

Living on the Green

Country club communities capture the unique lifestyle so many golfers (and nongolfers) covet

B Y E L L E N P A R I S

Most days Nancy Bosworth stays busy morning to night. From a morning round of golf to dinner at the club with friends, Bosworth and her husband live the good life at the Citrus, part of La Quinta Resort & Club. “We call it Camp La Quinta because there is always something happening,” she says. The Bosworths represent a growing segment of desert residents who enjoy life at the area’s 95 private residential golf communities. A decade ago there were fewer than half that number.

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Country clubs are a staple of desert life. Long before The Vintage and Bighorn, Eldorado and Thunderbird captured the desert's quintessential lifestyle. They were considered "the places" for country club living.

These communities have become so popular and prolific because they're beautiful places to live and offer dream lifestyles with loads of activities and built-in social lives. Championship golf courses, stadium tennis courts, fitness centers, and even world-class spas have become the standard.

Many residents love the fact that, once inside their gates, they have little reason to leave. They prefer golf carts as their mode of transportation — and not only around the fairways. "When you live on a golf course, you just drive your cart to friends' houses for dinners and parties," Bosworth says.

Whether you own a million-dollar-plus home at Bighorn or a \$350,000 fairway home at Indian Springs Golf & Country Club, residents say making friends is easy. Camaraderie among a peer group with common interests is a natural attraction. Most residents are semi-retired or retired, successful, and now want to fully enjoy their lives. People who choose the club life soon discover they're busier than they ever imagined.

The Bosworths go out at least four times a week with friends from the Citrus and during the season frequent social events at the club.

"It's a built-in social climate for us because most of our friends are here and 90 percent of our activities are related to Bighorn. There is very little need to leave," observes Bighorn resident Dr. Gary Lyons, a retired heart surgeon. From cocktails at Bighorn's recently built lounge, The Pour House, to casual barbecues, why go elsewhere? Add in the new 13,000-square-foot spa/salon offering more than 100 different treatments, private jet service, and limitless golf, and it's no wonder members like Sharon Kimbell of Hutchinson, Ks. "feels like she's living in a five-star resort with all the comforts of home."

Of course, unlimited golf and social opportunities don't come cheap. At Bighorn, initiation fees for a full dual membership run \$345,000. An individual golf membership runs \$200,000, with annual dues of \$17,000. Plenty of people eagerly fork over big bucks to play the same Canyon and Mountains courses Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus did at The Battle at Bighorn. Bighorn homes range from \$1.5 million to \$13 million. One custom home site boasts a \$5 million price tag.

Above: Many of the homes at Bighorn feature great rooms with pocket glass doors that open to one of two championship courses. Left: Estates at The Vintage nestle into private canyons along the course.

In Indian Wells at The Vintage, a top private country club community where Bill Gates and Lee Iacocca have owned homes, anonymity and privacy rule. Members share two championship courses. For that privilege, initiation costs \$300,000 and annual dues are \$21,000. “The Vintage is a place for people looking for a retreat that takes them away from the business world,” says Carmen Wolfe, assistant manager for Vintage Club sales. Security at The

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Vintage is beyond stringent, and that’s how residents want it. “People are looking, especially today, for secure environments to spend time with their families,” Wolfe says.

For Don and Kay Hanson, Rancho La Quinta Country Club residents, living on a fairway is like having a huge park as your backyard minus the maintenance. Their large double fairway lot provides unobstructed mountain views and

plenty of privacy. Their 4,300-square-foot home sits on a quarter acre and overlooks three fairways and a lake near the 16th hole. After living in Desert Horizons Country Club in Indian Wells for almost 12 years, they wanted to live in a club with two golf courses. They’re both golfers and like the diversity available in their backyard.

There are so many activities here, you could be busy all day long. You really need to find time just to rest,” Kay says. She spends her time golfing with various ladies groups, playing tennis, and taking aerobic and golf classes. Most of the Hansons’ friends are other Rancho La Quinta residents and club members. They’ve even formed a birthday group on their street and go out for celebratory monthly lunches.

One of the desert’s newest luxury golf course communities, The Hideaway in La Quinta, offers 36 picturesque holes of golf.



JOHN & JEANNINE HENEERY



According to Bill Dawson, Rancho La Quinta's director of sales and marketing, at least half of all Rancho La Quinta residents buy because of their friends, who already own homes there. "Those friendships are really what makes the community thrive," Dawson says. "Fun is what it's all about for the 55-and-over buyer. With so much going on here, you'd really have to go out of your way not to make new friends."

It's not surprising — given these communities' beauty and diverse activities — that they attract nonduffers. At Rancho La Quinta, 30 percent of residents don't golf. They play tennis, walk the cart paths, and enjoy the views. A social club membership is included in the monthly homeowner's association fee. Unlike many other golf communities, Rancho La Quinta has about 50 percent year-round residents. At Bighorn, only one homeowner resides there fulltime. The other 329 are seasonal.

One of the area's newest private residential golf communities is The Hideaway in La Quinta. With two championship courses, extensive landscaping, lavish clubhouse, and world-class spa, The Hideaway brings new competition to the luxury market. It's on 590 acres and will eventually have just under 500 homes. The 400 estate sites start at \$400,000 and go up to more than \$1 million. There will be approximately 100 luxury homes priced from \$900,000 to more than \$1.5 million.

Developed by Discovery Land Co. — known for its high-end communities in Hawaii, Montana, and Arizona — the Hideaway focuses on member services. That emphasis and the golf courses impressed Bob Spaletto and his wife, Debbie, who recently purchased a home site. The Spalettos, Mission Hills residents since 1984, bought at The Hideaway because, "We were impressed with the ambiance, and we believe in the project so much that we decided to buy as investment with the possibility of moving out there."

But it's not only the wealthy who enjoy the desert's country club lifestyle. At Indian Springs Golf and Country Club, fairway homes begin in the mid-\$300,000s. "Our niche is the entry-level golf course community," says Bill Earman, sales and marketing vice president.

"Developers in the desert today build projects with golf courses not as amenities but as requirements," says Greg Berkemer, executive vice president of the California Desert Association of Realtors. "The feeling among many developers out here is that if they don't have a golf course, they become a second-tier community."

It's obvious homeowners choose much more than a home when they decide on their ideal desert community. According to Bighorn's general manager, Warren Smith, "When you get to this level of living, most people identify the lifestyle they want and then look for the shelter." Happy hunting.

Along with world-class golf, luxury country club communities offer their members full-service spas and dining, plus activities such as tennis and aerobic classes. Below: Bighorn. Right: The Hideaway's clubhouse.

TOM BREWSTER



