

At Home in the Mountains

The newest high-end developments capitalize on their proximity to nature.

by Nan Chase

“We’re not in the real world here,” declares Jay Vincent, owner of Vincent Properties Inc. “There’s just so much money here, and we’re being ‘found’ more every day.”

Vincent has 34 years of experience developing, managing, and selling High Country properties. He has watched the area change from dense woods and steep farmland to a garland of high-end resorts and gated communities draped over the mountains.

“In some peoples’ minds we’re selling less property, but that’s just not true,” he says. “The last couple of years were just so substantially strong that any kind of getting back to normal seems like a bit of a slowdown. Our market has evolved and changed and gotten huge.”

Significant Watauga County housing growth comes from second homes; more than half the county’s tracts are owned by people living elsewhere.

Increasingly, developers of these high-end communities are using careful placement of home sites to enhance their properties’ long-term value. The Headwaters at

Banner Elk, for instance, adjoins Pisgah National Forest and has stunning views that stretch as long as 40 miles. Handcrafted footbridges span tumbling creeks, and common amenities encourage casual open-air entertaining.

Developments like Echota, Firethorn, Hound Ears Club, The Lodges at Eagles Nest, and Elk Creek at Banner Elk are in various stages of completion. Next: nearly 7,000-acre Laurelmor, a Ginn Resorts project capitalizing on unspoiled nature. First-day sales of lots last year set a North Carolina one-day record of \$150 million.

Despite all that wilderness, the easy proximity to city services is part of the appeal. “One of the major reasons we picked this piece of property was that it’s close to both Boone and Blowing Rock,” says Ginn’s Eastern Mountain Region President Doug Miller.

The home of Blowing Rock Community Arts Center Foundation Vice Chairman John Beall and his wife Josephine includes panorama with Mount Mitchell, the highest U.S. peak east of the Mississippi River.

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