

# Lifestyle:

## Equestrian Communities

BY SALLY SILVERMAN



**U**rban sprawl is pushing land suitable for equestrian activities further and further away. That means longer commutes to the barn for many equestrians, or, for those who keep their horses at home, a choice between encroaching development of the land or more lengthy trips to reach commercial resources. Pair the proximity issue with a horse person's penchant for sharing their passion with like-minded individuals, and it is no wonder that the equestrian community has been born. On the rise are residential developments that cater to the equestrian. Enter "equestrian community" into your Internet search engine, and close to a half-million results pop up. What are developers striving to achieve with these developments, and who is moving in? Are they really the Eden that those of us with a 45-minute commute to the barn dream of daily? We took a look at a sampling of such properties in an effort to answer these questions and more.

From Florida to Oregon, and almost every state in between, riders with and without their own horses have more and more living options that take their hobby into consideration. The nature of these properties varies greatly. Some offer build-your-own lots, others already-built homes. Many feature an equestrian center, others offer the option of farmettes for those who prefer to keep their horses at home. Some are designed first and foremost for the equestrian, while others tempt golfers, tennis players, fishermen and riders in equal measure. Style and price also run the gamut.

### Greenbrier Sporting Club

For exclusivity, The Greenbrier Sporting Club tops the list on the east coast. First cousin to the historic Greenbrier Resort in White Sulphur Springs, WV, this 500-home development is located on The Greenbrier's 6,500-acre site. Its amenities are abundant and include golf, shooting, tennis, fly fishing—even falconry. Club members can choose from seven distinct neighborhoods offering cabins to estate homes priced from \$400,000 to \$2.5 million. Club membership is a requirement for residents, and is an additional fee.

Although all of the homes have not yet been completed, the equestrian center opened in December 2002. It features a 24-stall barn, outdoor riding

arena and a network of trails, and offers lessons on its own horses as well as for boarders. Nancy Johnson, who manages the center, says that the Greenbrier Sporting Club will be a second or even third home for many of its members, who have indicated that they will come to the club for a couple of weeks every other month, or all summer. Composed of mostly English riders, the equestrian center had been crucial to their purchasing decision. "They devote a lot of time to horses, and it is important to them to buy into a community that has horses,"

says Johnson. Many rode when they were younger, she says, and are anxious to return to the sport, while others welcome the opportunity to introduce their children to the world of horses.

Guy Hubbard hopes to move into his Greenbrier home, a five-minute walk from the barn, this month. A resident of

New York, he began riding a decade ago. Riding is just one of the many activities this avid sportsman will pursue at Greenbrier, but he says his interest in horses is definitely a reason he chose the property. "I would like to be able to hunt," he says, "and become a more competent rider." The social aspects of the community were also a draw. "I hope to have a social community of riders here. It will be a nice balance to the other communities."

**Opposite: Tennessee's Rarity Bay offers equestrians beautiful surroundings and the opportunity to combine home and the equestrian lifestyle.**

**Below: One of the many facilities at West Virginia's Greenbrier Sporting Club.**

### American Ranch

American Ranch, in Prescott, AZ, about 100 miles northwest of Phoenix, was conceived with the notion of offering the convenience and accessibility of outdoor sports within a controlled environment, says Jeff Davis, partner in the M3 Companies that have developed the community. The gated community will ultimately include 188 homes, ranging in value from \$650,000 to more than \$2 million, and of the 83 sold to date, Davis estimates that 50% of the buyers are horse people. The nearly 600-acre property is located at the base of the 10,000-acre Granite Mountain Wilderness area, with miles of trails. It has been a working ranch since the late 1800s. Twenty-five percent of the land will remain open space, including natural creeks, boulders and grassy meadows.

The developers have gone all out to appeal to horse people, with a full service equestrian facility that boasts indoor and outdoor arenas (both measuring 200'x300'), and 39 stalls, each with a private tack room. World-class reining champion Ben Balow manages the facility and will be a training resource for residents. Though the average property is three acres, lots range to five-plus acres and many residents plan to house their horses at home. The development has spent over \$1 million on fencing to ensure a uniform look throughout the property.

"The amenities of American Ranch are perfect for our lifestyle, and I love what they are offering the horse person,"



Greenbrier Sporting Club

says future resident, Susan Vander Woude. "The high desert ranks right up there with the most beautiful places in the world."

Davis, though not a horseman himself, understands that people want to socialize with people who have similar interests. "You've got a whole lot of people here passionate about their horses," he says. "Things will grow from that. People will learn from other peoples' experiences."

### Rarity Bay

"There is a real camaraderie with all of the people at the equestrian center," says resident Bill McElhaney. It is, he says, one of the real perks of living at Rarity Bay, the Vonore, TN, equestrian community where he and his wife Dolly have lived for three years. The couple kept horses at home for 30 years, and sought a place to retire where they could have their horses close by, but not be tied down by the work and responsibility that keeping a horse at home demands. After a nationwide search, they settled on Rarity Bay, "An upscale community," says Rarity Bay Vice President Fred McArthur, "in concert with nature. Horses are a natural here."

Rarity Bay is set on a peninsula in Lake Tellico in Eastern Tennessee. There are 750 home sites of one to one and a half acres. The equestrian center features a 175'x275' outdoor arena, 35

stalls and enough pasture for turnout and pasture board as well. A second barn is planned. There are 10 miles of trails on the property and a lot of trail riding in the Smoky Mountains nearby. McArthur is particularly proud that the center is multi-disciplined, with training and instruction in Western riding, hunter/jumpers, dressage and more. Events that include rodeos and grand prix jumping competitions are hosted regularly, and social events such as trail rides to a bonfire take place as well.

Building at Rarity Bay is ongoing and houses are valued at \$400,000 to about \$3 million. Of the 350 people currently residing at Rarity Bay, McArthur says about 20% participate in the equestrian center. "The horse people here are those who may have ridden at camp as a child, and always wanted to dedicate more time to the sport, some who always wanted to ride, and people who have horses and always dreamed of living in an upscale community with their horses close by." In addition to the equestrian center, Rarity Bay boasts first class golf and a wealth of water sports.

### Saddlebrook Ridge

Though investors seem to favor locations with more dependable climates

for equestrian communities, one community that has sought to offer riders in the northeast the convenience and amenities of an equestrian setting is Saddlebrook Ridge in Shamong, NJ. The eight-year-old property is located within a 35-minute drive of Philadelphia, and the 110-acre farm has a bucolic feeling, with custom homes (the sample is priced at \$970,000) positioned around the equestrian center. There are 36 lots of one to two acres, seven still undeveloped. Wharton State Forest offers additional trail riding opportunities close by.

The barn features 49 12'x12' stalls as well as heated and air-conditioned tack rooms, lockers and other custom-designed amenities. Clinics, primarily dressage and eventing, with high-profile professionals such as Steven Bradley, Walter Zettl and Todd Flettrich, are frequently held at Saddlebrook Ridge. Its comfortable lounge is fitted with a fireplace, bar, couches and chairs overlooking the indoor arena. The space could provide a handsome

gathering place for the community, but for the fact that there are no equestrians living in the homes at Saddlebrook Ridge. Gail Pratt, who developed the property with her husband, Charlie, says that buyers were attracted by the quality of homes and appealing setting. "They moved here just to own property adjacent to the farm and enjoy looking at it." The equestrian center does, however, provide an opportunity to educate. "We invite non-horsey people into the equestrian center. Some residents have brought their children over. It's a wonderful opportunity to teach them to understand and respect horses."

Pratt manages the facility, which has a number of instructors and a big student following in the wider community.

### Whitelock Farms

As the home of Wellington and Palm Beach, Florida has long been a mecca for equestrians. Development began in 1999 on Whitelock Farms, Equestrian Way and Countryside, a cluster of equestrian communities 30 minutes from the Jacksonville area that are being developed in four stages. Together, the communities will have 107 homes, each on an average of five acres, though property sizes range from two and a half to nearly 40 acres. While a parcel of land has been dedicated for an arena, the real draw here is the lot size. Residents who own horses have

Below: The front gate at Arizona's American Ranch takes full advantage of the Granite Mountain Wilderness area and its beauty.



American Ranch



Rarity Bay

If you would like to learn more about the communities mentioned or pictured, visit the following websites.

**Greenbrier Sporting Club** – White Sulphur Springs, WV  
[www.greenbrier.com](http://www.greenbrier.com)

**American Ranch** – Prescott, AZ  
[www.americanranch.com](http://www.americanranch.com)

**Rarity Bay** – Vonore, TN  
[www.waterviewhome.net/communities/Community-Raritybay.html](http://www.waterviewhome.net/communities/Community-Raritybay.html)

**Saddlebrook Ridge** – Shamong, NJ  
[www.saddlebrookridge.com](http://www.saddlebrookridge.com)

**Whitelock Farms** – Jacksonville, FL  
[www.davidweekley.com/Community.asp?Community=44090000](http://www.davidweekley.com/Community.asp?Community=44090000)

**McLendon Hills** – Southern Pines, NC  
[www.mclendonhills.com](http://www.mclendonhills.com)

**Alafia Ridge** – Lithia, FL  
[www.alafiaridge.com](http://www.alafiaridge.com)

**The Santa Lucia Preserve** – Carmel, CA  
[www.santaluciapreserve.com](http://www.santaluciapreserve.com)

barns at home, and many, according to developer Charles Atkerson, have arenas as well. Thirty percent of the residents are equestrians. “The others,” says Atkerson, “are families that want five acres in the country.” The property is zoned for horses, which he says is a big plus in Florida, and fairly stiff covenants and restrictions in architectural review ensure a standard in the community that is not available when you buy a single lot in the country. “Often,” he says, “you don’t know what will end up on either side of you.” Wider than normal right of ways between roads and fences provide riding paths on both sides of the road.

**Above: Equestrian communities offer a sense of welcoming, security and beauty.**

Susie Peterson, who has lived in Whitelock Farms with her five Paint horses for two and a half years, finds the area well protected and full of wildlife, but with all the modern conveniences of a new home in a new community. “Horses and the modern conveniences don’t always go hand in hand.” She is also thrilled with the social aspects of living here. “You have people who have common interests. On Saturdays and Sun-

days a bunch of us get on our horses and go riding together. And I like to know if I was in a pinch, or needed help, that there would be people who understand and could help out.”

Atkerson predicts that more and more equestrians will be moving in. He knows there is a demand. River’s Edge Plantation, in St. Augustine, is another equestrian-themed community he was involved with earlier. The draw at River’s Edge is the water front, lots of 3.2 to 5 acres, and over 100 acres of nature preserve, with trails at the edge of the property. “We did a lot of talking to people in the equestrian community. We were very confident that the market was there. Interest is even stronger than we anticipated.”

#### McLendon Hills

Seven miles west of Southern Pines, NC, also big horse country, is McLendon Hills. This 600-acre property features rolling hills, Lake Troy Douglas, and lots from one to five acres. Many residents of McLendon Hills choose to keep horses at home, while

others take full advantage of the 25 acre equestrian center with its 24 12’x12’ stalls, all-weather lighted outdoor arena and other amenities. The property is criss-crossed with six and a half miles of bridle trails as well.

At McLendon Hills, about half of the 30 homes already occupied belong to equestrians. They are, according to equestrian center manager Steve Phillips, mostly people who have had horses all of their lives and want their horses close to home. Dressage is the predominant discipline, but the center offers instruction in hunters, jumpers and Western pleasure, and offers a trail riding program as well. Boarders, about half of whom live in the community, can also bring in outside trainers, and the center is enjoyed by students outside of the community as well. A number of McLendon Hills residents started to take lessons after they moved into the community. “They usually start with a trail ride,” says Phillips.

The community feeling has been a big draw for equestrians. Kathy Stevens, who is keeping her Thoroughbred cross at the center for the moment, says that the equestrian aspect of McLendon

Hills was the primary attraction for her. "I wanted to be near other people who understand horses." The second important aspect was sense of community. "You have social interaction here that you don't have when you are on 20 acres by yourself."

Patty Abbondanzio agrees. She and her husband and pre-teenage daughter moved to McLendon Hills a year and a half ago from rural Massachusetts. "This is a great blend of what the country has to offer, and what a development might offer," she says. "Our daughter has friends as well as neighbors interested in horses, and the community is very family oriented. It's the best of both worlds." Her horses stayed at the equestrian center until

ing that riders are an important part of the community at large.

### Alafia Ridge

In the early stages of development is Alafia Ridge Estates, 142 acres in Lithia, FL, between Tampa and Orlando. The 21 properties range in size from five to 12 acres, and each equestrian will have their own barn or build one with a neighbor. A bridle trail outlines the property, which is also populated by grandfather oaks, cabbage palms, pine trees and abundant wildlife. The property edges a 1,000-acre conservation area and is very close to the riding trails of Alafia River State Park.

Developer Matt Yarbrough says

**Santa Lucia Preserve—an intimate community of 300 homes nestled within a 20,000 acre private preserve, 100 miles of trails, a distinguished equestrian center and a Tom Fazio designed golf course located in Carmel, CA.**

"They were looking for a deed-restricted, gated community. You can have a gorgeous property with horses," says Yarbrough, "and then a trailer can pull up on the property next door. That can't happen at Alafia Ridge." Though Yarbrough himself doesn't have horses, he has purchased a lot in the community and predicts that horses are in his future.

### Santa Lucia Preserve

Located on 20,000 acres in beautiful California, Santa Lucia Preserve is a private community with 300 home sites settled amidst the coastal foothills next to Carmel and Pebble Beach, CA.

"The community is made up of people who cherish nature, family and friends and endeavor to spend time with their children enjoying the many outdoor amenities offered in a world class location and climate," says Lisa Guthrie, Director of Clubs and Services at Santa Lucia.

The estate home sites range in price from \$1 million to \$4 million, and currently the completed homes available range from \$5 million to \$7 million. According to Guthrie, the ethic of the equestrian center imbues an attention to detail and tender caring for the equine members and warm California hospitality for the members and their guests.

In its Main Center aisle barn there are 12 box stalls (12'x12') with attached run (12'x36'), two tack rooms, two interior grooming stalls, one interior wash stall, one exterior wash area and a lounge. Among the communities other facilities include: a main arena (150'x260'), dressage arena (20m x 60m), a 60' round pen, plus plenty of pastures for daily turnout and a 1,500' track.

The Preserve, which is about one-and-a-half times the size of Manhattan Island, is an equestrian jewel according to those who live there. Among its many landscapes include a selection of every terrain found in coastal California—open grassland, oak savannah, chaparral and coastal sage, and woodlands of oak, redwoods and pine, and wetlands.

Guthrie believes that Santa Lucia Preserve provides its residents an environment that fosters a sense of "emotional peace, physical security and natural beauty...the foundation of an ideal quality of life." ■

*Sally Silverman is a lifelong equestrian and freelance journalist. Her work has appeared in Dressage Today and Practical Horseman. Ms. Silverman can be reached at [SallySilverman@comcast.net](mailto:SallySilverman@comcast.net).*



Santa Lucia Preserve

their barn was built and she was impressed with the care and the facility. The center also hosts a 4-H club, with which her daughter has become involved. "The facility is a gathering point, not just for the horsey set, but for all the families. When they say, 'We are one big family,' we really are!" Both Abbondanzio and Stevens say that the equestrian advisory committee created by the developers has added to the feel-

he was attracted to the property's rolling hills and water features. "Lithia is country, and we wanted to keep it that way. This spot is ideal for higher end homes." The rural feeling is preserved, and the developers have been careful not to disturb trees and wetlands. Yarbrough estimates that 95% of those who have purchased lots in Alafia Ridge have horses. Maintaining property values has been key to the buyers.