

America's TOP 100 GOLF COMMUNITIES

Our Annual List of the Best Places
to Live—and Live Well



BY DAVID GOULD AND LAUREN KAY

HEARTBREAK RIDGE

Four Oscars and five Golden Globes later, Clint Eastwood may come to view Tehama, his golf community in Carmel, as a crowning achievement.

PURSUING A LIFE AS CLOSE TO NATURE as possible would have been madness to the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who sensed “continual fear and danger” in such an existence. Hobbes felt certain it would be “poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

We could change old Hobbes’s mind with the help of a time tunnel, showing him the mix of civilized refinement and untamed natural beauty at America’s finest golf communities. Right now, as Briar’s Creek members enjoy their plush new clubhouse and Talisker Club members begin skiing in and out of their Red Cloud lodge, residents at properties like Black Bull in Montana and Spring Island in South Carolina are tramping through raw nature, studying its flora and fauna with the aid of staff naturalists.

A fine balance has been struck. Enjoying the comforts and refinements of a top-shelf community—including golf that brims with beauty and challenge—today’s person of means wants to reach beyond all that and plunge into wild, unspoiled surroundings. Further, he wishes to make his luxury community as sustainably green as possible.

In deference to Hobbes, “poor, nasty and brutish” are fitting adjectives for our current world economy. Meaning that, if you can make it happen, owning the most desirable and best-managed real estate on earth offers reassurance.

These one hundred exquisite environments are case studies in how to make life on earth as pleasing, stimulating and worthwhile as possible. They have sited themselves within the finest natural surroundings one could wish for, and added all the comforts of home. ▶



The Top 25

1 PRONGHORN

Bend, Oregon

Six hundred paces into the volcanic caverns beneath the Fazio golf course at Pronghorn is an unlikely office where Ron Davis, the community's director of development, toils by lamplight with old Pink Floyd albums as background music. Davis emerged one day from his nontraditional workstation with sketches and plans for Tesana, a new enclave within this ever-evolving high-desert community. An influential California architecture firm, Bassenian/Lagoni, executed the idea in a style that merges Tuscan villa living with a "contemporary organic" theme drawn from Frank Lloyd Wright. These homes have smaller footprints and price tags than most Pronghorn housing, but an enviable location on "the peninsula" between two (distinctly different) golf courses. Their arrival is Pronghorn's big news maker of 2008. Start-up of construction on a long-awaited hotel will be 2009's major move.

2 PALMETTO BLUFF

Bluffton, South Carolina

The resort component of this new-but-very-old community in the Lowcountry is featured prominently in this issue (see "May River Anthology," page 62). Resident members instill a warmth and sense of ease to daily life at Palmetto Bluff—a factor that guests of the Auberge-managed inn have remarked on. Just as the pace of life here is leisurely, development phases are very unrushed. Thus, we'll have to wait a while to see what the Coore-Crenshaw design team does with Palmetto Bluff's second course.

3 SANTA LUCIA PRESERVE

Carmel, California

Along the creased hills where vaqueros in their skirted saddles herded Don Estevan's cattle, modern-day Californians savor morning gallops on mounts of their own. The Preserve's equestrian center, with its arenas, pastures and sheltered paddocks, is part of an amenity package that gets lost in the community's natural grandeur. An artsy, unstressed Carmel spirit laps into SLP, making way for visiting-artist programs and a "Midsummer Night's Dream" black-tie musicale that takes place in a clearing among ancient redwoods uplighted for the occasion. Out on the beautifully upholstered Tom Fazio golf course, fewer than ten thousand rounds are played each year.

4 MAYACAMA

Santa Rosa, California

The terroir of the creased hill country east of Highway 101 in Santa Rosa favors golf courses as well as the cultivation of wine grapes. Mayacama is the natural product of those climatic and topographic conditions. Not everyone knows that quarter-share ownership is an option here. You can buy your way in for ninety nights of residence in a large, professionally decorated home (with wine storage, naturally) and attentive service before, during and after your stay.

5 THE CLIFFS COMMUNITIES

Travelers Rest, South Carolina

Cliffs-branded properties have innovated for years with their wellness centers, reciprocal amenities and little extras like America's first Tiger Woods-designed golf course. But golf communities face competition from the ever-growing destination club industry, and Cliffs founder Jim Anthony is virtually alone in pushing back. He's been collecting far-flung, exotic getaway properties under the banner of the Cliffs Retreat Collection. Should life in the Cliffs' eight Carolina communities induce ennui, a member can bivouac off to Patagonia, Chile, or either of two beachheads in British Columbia.

6 KIAWAH ISLAND

Kiawah Island, South Carolina

The Kiawah Island resort is about to celebrate its thirty-fifth anniversary, believe it or not. In the meantime it is prepping its famed Ocean Course to host the 2012 PGA Championship. Few communities on this list offer a range of price points for real estate comparable to Kiawah's. You could pinch out \$315,000 for a one-bedroom villa or empty the vault to the tune of nearly \$19 million for an ocean-view estate. Praises continue to be sung for Tom Watson's Cassique Course at the private Kiawah Island Club, with its stark, dune-style shaping and the tall, brushy grasses that rim many greensites. Cassique's arts and crafts-inspired clubhouse matches the artisan look of Watson's course nicely. A less-touted component of Kiawah's club lifestyle is the Sasanqua Spa, a panacea palace surrounded by long and lovely marshland views.

7 SPANISH PEAKS

Big Sky, Montana

Blue-ribbon trout streams ply the foothills and some of America's longest, snowiest ski trails are painted onto distant mountainsides. Add luxury and you've got a club community ripe for national acclaim. The clubhouse at Spanish Peaks has guest suites, fine dining, locker facilities and golf/ski storage. There's also an equestrian center, a planned ski lodge and an outfitter to help you tame the wilderness. Tom Weiskopf, king of American high-elevation golf, designed the 7,200-yard course.

8 TALISKER

Park City, Utah

On style points and hipness quotient, this five-year-old community stands apart from other golf real estate projects. Armed with all that panache, developers might be expected to drag their feet when it comes to building the amenities. Instead, Talisker is a model of swift execution. Already there is Talisker Tower, at the Empire Pass ski community; the Red Cloud Cabin, another ski clubhouse; and the Talisker Club Park at Tuhaye (pronounced "TOO-hay"), with its clubhouse and spa. In keeping with the uptown tone, decor inside these alpine facilities avoids mounted taxidermy.

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9 **THE GREENBRIER SPORTING CLUB**

White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia

The downhill skiing in these hills is modest, otherwise the array of activities and luxury amenities of the GSC admit no deficiency. Nearly two hundred homes have been planned and built here since the community was founded in 2000—enough of a population to help spur additional flights into the local airport. The newest phase of residences, the Green Homes at the Greenbrier Summit Village, is perched high to yield sweeping valley vistas.

10 **REYNOLDS PLANTATION**

Greensboro, Georgia

Every great rhythm-and-blues artist wanted to play the Apollo Theater and now every top-tier golf architect wants to design a course at Reynolds Plantation. Pete Dye just signed to craft a new layout with Lake Oconee vistas and an expressly walkable configuration. Tom Fazio, Rees Jones, Jack Nicklaus, Jim Engh and Bob Cupp have also left their marks. The official twentieth anniversary of Reynolds Plantation was celebrated a few months ago. Encompassing ten thousand acres and eighty miles of shoreline, it stays on the leading edge of new ideas.

11 **SEA ISLAND**

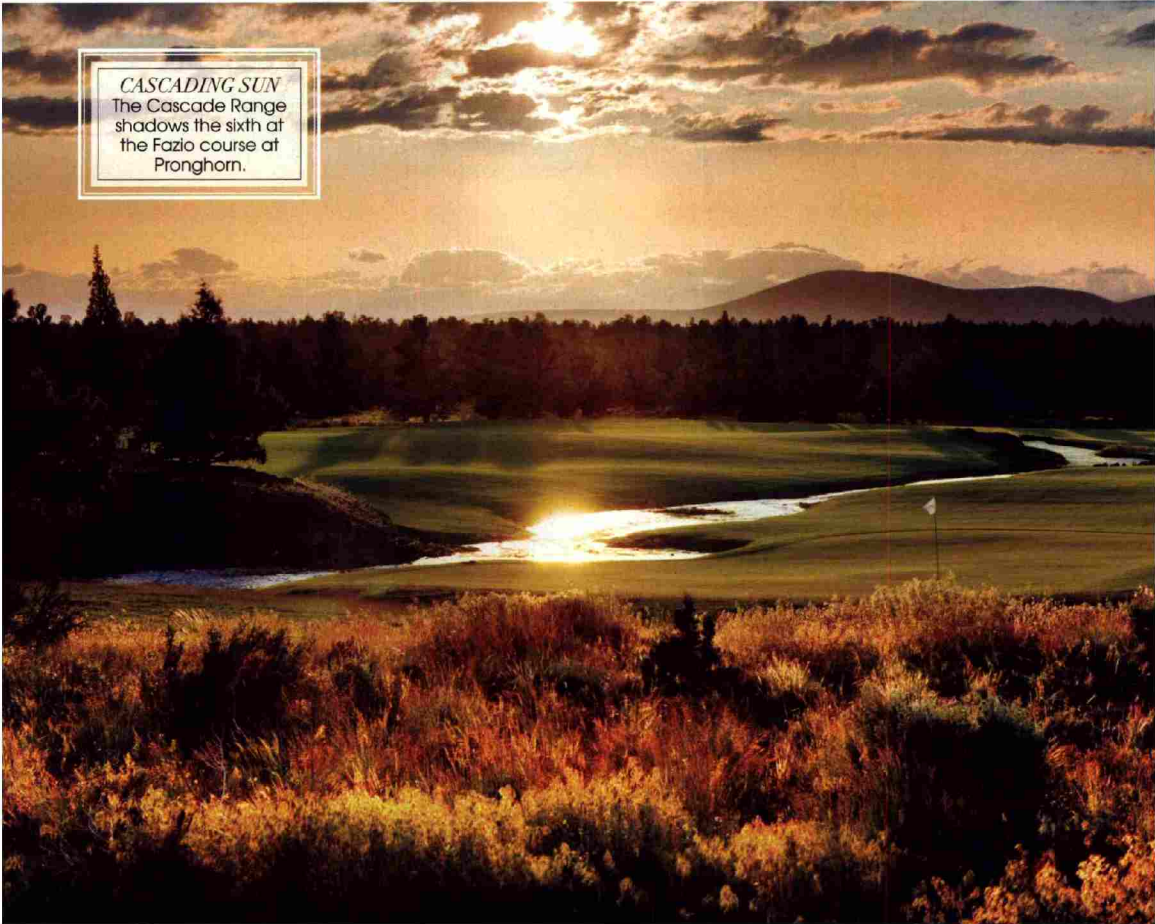
Sea Island, Georgia

The luxury assets and accoutrements that make Sea Island such a superior destination (or domicile) have likewise placed its finances in an awkward condition. From Frederica to Hawkins Island to Kings Point, there should be attractive opportunities for house- and lot-hunters who judge that the property's eighty-year tradition of excellence will carry it to further success.

12 **TEHAMA**

Carmel, California

The American poet Robinson Jeffers, who built a fieldstone fortress called Tor House out on Carmel Point in the early twentieth century, had a raw-boned artistry that actor-director Clint Eastwood is an indirect heir to. Each has been a voice for preserving important landscapes, Eastwood following through on his declarations by founding Tehama. Along with golf by Jay Morrish (the course plays 6,520 yards, with 200 feet of elevation change), there is a dining venue called Callahan's, an homage to Dirty Harry. Tehama's fitness complex, however, is the gleaming antithesis of Frankie Dunn's Hit Pit in *Million Dollar Baby*.



CASCADING SUN
The Cascade Range
shadows the sixth at
the Fazio course at
Pronghorn.

The Top 25

13 3 CREEK RANCH

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Merely by nailing up a birdhouse or two a community could lay claim to environmental stewardship. At 3 Creek Ranch, staff naturalist Roger Smith pursues a full-on bird-banding project, enlisting residents as field workers and following protocols created by the Institute for Bird Populations. On the Rees Jones–designed golf course, with its heartbreaking views of valley floor and Teton peaks, a score of one under par is still called a “birdie.”

14 ESTANCIA

Scottsdale, Arizona

Conditions are finer than ever on the Tom Fazio–designed golf course at prim, private Estancia, following extensive renovations that addressed issues of drainage, inadequate ladies’ tee boxes and overly close encounters with the natural desert environment. This mid-’90s club community was an early example of Tuscan-influenced architecture and building siting.

15 KUKI’O

Kona, Hawaii

How can you lie there on that sandy beach when molten lava is flowing from the nearest mountain? Turns out volcanic activity only adds spark to the splendid views as Kuki’o residents gather for sunset cocktails or a sashimi fest in the open-air dining pavilion. Residences tend to comprise main houses, guest-houses, gardens, lanais and pools. The Tom Fazio golf complex includes a ten-hole short course to go along with the championship eighteen-hole layout.

16 WINDSOR

Vero Beach, Florida

Golf real estate can be a wearying landscape of artificially curved roads and constant four-minute car rides from home to clubhouse to tennis center. At Windsor, a walkable New Urbanist land plan and patrician developer-owners set a more urbane tone. Some of the major common buildings are by trend-setting architects like Leon Krier, Clemens Bruns Schaub and Jaquelin Robertson. At the center of things is a serious art gallery, established by Alannah Weston, daughter of the Windsor founder, Galen Weston. Sporting clays, overseen by gun instructor Count Nikolaus Szapary, lends the place an insouciant, Sonny-and-Klaus sort of atmosphere.

17 SPRING ISLAND

Okatie, South Carolina

In Lowcountry argot, “tabby” is a mixture of oyster shells, lime, water and sand used as a concretelike building material. Old Tabby, the Arnold Palmer–designed golf course at Spring Island, takes its name from architectural ruins found in this mystically pretty barrier-island site. A getaway adopted by members of Pine Valley, Augusta National and Cypress Point, the community is known for ingenious methods of repurposing found objects and holding the natural world in a light embrace. Amid the constant nature hikes and plein-air painting workshops, the membership occasionally indulges itself in new toys. Walker Landing, the main recreation area, is about to get a new sports complex complete with fitness center, multiple pools, tennis courts and a new croquet pitch.

GOLF WIDOW’S WALK

Screened and open-air porches afford course views from the Creek Club Cottages at Reynolds Plantation.



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18 SILVERLEAF

Scottsdale, Arizona

The Chinese-born architect Bing Hu did his training down the road from Silverleaf at Taliesin West, the Frank Lloyd Wright school. Hu's much celebrated H&S International designed the homes in the Sterling Collection, located near DC Ranch's Market Street and the Silverleaf Club and Spa. A community within a community, Silverleaf is long on aesthetics, pleasing the eye with stucco walls, wrought-iron trim and low-rise tile roofs. It has its own sparkling Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course, or members can angle for an invite at DC Ranch's John Fought—Tom Lehman layout.

19 IRON HORSE

Whitefish, Montana

The compact city of Whitefish sprang to life at the turn of the twentieth century when a Great Northern Railway executive outwitted land speculators who had bid up real estate prices along the presumed route through Flathead Valley. This upscale golf community, with its soaring, timber-frame architecture and Daniel Boone-like wilderness guides, has one of Tom Fazio's best mountain courses. Whatever your daily adventure—kayaking, backcountry horseback rides and trips through Glacier National Park are all popular—Iron Horse brings it all home every evening with gourmet dining under chef Ken Lyons' deft touch.

20 STOCK FARM

Hamilton, Montana

Just like today's gated communities, the handsome city of Hamilton was sketched up by professional planners and built in one fell swoop. The work was funded by the Irish-born copper baron Marcus Daly back in the 1890s. Stock Farm residents, whose homesites dot the old Daly spread, turn to Hamilton's Queen Anne and Romanesque façades when a yearning for urbanity strikes. Mostly, however, people are here to enjoy custom mountain homes with lump-in-the-throat views. A fine Tom Fazio golf course serves dimpled passions while dry-fly fishing, elk hunting and kayaking down the rapids addresses more rugged desires.

21 ISLEWORTH

Windermere, Florida

There may be more stellar rounds of golf played on the Steve Smyers-amended course at Isleworth than at any club community in the U.S. Along with the well-publicized Tavistock Cup contested by Tiger, Ernie, Retief and friends, the community also hosts an annual Isleworth-UCF Collegiate Invitational that vies for recognition as America's premier collegiate golf event. A club Wellness Center attracts two opposite types, the workout fanatic and the massage-and-manicure set. You have to spend a bit of time here to realize how long a stretch of beautiful Butler Lakes shoreline the property enjoys.

22 WADE HAMPTON GOLF CLUB

Cashiers, North Carolina

Any successful golf resort with unbuilt land adjacent to it is a real estate project waiting to happen. Developers of the Wade Hampton Golf Club waited sixty-odd years—through three generations of the McKee family—to make the leap into residential property. High Hampton Inn was their flagship and this club is the answer to the question so many families would ask at season's end: Why do we have to leave?

23 TRADITION

La Quinta, California

The studio system and Pierce-Arrow coupes with rumble seats are long gone. Meanwhile, La Quinta, the cove-like settlement beside the Santa Rosa Mountains that Walter H. Morgan founded in the 1920s, endures and thrives. Arnold Palmer put his imprimatur on the desert town by establishing this community and building a winter home here.

24 THE BEAR'S CLUB

Jupiter, Florida

For a good many of the Friends of Jack who were founding members of this posh, polished enclave, the club's upcoming tenth anniversary will make them wonder where the years went. By now the walls of this community's forty-thousand-square-foot Tuscan-style clubhouse hold a rich trove of golf lore.

25 CORNERSTONE **NEW**

Montrose, Colorado

Golf meets West in this six-thousand-acre expanse of Rocky Mountain beauty and sports activity. The Cornerstone resident is in great need of footwear: golf spikes, hiking boots, stream waders, tennis shoes, ski boots, riding boots and (one hopes) loafers. Dallas-based Hunt Realty Investments is the developer—sister company of Hunt Oil. Among the housing options: Golf Foursome Cabins, made up of four master suites, each with a private bathroom, walk-in closet (for those shoes and boots), steam shower and private patio. Golf director Mark Wood brings his superior blend of physical-mental golf training to a theme-park-style practice complex he designed himself. ►

HOW WE COMPILE THE LIST

To be eligible for Top 100 consideration, communities must offer property owners an opportunity for membership in an affiliated private golf club. Limited public access to the course—such as for guests at a resort—is allowed but may detract from a community's ranking. Each property is reviewed in the following six categories, in order of importance: golf amenity; residential architecture and style; location, including natural setting and proximity to cultural activities; management, service and programming options; nongolf amenities, such as a full service spa, equestrian center or marina; and environmental stewardship. A concern for residential asset value, implicit in the previous years' rankings, is of heightened value in editors' deliberations for 2009.