

EXCLUSIVE ENCLAVES

Changing all the Rules

The Lodges at Eagles Nest sets a new standard for second-home living

BY MARLA HARDEE MILLING



The guard house at The Lodges at Eagles Nest embodies rustic elegance with a reclaimed metal roof, logs imported from Canada and stone quarried from Eagles Nest mountain.



With a roof that is reclaimed metal from local barns, the guardhouse looks as if it was built a long time ago.

High on morphine following a four-wheeler accident in 1999, developer John Turchin decided to buy a mountain. After he transformed that mountain into a gated community, some people thought he was still under the influence of drugs. But he wasn't. Turchin is just a creative visionary who's not afraid to buck tradition.

For starters, he took an existing golf course and transformed it into a motocross complex for riding four-wheelers and dirt bikes, as well as a shooting range. Then, he called his luxury community "a camp," which continued to raise eyebrows.

"I could never live in a country club community," explains Turchin, the owner-developer of The Lodges at Eagles Nest in Banner Elk, North Carolina. "I shoot off fireworks at my house and let my dogs run loose. My wife rides roller blades. The typical community is built around a golf course and retirement. That wasn't for me. I've taken all the typical country club rules and changed them."

What he has created instead on his 1,400 acres is a summer-camp inspired lifestyle where, he says, "three to five generations can grow young together."

As he talks, Turchin wheels his gray Humvee through the property and passes a field located within "The Great Camp." Today, a group of kids engage in a lively game of soccer. Others ripple down



A private home surrounded by beautiful fall foliage



a huge water slide and toss water balloons. They all smile and wave at Turchin, and call his golden lab to come and play.

“The arts and youth are driving what we are doing,” says Turchin, dressed in frayed, faded blue jeans and wearing an arrowhead he found on the property around his neck. He enjoys surrounding himself with art and artists—there are even working studios on the property, including Ryan Blythe’s glassblowing studio. Plans are underway for an arts and crafts center and Turchin has designed most everything at The Lodges at Eagles Nest.

Most of all, he wants people to have fun. That’s why crews are building a teepee village, and why residents can find any type of sporting equipment they need in a really cool toy barn. Turchin has created a stunning library constructed around existing trees so that they won’t have to be cut down. Equipped with Internet access and a remote-controlled gas fireplace, the library sits adjacent to an outdoor amphitheatre that has already hosted such big-name entertainers as Edwin McCain, Devon Allman’s Honeytribe Band and Laura Blackley. When construction is complete, The Lodges at Eagles Nest will also have an equestrian center, a swimming pool and spa.

When it comes to the homes, don’t expect cookie-cutter models. Each has a distinctive appearance, yet looks as if it belongs in its mountain setting. Turchin feels a responsibility as a steward of the land. “I think long term in terms of the impact of the environment and the animals. It’s very important to protect it,” he says. “We can’t screw it up.”

That’s why Turchin personally spends time at each homesite to help determine the best placement for each structure. So far, 14 homes are complete and 37 of 250 homesites have been sold. Buyers have the option of building a home from scratch or selecting one of Turchin’s turnkey creations. When someone buys one of his fully furnished estates, Turchin says, “the sheets will already be on the bed, and wine in the wine cellar.”

Homesites range in price from \$250,000 to more than \$1 million; homes are selling from \$1 million-plus up to \$5 million.

Turchin is a third generation developer who grew up building high-rises and nightclubs in Miami. He’s been exploring the western North Carolina area since the 1970s and says while he could live anywhere in the world, it’s here in Banner Elk that he feels most at home. He’s proud of his vision and emphasizes it with his motto: “The only thing greater than living your dream is sharing it.” ■