

# Throw in a vineyard (or some rhinos) and I'll take it

LONDON

## High-end developers find it now takes more than a golf course to lure buyers

BY SHELLEY EMLING

Not so long ago, developers were able to draw attention to their properties simply by including tennis courts, golf courses and spas, with perhaps a home entertainment system thrown in for good measure.

Recession or no recession, times have changed.

Today, developers trying to motivate interest in a buyer's market have to consider golf courses and the like as standard features — and to spice up their offerings with more unusual extras like polo lessons, cooking classes and access to wineries and olive groves.

La Estancia de Cafayate, a 550-hectare, or 1,400-acre, development of 350 home sites in the northwestern Argentine province of Salta, is one of those projects offering more to increasingly jaded buyers.

"Five-star amenities such as a spa, a golf club and a great fitness center are absolute necessities, but they exist in almost every property all over the world," said Diane Romero, the developer. "Our buyers come to us seeking an experience."

With plots priced from \$100,000, owners at La Estancia are able to study Spanish, take polo lessons and enjoy a share in the estate's 50 hectares of vineyards, including the opportunity to take part in the harvests.

In addition, Ms. Romero said the on-site equestrian center had horses available for outings along about 50 kilometers, or 30 miles, of trails that have been placed throughout the property.

"Our buyers are seeking the slow, colonial culture of rural northern Argentina, surrounded by strikingly beautiful one-of-a-kind scenery, living the life surrounded by vineyards with interesting cultured neighbors and, of course, the ultimate: drinking wine that came from your very own vineyard without the hassle and costs to maintain it," she

said.

Ms. Romero said 112 plots, which range from 2,000 to 10,000 square meters, or a half acre to 2.5 acres, have been sold since October 2007. The buyers can choose from among a series of

home designs and have access to the development's home-building service.

Marc Achard, director of sales and marketing at Les Jardins de Saint Benoît, a riverside vineyard development in the southern French region of Languedoc, agrees that developers now have to do more to jolt buyers into making a purchase.

"We are not just developers anymore but the givers of experiences," he said. "We are always trying to think of something different we can offer."

Buyers at the development, where prices start at about €205,000, or \$292,000, are encouraged to integrate into the local community of Saint-Laurent-de-la-Cabrerisse by participating in the grape and olive harvests, cookery and archery classes and regional festivals.

The developers, Garrigae Resorts, hold regular meetings with local people to develop activities that allow buyers to discover regional traditions, Mr. Achard said. "Our target market is a niche one," he said, "and we are looking for educated and cultivated people, mostly in their 40s, that like the French culture and lifestyle."

About 90 percent of the 171 units in the development has been sold, but Mr. Achard acknowledged that sales had slowed considerably over the past 10 months. "The recession has hurt buyers from Britain and Ireland, so we are now marketing to the French market and the Scandinavian market," he said.

Pam Gregory, 55, said she recently purchased a two-bedroom townhouse at Les Jardins de Saint Benoît because it allowed her to immerse herself in

French culture. "Sure, it has a spa, pool and restaurant, but the development also has a lot of activities with something going on every day," she said. "You can do yoga or water polo or bike riding or take a French cooking class."

Ms. Gregory, a self-employed management consultant in Britain, said the developers list the schedule of daily activities on a giant board near the reception desk. "I bought this place thinking I'd be here 10 weeks a year but already I can see that I will want to be here more," she said.

Another developer, Karl O'Hanlon, said he was also relying on the lure of

community to tempt prospective buyers to his converted Château Les Carrasses, also in the Languedoc region, where a winery and surrounding vineyards were being brought back to their 19th century glory.

"What people like is that there is something community-based at the center of this estate," said Mr. O'Hanlon, director of Domaine & Demeure, a development company based in Boujan-sur-Libron, France. "There aren't just homes here, but there is also something community-based at the center of it."

Since sales began in mid-April, 20 of the project's 28 properties have been sold. Prices start at €207,000 for a one-bedroom apartment in the estate's chateau.

Owners are allowed to take part in every aspect of the winemaking process and to receive a portion of the yield, which they estimate at 40 to 50 case of wine a year.

"Our buyers generally want to meet other buyers and so, by providing a central activity, people are benefiting not only from the wine but also from meeting people and everything else that comes with it," Mr. O'Hanlon said.

One of the most unusual offers is coming from Zorgvliet, a South African development company that is marketing



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21 three-bedroom luxury lodges in a development called Dinkweng, in the Waterberg Biosphere. The biosphere, covering 400,000 hectares, is among about 400 Unesco-registered biosphere reserves around the world and is the only savannah reserve in southern Africa.

Ownership includes access to Zorgvliet's private, 16,000-hectare reserve, Ka'Ingo. The site, about three hours from Johannesburg, offers daily drives to spot rhinos, lions and elephants as well as work with the company's conservation projects.

"Owners have access to the Ka'Ingo reserve to experience all the attributes of a pristine Big Five reserve, including game drives, historic African rock art sites, nature drives, ethnic restaurant and spa treatments," said Mac Van Der Merwe, Zorgvliet's chief executive.

Mr. Van Der Merwe said the owners themselves were continually urging the company to develop new conservation projects.

"Today's buyers are different and all are interested in conservation, such as our cheetah conservation program and our leopard releases," he said. "Buyers have higher expectations these days. The simple holiday property is no longer good enough."

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DOMAINE & DEMEURE

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GARRIGAE RESORTS

**In the southern French region of Languedoc, the developers of Château Les Carrasses, left, and Les Jardins de Saint Benoît have made vineyards an integral part of their properties.**