

Design & Architecture

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Arizona Edition*

*Inspirations in **Design** and **Art** for the Home



art's & craft's style

Lifestyle
Developments

Desert Modern

Art of Buying Art

**below: Verrado closely integrates homes and commerce with the surrounding landscape in a community that is expected to get better and better with time.*

**right: Verrado's Main Street is based on a small town idea, with attached shops and lofts taking on different architectural styles.*





making PLACES

How do you make a community? It's a question developers are forever asking, and they're consulting history, both real and imagined, to find out.

The story is set in the 1800s, and goes something like this: A wealthy landowner amasses 900 acres in the desert, on the edge of mountain wilderness. He builds a homestead, a stronghold, on a hill in the center of his ranch, surrounded by irrigated farmlands and fields for livestock. As his family and its space requirements grow, so does the home. He has means, and the ability to import materials that reflect his European influences, yet at the same time he builds only what he needs.

Fast-forward 150 (or so) years later to today. The buildings remain, and are better for only a bit of renovating and removal of cobwebs. The spaces where livestock might have grazed have become relatively small, themed neighborhoods, and irrigated farmland has

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been converted to a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. The onetime homestead is now a richly appointed, but comfortable country club, and a central gathering place for a community called Superstition Mountain.

This is how Taber Anderson, president of The Lyle Anderson Company, tells it. He calls it his quasi-reality, historically appropriate fiction created as a means to an end. The company had acquired acreage in the far east Valley near the Superstition Mountains, and wanted to build a community with a small-town

with all the lifestyle opportunities upscale homebuyers want. To create places, Valley developers are using this kind of thematic thought process, and are designing to provide everything—from social venues, to recreation, to family togetherness, to security, to community—within one painstakingly planned development. It's a somewhat progressive effort here in the Valley, and yet it's being done with more than a hint of nostalgia.

Part of the reason for this particular evolution of the luxury home market is that a new category of luxury homebuyer

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has emerged. "The more traditional profile is the buyer seeking estate lots, looking for privacy and serenity, open space and views," says Brent Herrington, general manager of DC Ranch and senior vice president at DMB. "But there is a very important other category: the family who wants to be part of a great neighborhood."

PERFECTLY DESIGNED PLACES

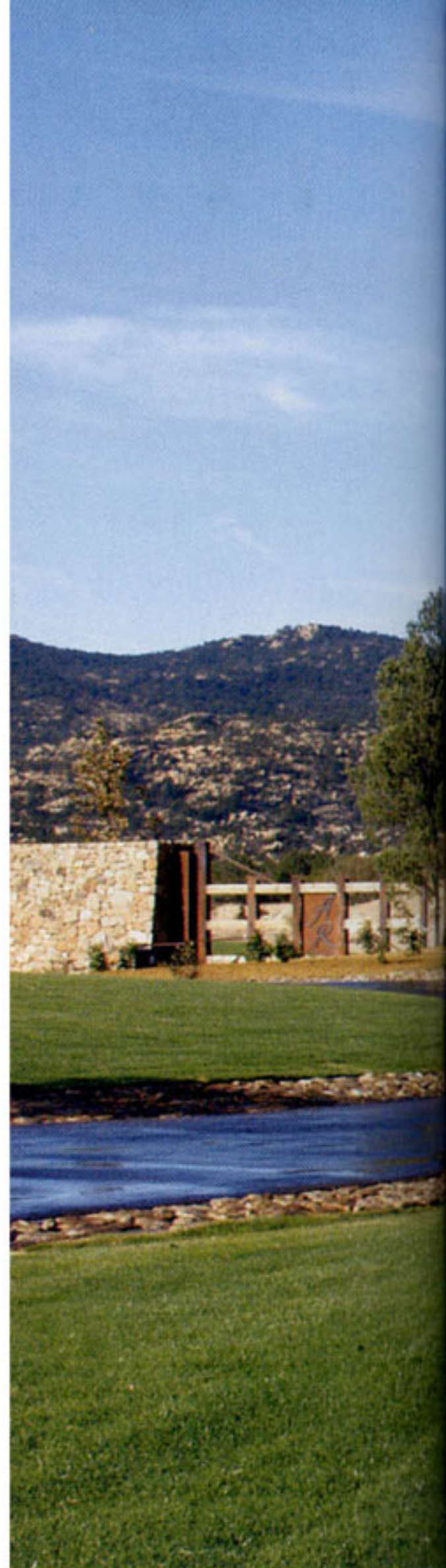
American Ranch, near Prescott, seeks to reclaim an innocent childhood. The Parks, part of DC Ranch's Silverleaf development, recreates the classic neighborhoods found in so many other parts of the country. Like Superstition Mountain, Verrado in Buckeye is based on a small town concept (although the execution is entirely different). In each of these developments, the purposes are twofold. One: create a multi-use community with a very specific lifestyle; and two: make it familiar.

Jeff Davis, of m3 Companies, which is developing American Ranch, is finishing raising four children and has four grandchildren. He wants them to experience some of the same freedoms he had as a kid. "I grew up in a small town in Indiana, of only about 800 people. It was the kind of place where my mother turned us loose after breakfast and told us to be home by dinner," he says. "It was an innocent lifestyle."



atmosphere, offering amenities, activity and golf in an unmatched setting. "We played on the incredible history of the area a bit—the Pima Indian legends, the Lost Dutchman, and the Peralta family massacre," Anderson says.

While the story itself may not be historically accurate (Anderson will be the first to tell you that), the idea of going back in time offers a way to think about a place, combined with what its built environment ought to be—and how that can turn a place into a thriving community



American Ranch wants to offer that lifestyle, with touches of the "Old West" in modern-day packaging that includes gates and a \$1.5 million equestrian center, as well as activities like hikes and pickup softball games arranged by the community's own concierge, or Trail Boss. It wants family togetherness and social interaction at the community center (Davis describes it as "the country club feel without the



**far left, top: A true ranch setting is found at American Ranch, a place to "hang out and watch cowboys," says Jeff Davis, the community's developer.*

dress code") and safe adventure at the Ranch Camp, with its tree forts and tire swings, a creek, sporting fields and camping areas.

Lessons learned from old-but-cherished neighborhoods across the country contributed to the design of The Parks, whose developer is DMB. Because the Valley didn't have the base of population and old money that went into developing

these places elsewhere during the pre-War era, Phoenix never became home to what Herrington refers to as "classically designed" neighborhoods. So DMB took a "what if" approach. "That was the creative joy of the process, imagining what these neighborhoods would have been like in the 1920s," had they existed, Herrington says.

DMB's research entailed visiting

**far left: The Ranch Camp at American Ranch exists purely for those wanting to rough it once in a while, but close to home.*

**above: Western hospitality, childhood innocence, family togetherness and plenty of activities are the basis of the American Ranch community near Prescott.*

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"We measured sidewalks, the distance between the back of the house and the alley," Herrington says, "We observed that the central organizing element is beautiful park space, more formal than organic, in a purposeful shape, with water features and lush landscaping." The Parks

Dale Gardon of Dale Gardon Design, an architect and planner for the development. Main Street, with its mix of architectural styles and uses, is intended as both a nerve center and an announcement, and is a counter to the homogeneity of other recent residential communities.

character. "Front-of-the-house living" is part of the vernacular at both The Parks and Verrado, where a home's architecture, complete with front porch or courtyard, is oriented to the street rather than a garage, and vehicular entrances are around back. "Tucked garages and alleys will start becoming part of the vocabulary in the next 10 years," Gardon says.

And builders are incorporating varied architectural styles that are still region-true—Spanish Colonial, Spanish Monterey, Ranch Hacienda and Regional Farmhouse are just some of the designations—to further make a community feel like one. "In visiting the old neighborhoods, we found a wonderful sense of diversity in types and sizes of homes," Herrington says. "You might have a large home across from a bungalow."

Yet, even though "homes are each crafted to make a statement, it's clearly about the neighborhood," Herrington

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lifestyle revolves around its 11 elaborate parks for 183 homes, each with its own shape and purpose.

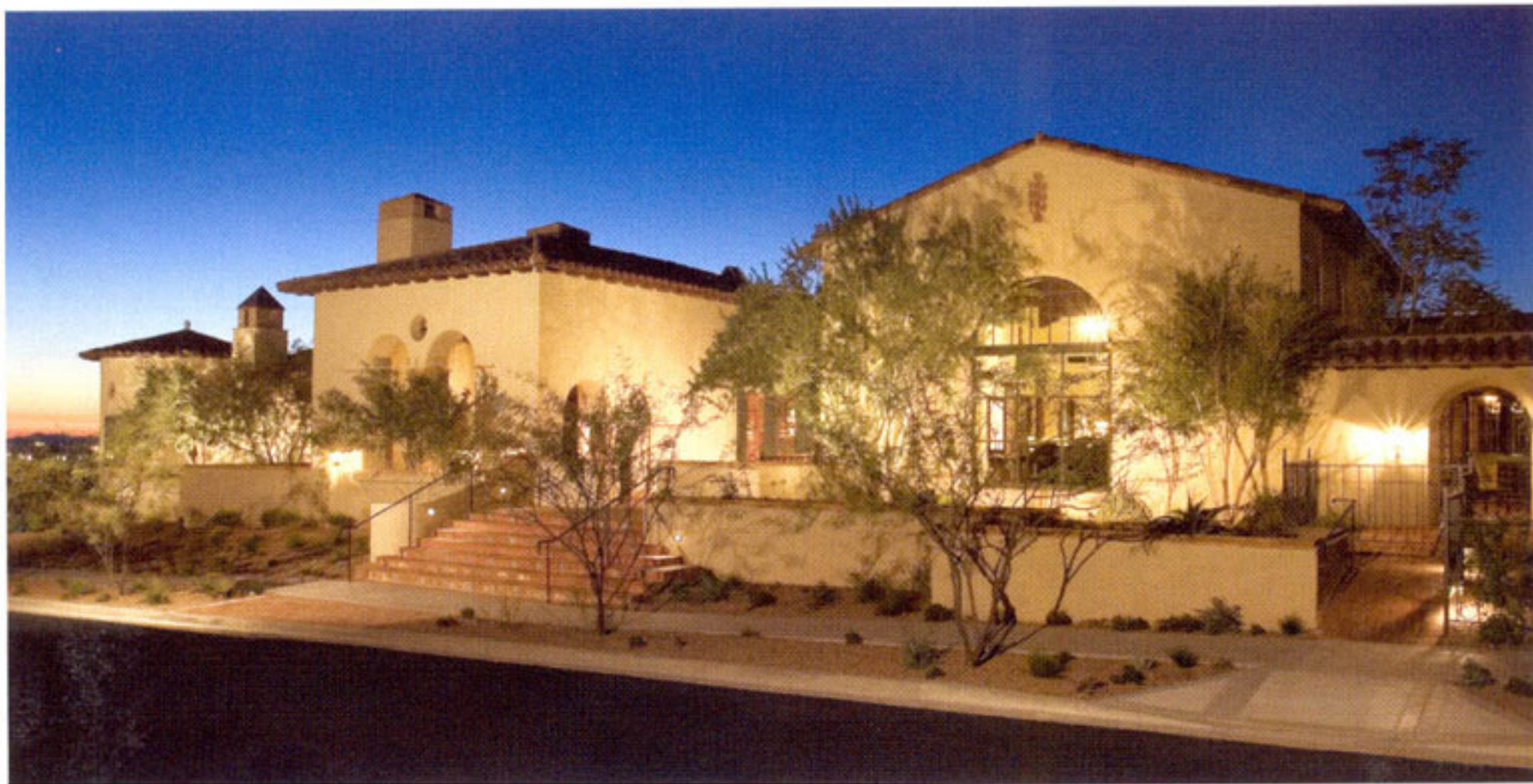
DMB is also Verrado's developer. The company built the community's core—its walkable Main Street, with commercial below and lofts above—before the houses started going in, a risky move that entailed a large up-front investment, but that the company deemed necessary to foster its small-town concept, says

Gardon says many developments of the last several decades "are like an architectural one-liner," with merely a sign at the entrance, and a streetscape of garages.

PRIVATE PLACES, PUBLIC SPACES

Homes, then, are being designed to augment the lifestyle aspects of these communities, some of which feature more compact, pedestrian-focused neighborhoods, with an emphasis on street

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says. "It's much more about a sense of vital engagement."

That developers are spending millions on public gathering places to further promote that sense is one standout of these communities. "Every community needs its own central gathering place, and it must feel comfortable enough for people

to frequent it often," says Anderson about Superstition Mountain's clubhouse. American Ranch has three such social and activity hubs in the Equestrian and Community centers and the Ranch Camp. The Parks' Silverleaf Club and parks, and Verrado's Main Street, Village Green (designed to function as a traditional town square) and central squares are DMB's signature gathering spots for each of these developments. Furthermore, in each community, leisure and social time may be orchestrated through activities and events; and classes and workshops provide learning along with interaction.

BUILDING SENSE

But the big question remains: Can a sense of community be built? "You can't turn the clock back entirely, regardless of what is changed in the built environment," says Nan Ellin, associate professor of architecture at ASU and the author and editor of two books on urban studies. She notes that our schedules are such that many people aren't home much anymore, and therefore may not be whiling away time on the porch. Many families have two working parents, and commutes can

consume much of our time. "That leaving will mitigate the sense of community," she says. "Maybe only a certain subset (such as moms who are home) will have that connectedness."

On the other hand, if developers take the demands of the overworked and overscheduled into account, connectedness could require little in the way of time and effort. "The whole idea stemmed from me working 60 to 70 hours a week," Davis says of American Ranch. He says the weekend would arrive, and his wife and boys would look at him and say, "It's great that you're here, but what are we going to do?" The builders of these communities work in resources to answer just that question.

Yet, as Ellin and many developers and architects will report (and as the strong sales for these developments will attest), buyers are crying to be in places with a sense of community. And, interestingly, we seem to be in an age that often relies on developers to create these places for us, at least here in the Valley. "Would it happen spontaneously? No," Ellin says. "The developers are buying so much land that they're in effect becoming our urban planners." And, even though historically that job has been left to the public sector,

it isn't in and of itself a bad thing. "Some developers are more creative than others, and are willing to take a risk. Some are more enlightened, and they do ask what makes people feel a sense of community. By defining that, they can have a tremendous influence," Ellin says.

Yet for all the stories imagined, the thoughtful planning and the research conducted, if these communities are to become vital and successful, it will be because of the people who live there. "The most important thing when building these places is people," Ellin says. "Some streets have no interesting buildings at all, but they're crawling with people. It's people who make them interesting places." *

** The Tom Weiskopf designed par 72, 7299-yard golf course at Silverleaf presents a degree of challenge that all players applaud.*



** The 17th hole at Silverleaf.*