

News

SHARE  

PRINT  | COMMENTS  | EMAIL  | LETTER TO EDITOR | SIZE 

September 10, 2011

New River Gorge: Where the Wild Things Are

Feng shui, sustainability, Gorge views features of new development

By Rick Steelhammer



The forest is only a few feet away from Wild Rock's homes, including that of Carl Frischkorn, who shows off the view from a second floor bathroom.



With the New River Gorge Bridge in the background, Carl Frischkorn and Pattie Coffin take a break from a hike along a Wild Rock trail at a community viewpoint/campfire site.

Related Stories

FAYETTEVILLE, W.Va. -- It takes a lot of energy to move forward with an upscale second-home development in West Virginia during a recession.

At Wild Rock, the 725-acre community taking shape along the rim of the New River Gorge near here, even the natural energy of the landscape comes into play.

New York feng shui consultant Alex Stark, who helped identify harmonious environments for such places as NBC's "Today Show" set and Beth Israel Medical Center in Manhattan, studied aerial photos of Wild Rock, then walked the grounds of the property to chart what he calls its natural energy fields.

"Using that information, he came up with his layout of home sites for the property while our design firm, Nelson, Byrd, Woltz Landscape Architects of Charlottesville, did theirs," said Carl Frischkorn, Wild Rocks' managing partner. "They turned out to be remarkably similar."

Frischkorn is a former Charleston resident whose real estate credits, as managing partner in Optima Properties, include a second-home development adjacent to the Cheat Mountain Club



Trees dominate the natural landscape surrounding homes at Wild Rock, where the cutting of trees larger than six inches in diameter must be pre-approved during a landscaping review.

in Randolph County, The Coves at Smith Mountain Lake, Va., and the Falls at Bear Lake in North Carolina.

"I thought we could replicate here, on a larger scale, what we did at Cheat Mountain," he said. "I see Wild Rock as a multi-generational community, where people of all ages can have something to do. With all the activities that are available in the New River Gorge and with Fayetteville being such a cool town, and only three miles away, this can be kind of a year-round summer camp for adults."

Wild Rock's first phase of development includes 10 miles of trails, already in use, including some with spectacular vistas of the New River Gorge. The trails allow residents to walk or bike to the adjacent Adventures on the Gorge campus, where there are cliffside restaurants and outfitters services for whitewater rafting, climbing, fishing and zipline canopy tours.

Wild Rock teamed up with a climbers' access group to develop an easement and trail leading from a parking lot along a public road through the community to Bubba City, a popular climbing wall in the 70,000-acre New River Gorge National River, which shares a three-mile common boundary with Wild Rock.

"This is not a gated community," Frischkorn said. "We welcome people on the property to hike or bike."

In addition to being what might well be West Virginia's first feng shui-surveyed development, Wild Rock bills itself as the New River Gorge region's first sustainable community, following the principles of architect and sustainability guru William McDonough. McDonough is the author of "The Hannover Principles: Design for Sustainability," which calls for new development to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

"We're doing things here like building roads with porous gravel surfaces, to allow natural water flow, maintaining the tree canopy and using natural ground covering and native plants instead of lawns that need extra water and fertilizer," Frischkorn said.



Roads and underground utilities at Wild Rock follow ridgelines and existing road traces to avoid disturbing streams, wildlife corridors and hemlock and rhododendron groves.

Building covenants require small clearing zones for home construction sites and viewing corridors. Beyond that, no tree over six inches in diameter may be cut without a review. Night sky-friendly lighting layouts are mandatory to ensure that stargazing is not diminished. Home site lots are at least two acres in area to achieve privacy and maintain a wilderness feel. At least one-fourth of the land in Wild Rock will be preserved in mutually owned conservation zones.

Home sites were selected by Nelson, Byrd, Wolz -- the firm that designed the 9/11 Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, Pa. -- to provide the proper orientation to sun and prevailing winds to maximize the efficiency of passive solar heating schemes. Homeowners are encouraged to store rainwater runoff in cisterns or rain gardens to prevent sedimentation in streams and groundwater. All houses in the development must be architect-designed, and all plans are subject to an architectural review board.

Six of the 16 lots in Wild Rock's first phase of development have been sold, and three homes -- including Frischkorn's -- have been built, with construction set to begin on a fourth. Lots range from \$40,000 in the Mill Creek section of the property to \$500,000 for a lot with a prime view of the Gorge, although some Gorge-view lots range upward from \$149,000, depending on location, view and terrain features.

Frischkorn, a Huntington native who lived in Charleston during the 1980s and 1990s, served as chairman of the Charleston YWCA board of directors, the United Way of the Kanawha Valley and the Kmart Classic staged bicycle race. He also was the founder of Battle Ridge Companies, a firm involved in mining, reclamation and road and bridge construction, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 1997.

Frischkorn's son, Will, a retired professional bicyclist now living in Colorado, competed in the 2008 Tour de France, taking third place in Stage 3 after leading the field for most of the day's racing. He was named the stage's most aggressive rider.



Plans call for 150 houses to be built during three phases of development at Wild Rock. The trail system is expected to expand to 25 miles, with connections to all houses and three planned Wild Rock parks.

Frischkorn's house, designed by Formwork Architecture of Charlottesville with feng shui input from Stark, makes use of planks of recycled heart pine from a Georgia textile factory for a siding treatment that helps it blend in with the surrounding forest. The reclaimed pine also is used for flooring inside the house, where an open floor plan and an array of cross-ventilating, floor-to-ceiling windows provide ample light, views of the surrounding woodland and a glimpse of the New River Gorge Bridge.

"It's a modern house that feels warm and comfortable," Frischkorn said.

Marketing a second-home community in the current economy is a challenge, but Frischkorn said Wild Rock has some advantages over other developments.

"For one thing, we're all equity, with no bank debt, so there's no pressure to sell fast to make payments and compromise vision," he said. The 18 partners in Wild Rock "have demonstrated their commitment to the project and think we're well poised to grow."

Wild Rock offers owner-financed lot sales backed by a bank home loan after buyers make 25 percent cash down payments.

Frischkorn, a venture capitalist based in Charlottesville, said there is reason to be hopeful that the economy is on the verge of change.

"There's a real exuberance here among the whitewater, climbing and biking communities that spills into the town of Fayetteville, and the people who live there," he said. "We offer a place that has access to all of those things, and is restful, peaceful and fun. We're willing to ride things out until people feel more confident and the banks start loaning money again."

Reach Rick Steelhammer at rsteelham...@wvgazette.com or 304-348-5169.