

Article Tools



West Virginia vacation community developed to embrace nature

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The Paddle House, a luxury rental within the Wild Rock development on West Virginia's New River Gorge, has two covered porches, including one with an outdoor fireplace.

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In this rugged corner of southern West Virginia, you can do everything: hike, bike and rock climb on the cliffs of the Appalachian Mountains or shoot white-water rapids on the New and Gauley rivers.

Wild Rock is a new sustainable second-home community bordering the park in Lansing, just a few miles north of the historic town of Fayetteville.

To some, this corner of the state might be synonymous with mountaintop-removal strip mining, an alternative (and unsightly) method of coal mining. Wild Rock is the very antithesis, embracing nature with home sites that are as kind to the environment as they are architecturally sensitive.

Nestled on 850 acres on the canyon rim some 900 feet above the New River, the development was conceptualized by Charlottesville, Va., landscape architecture firm Nelson Byrd Woltz, who with Paul Murdoch Architects is designing the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, Somerset County.



Developer Carl Frischkorn of Optima Properties West Virginia also consulted with Alex Stark, a New York-based feng shui consultant who has created "harmonious environments" for such clients as Citigroup Inc. and Merrill Lynch.

Practitioners of this ancient Chinese art believe human environments should be oriented auspiciously and should be built on sites with good "qi," or life force. To come up with a plan for the undeveloped land, which borders three miles of the scenic New River Gorge, Mr. Stark spent a day walking it, "reading the energy levels and identifying geo-pathic stresses," says Mr. Frischkorn. He also identified underground streams and Native American burial grounds that rendered the land above a "no build" zone, and designated sanctuary areas.

The long-term development plan calls for building 150 homes in three phases. Of those, 50 lots have been approved for development and sale by Optima Properties. Prices in Phase One range from \$99,000 for a 2.24-acre highland lot to \$529,000 for a premier gorge-front lot encompassing 2.16 acres; six of the 29 sites have been sold.

In keeping with its mission of sustainability, Wild Rock buyers are required to use an architect and submit plans to an architectural review board. (Hint: Log homes, timber frames and post-and-beam homes are preferred, and landscape design should use native plants and materials that reflect the natural patterns, character and colors of the Appalachian Mountain region.)

As Mr. Frischkorn puts it, "A Colonial-style Georgian mansion is probably going to be denied. It's not that kind of community."

To date, three buyers have finished construction using green practices and eco-friendly materials in varying styles. The Paddle House (paddlehousewv.com), a four-bedroom luxury rental for the nearby Adventures on the Gorge resort, is a traditional mountain retreat-style residence. Designed to visually blend into the forest, it features dozens of windows, reclaimed wood flooring gleaned by Mountain Lumber from a Georgia textile mill, exposed timbers and a great room fireplace crafted from sandstone hauled from the New River. There's also a custom cherry kitchen with Viking appliances and granite countertops for entertaining (the house sleeps 12), and a pair of covered porches (one with a fireplace) and deck with a hot tub. A rocky outcropping holds a large firepit on a stone patio.



Mr. Frischkorn's house, designed by Cecilia Hernandez of Formwork Design in Charlottesville, is a rustic contemporary. Also set deep in the trees, it boasts an open floor plan with gleaming reclaimed heart pine floors and large walls of cross-ventilating windows that flood its interior with natural light. A sunken living room opens onto a large deck. Clad in oily-grade historic heart pine, the three-bedroom home also has cast-concrete counters in the kitchen and bath and a steel staircase with wide-open views of the front yard.

Sustainable building practices you don't see include Ecoblatt insulation, an EPDM single-ply synthetic rubber roof membrane and low-VOC paints. In addition, general contractor Owen Lilly of Top Notch Construction in Beckley, W.Va., wrapped and wind-sealed the exterior with Tyvek to eliminate air leaks. The floors are finished with plant-based, VOC-free Rubio Monocoat oil.

As expected, Wild Rock's gorge lots offer sweeping, to-die-for vistas of the New River Gorge. Following low-impact building practices, though, the developer has left most of the mature oak, poplar and hickory trees standing, choosing instead to prune "windows" in the branches. Properties also will have low-lighting schemes so when they're lit up at night they don't detract from the evening stars.

In addition, home sites are cradled by winding roads instead of square grids. Placed far enough from the gorge rim that they can't be seen from the river below, they're also far enough into the woods that you feel at one with nature but not so removed from civilization that you feel isolated. The Adventures on the Gorge campus (homeowners will enjoy a discount on adventures) is within walking distance, and Fayetteville is just 3 miles down the road.

The development, which sits above the popular gorge climbing area known as Bubba City, will eventually include 25 miles of walking and hiking trails that parallel the gorge rim, connecting residents not just to nature but to each other. There also are four designated gorge overlooks and three parks. The largest, Peregrine Park, includes a bocce court and will serve as a community gathering space.

For more information on Wild Rock, visit www.wildrockwv.com or call 1-866-929-9453. The developer is currently offering a 25 percent discount on selected gorge front and highlands lots; to qualify, you must contract to purchase by Oct. 15, 2010, and purchase the lot by Dec. 31.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10258/1084535-478.stm#ixzz0zcvrqTLy>