies are shown on hot summer nights. The cottages also share a community center known as the Club, a tool shed, and communal garbage enclosures located near the groups of garages at the rear of the property. The public spaces are beautifully planted by Seattle gardener Todd Paul, with drifts of perennials at the base of the massive conifers that have been carefully preserved to give overhead shelter to the new community.



Each unit enjoys a spacious front porch and a small backyard, enclosed by simple wooden fencing whose boards are set with spacing between them to let in light and air. Along the street, an edge of grass separates the sidewalk from a front garden of grasses, daylilies, and herbs. These are divided by a low split-rail fence that marks the property line of each home. Behind the fence is each unit's private garden space, set below the front porches. The same colorful layering effect happens along the common green and community center, lending an exuberant atmosphere to the whole neighborhood.



¹ Eight of the houses in the "pocket neighborhood" are oriented around a public commons. The 1,600-sq.-ft. single-family dwellings measure roughly half the size of most new homes today.



³ The Club is the central gathering place for the residents of the community.





In a narrow band of only 15 ft., a series of layers moves from most public to most private: from the green, to the sidewalk, to a common planting strip, to a fence that marks the property line, and then to layers of plantings or lawn, to the front porch. The layers continue inside to the living room, to the den, and finally out back to the private garden.

² Each house is designed so that the "active" parts lie near the public realm—the living room faces the green or the common walkway, for instance, so you can tell who's coming and who's going. These eyes on the street are particularly helpful for those who are living alone, are infirm or elderly, or have small children.

³ Communal tool sheds and garbage corrals are the kinds of places where people get to know each other in the course of daily life; they're where a caring neighbor can become a caring friend.