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## Golf course living

At these new developments, you can have beautiful greens ... and some space to yourself.

By [Ellen Florian Kratz](#), FORTUNE writer

June 2, 2006: 2:56 PM EDT



NEW YORK (FORTUNE) - Plenty of people dream of living on a golf course. Put on your spikes, step out your front door and you're ready to sneak in a quick nine holes before dinner.

But these days, all too often newer golf-course communities come with an undesirable side effect: hundreds of neighbors crammed in next to you.

But as these homogenized developments crop up around the country and builders try to cram ever more units onto them, some developers are taking a different approach to exclusivity. They're restricting their expansion and setting aside large tracts of land for preservation.

"There is a market that accepts that their homes will be subordinated to nature," says Jim Chaffin, an environmentally sensitive developer who has built golf communities all over the country.

The community that he is currently developing is called Spring Island, a 3000-acre site in South Carolina between Beaufort and Hilton Head. When he purchased the island in 1989, it was zoned for 5500 homes. But instead of carving up the entire parcel into pieces and selling them off one by one, he set aside 1,200 acres for a land trust and drew up plans for just 400 residential properties.

He also hired a naturalist and built community clubhouses, a sports center, an equestrian center, and a golf course designed by Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay.

The result: everything you could want in a luxury resort without having to see rows and rows of homes from your living room window.

"Every community has a championship golf course, tennis, and fine dining," says Chaffin. "So do we, but we chose to put it in a nature park."

Of course such natural beauty comes with a price. Chaffin's Spring Island homes, all designed to fit the landscape, run from \$1 million at the low end to more than \$3 million.

There are a number of golf communities where you can hear the call of the wild. Here are three that will inspire you to

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stop and smell the flowers.

### **Mountain Air, Burnsville, North Carolina**

Set atop the Blue Ridge Mountains and just 35 minutes from Asheville, this 1,300-acre community has 400 housing units - both single family and townhouses - tucked away in the trees on the side of the mountain.

Homes are divided into distinct neighborhoods - each with its own architectural feel and its own nature park. Resort amenities include a village center with spa, a members' lodge, two restaurants, a scenic 18-hole golf course with 100-mile views across the mountains (another 9-hole course is under construction), and a staff naturalist who conducts nature walks and classes.

An organic community garden supplies the restaurants and is available to any member who wants to work a plot. The community also houses a private airstrip - the highest one east of the Mississippi.

*Homesites: \$189,000 to more than \$1 million.*

*Existing Homes and Townhouses: \$224,000 to more than \$2 million.*

### **Balsam Mountain Preserve, Sylva, North Carolina**

Of the 4,400 acres in Balsam Mountain Preserve, a full 3,000 are set aside for conservation, which leaves room for just 350 owners in this community. Facilities include swimming pool, fitness pavilion, tennis courts and nature center. An 18-hole golf course is currently under construction.

There are 38 miles of streams; one that has an abundance of trout has a campground nearby with pavilion and cabins for overnight fishing trips.

*Fractional Ownership: \$235,000 for eight weeks a year*

*Homesites: \$350,000 to \$850,000*

*Existing Homes: \$800,000 to \$1.45 million*

### **Wintergreen Resort, Wintergreen, Virginia**

This 11,000-acre mountain community, situated 30 miles southwest of Charlottesville, Virginia, is surrounded on three sides by 1.5 million acres of federal forestland. Despite the abundance of nature surrounding the development, more than 50% of the land inside is devoted to wilderness.

So although there are 3,800 property owners, you won't see a bunch of houses sticking up all over the mountains. All housing designs and materials must be approved by an architectural review board in order to ensure that they blend in with the natural surroundings.

"You're not going to get away with that hot pink window trim," says Tim Merrick, an associate broker. Downhill and cross-country skiing are available at the resort during the winter. Summer finds residents playing tennis, fishing for trout, or playing either the 18-hole Ellis Maples course or one of the three Rees Jones designed 9-hole courses.

The resort goes out of its way to protect wildflowers. Before any additional construction, experts transplant them to another site. "Some of these flowers take 25 years to bloom," says Merrick. "You won't find too many developers who are sensitive to Jack-in-the-Pulpit."

*Homesites: \$80,000 to \$500,000*

*Homes and Condos: \$160,000 to \$2 million*

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