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Vacation Homes

PREMIERE ISSUE

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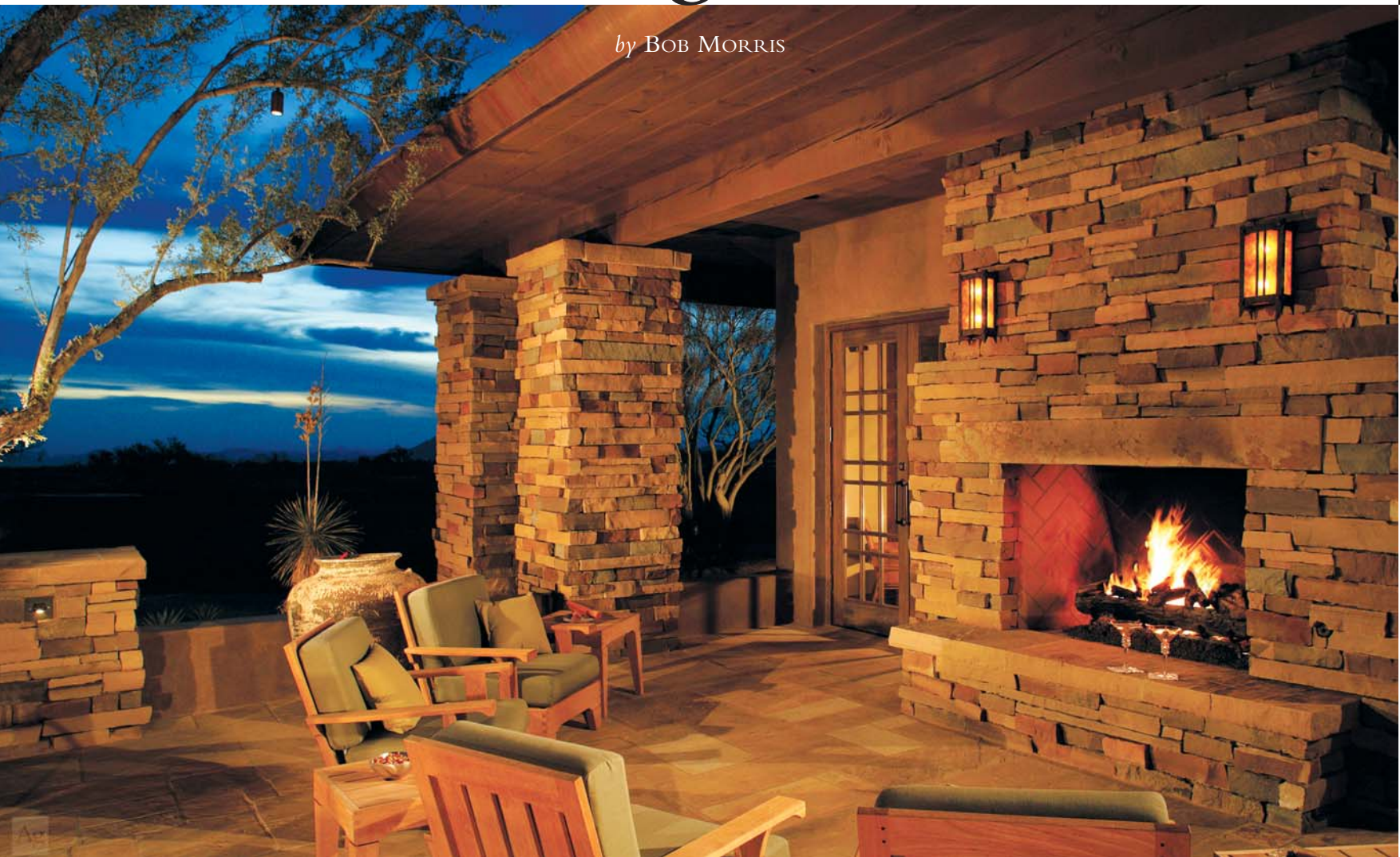
feature



THIS PAGE: ANTHONY GOMEZ
OPPOSITE PAGE: VINCENT KNAKAL

Blazing a Trail

by BOB MORRIS





Discovery Land Company builds a better country club

LISTEN TO MIKE MELDMAN TALK, and there is no doubt that he would have felt right at home trekking westward in 1804 with Meriwether Lewis and William Clark as the Corps of Discovery charted the American wilderness. The 46-year-old Arizona native has the heart of an explorer coupled with the vision of a builder who nurtures an abiding passion for the land.

Not mere real estate, mind you, but the *land*. There is a big difference. And it is evident in the reverence and awe with which Meldman speaks of the raw resources that are the palette for his acclaimed projects. “What we do—building golf courses and clubhouses and luxurious custom homes—anyone can do,” he says. “It just takes money. The quality has to spring from the land.”

Spotting the untapped potential in a singular tract of land and shepherding it toward development while preserving its intrinsic beauty and wild nature is akin to a high-wire act. Peril lurks at every turn. Months and years of permitting and planning often lead to compromises that end up sacrificing both the purity of the land and the vision.

However, the applause for the aptly named Discovery Land Company Meldman’s seven-year-old San Francisco development firm, has been nothing short of deafening. After launching its first project, the Estancia Club, with an acclaimed Tom Fazio course, in Scottsdale, Ariz., Meldman and his team have followed with amenity-rich golf developments from California (CordeValle Golf Club, the Hide-

away) to Arizona (Mirabel), Texas (Vaquero), Montana (Iron Horse) and the Kohala coast of Hawaii (Kuki’o Beach Club). Discovery Land’s most recent effort takes it to North Carolina, where Mountaintop Golf and Lake Club, a 731-acre community with another Fazio course, is sprouting in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Cashiers.

Meldman’s trademark respect for the land was evident from the outset when Discovery took the reins of the Estancia Club after another developer pulled out of the project. The original zoning would have permitted 800 lots in the 690-acre community, but Meldman decided that was far too many for the desert terrain to bear. He reconfigured the project so that only 267 homesites were offered for sale. “It was not a matter of what we could do, but what we should do as stewards of the land. We saw the quality of the terrain,” Meldman says. “We owned free title to all of Pinnacle Peak. It’s the most gorgeous piece of land in that part of the country, and people were eager to pay to own property there if the development was done in a respectful manner.” Likewise, at Iron Horse, in Whitefish, Mont., the permitting would have allowed up to 900 residences on the 820-acre property. Discovery chose to offer just 317 custom homesites for sale.

Along the way, Discovery Land has helped forge the new model of what a luxury golf-course community is all about. In short, it is not just about golf. “The market goes much, much deeper than that,” says Meldman. “Our demographic

The clubhouse for the Hideaway at La Quinta, opposite top, and an outdoor fireplace at Scottsdale’s Mirabel, opposite bottom. A library in the clubhouse at Kuki’o on Hawaii’s Big Island, above.



A village home at Vaquero in Texas.

VINCENT KNARVAL



DAVID LAWRENCE

is a little younger than the traditional equity-membership country club. Our clients are high achievers. Their time is at a premium and they want to spend it with their families. Sure, they want a great game of golf, and we give them that. But they also want other meaningful, active diversions—fly-fishing, white-water rafting, skiing. They want a multitude of ways to go out and experience the land.”

With that in mind, Iron Horse and some other Discovery Land communities offer owners an Outdoor Pursuits program, a dedicated concierge service that arranges virtually any kind of adventure imaginable. “It’s like golf pros for the great outdoors,” says Meldman. “We hire people who are passionate about the things they love, whether it is wakeboarding or snowboarding.”

Little wonder that Meldman’s company has attracted a band of loyal fans, especially among families. They have become Discovery groupies, who follow the company’s every move and clamor at the chance to invest in whatever



VINCENT KNAKAL

Outdoor dining at Kuki'o, above, and a member cabin in Whitefish, Mont., right.



MICHAEL JAVORKA

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it puts its name on.

Consider Rob Schumacher, a Bay Area real estate developer, who got his first taste of the Discovery brand five years ago at Iron Horse in Montana. Since then, Schumacher has bought property at four other Discovery developments, and praises what he calls “the quality of the experience.”

“From property to property, the staff knows you by your name, knows your likes and dislikes, and makes you feel that you belong,” says Schumacher. “I have joined a lot of private clubs and, compared to them, when you go to a Discovery property, it’s like being at Grandma’s house. You’re special. Discovery communities are all about the family without sacrificing any of the service.”

When Ilhan Refioglu, a vice president of Cypress Semiconductor Corp. purchased a home at Iron Horse, he was not seeking a good real estate investment; he was more interested in a place where he could spend time with his family. He has since bought property at Kuki'o and Hideaway. “For a guy like me, who doesn’t have a lot of time, if I see Mike Meldman’s print on a project, I know it has to be good,” says Refioglu. “I don’t have to do the due diligence. I just jump on the bandwagon.” ☀



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