

The Palm Beach Post

Monday, June 23, 2008

South County • PalmBeachPost.com

Horse country, gone upscale

By ELIZABETH CLARKE

This is not a typical South Florida gated development, despite its gate and clubhouse and tennis courts.

For starters, palm trees aren't allowed.

But visiting horses, day barns and "the sophisticated equine enthusiast," as the community's Web site calls its clientele, are all welcome on these 280 acres of former tomato fields.

Truth be told, there aren't many horses or day barns here, although there are plenty of equine enthusiasts in Equus, whose name is Latin for horse.

"People either love the community or they don't," says Angela Bean of Century-21 Tenace in Boynton Beach. "Some like the feel. Others don't like the sea of white fences."

All of the home sites - many of them 260 feet deep - include a portion of the community's natural preserve, which must be separated from horse trails. Many owners have completed three-rail, paddock fencing around their preserve areas, either for looks or so they can keep their horse in their yard temporarily.

Day barns, which are small barns for horses to spend a few hours or a night in, are the only buildings allowed on that portion of the lot, but the lack of clutter provides a wide- open feel that residents like.

"What we love about it are the open vistas," says Alan Berkin, who lives in one Equus home with his family and is having a second, larger Equus home built for the five of them.

Few residents have built day barns, but most enjoy having the 34-acre Equus Equestrian Center right next-door. Residents who



own horses can board them in the 100-stall facility and ride them on trails that wind through their own community.

And although that's attractive to potential buyers, the community's biggest draws seem to be its large lots, well-appointed estate homes and its central location, agents say.

"People like the big home sites," says Allen Ball, whose company recently took over new home sales in Equus. "You just don't find that anymore with gated communities."

Most lots are one-third to one-half of an acre. The community, which will be 280 homes when completed, also has two 10-acre lakes and 51/2 miles of horse trails, along with its 7,000-square-foot clubhouse with a pool, two tennis courts, a billiards room and lounge overlooking the equestrian center, with its 20 paddocks, and performance and practice rings.

"The intention by the developer was that this would not be South Florida," Ball says.

That explains the no-palm-trees edict - they're allowed in pots only - as well as the Northern European building design style,

heavy with stone façades, shake roofs and rich, dark woods in the clubhouse. And these homes aren't built for Everyman. One model includes a dog wash - yes, a shower/tub just for the pooch - in the laundry room.

Other standard features in many homes include 8-foot mahogany front doors, impact-resistant windows, granite kitchen counters, Saturnia marble counters in the baths, heated pools, crown molding and other high-end touches.

Homeowners association fees are \$305 per month. That includes the 24-hour manned guard gate, a roving patrol, clubhouse use, maintenance and irrigation, plus cable and high-speed Internet service.

Two well-regarded builders, Landmark Custom Homes and Ecclestone Signature Homes, are working in the community now, and the developer, Schultz Development, owns a majority of the remaining lots.

Engle Homes built some of the earlier homes but has finished its work in Equus.

The earliest homes were built in 2004. Five are being built now, and 78 of the 280 lots are vacant.

Resale prices start at \$599,000, and new, completed homes range from \$895,000 to \$2 million for a furnished model with five bedrooms, 7 1/2 baths, a library, game room, four-car garage and 8,223 square feet of total space.

The state of the real-estate market, combined with the builders' recent decision to lower prices make it challenging for sellers, Bean says. It's no different in Equus than in other communities, she adds. There are short sales, where sellers owe more than the house is worth, and foreclosures in every neighborhood.

Equus' location - between Lyons Road and U.S. 441, north of Boynton Beach Boulevard - make it appealing, as do its well-regarded public schools: Odyssey Middle and Olympic Heights High. Elementary students will move this year from Hagen Ranch to the new Sunset Palms.

Tom and Meenu Sasser, both lawyers, looked carefully at the schools before moving to Equus from Winston Trails in 2006. With three young children and a strong belief in the power of education, they wanted good schools and felt happy with the public-school options in Equus, although their children don't currently attend the zoned schools.

Their two older children, Andrew and Caroline, got into the International Baccalaureate magnet program at Morikami Elementary in Delray Beach, and their youngest, Will, attends pre-K at Panther Run in Wellington.

Meenu Sasser raves about the location. With her office in West Palm Beach, and clients and meetings all over the county, she puts many miles on her car. But with the turnpike so close, she can get south to Boca Raton in 10 minutes and north to Jupiter in 20.

"It's an excellent location," she says. "The kids can do activities anywhere, really."

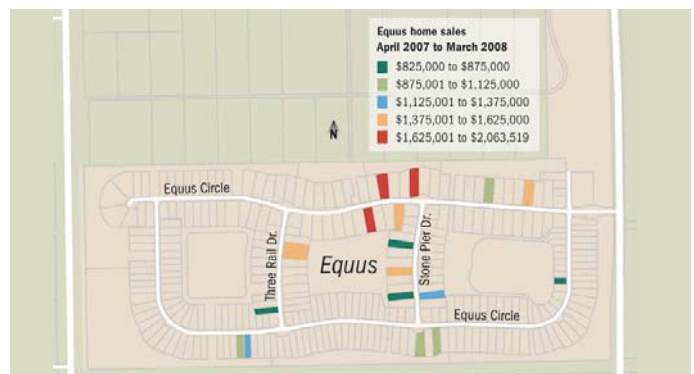
Her favorite things about Equus are that great location, the community amenities and the wonderful neighborhood feeling.

Agent Sandy Rigabar of the Ball Group can attest to all three as selling factors, especially the neighborliness here. Potential buyers can see it, and they like it.

"They love the closeness of the community," Rigabar says. "These people love each other. It's amazing to see."

History of home sales in Equus

YEAR	SALES	MINIMUM PRICE	MEDIAN PRICE	MAXIMUM PRICE
2004	31	\$217,000	\$634,291	\$1,232,712
2005	46	\$232,000	\$778,106	\$1,769,794
2006	28	\$675,000	\$1,046,329	\$1,657,247
2007	16	\$825,000	\$1,395,190	\$2,063,519
2008	5	\$850,000	\$959,990	\$1,260,000



The Real Estate Market at Equus

Total number of homes:	Homes listed for sale:	Median sale price this year:
202	48	\$959,990

Call or visit Equus:

To preview decorated models and to see the immediate occupancy homes available, call the Equus Sales Center at 561.737.7137 or visit www.LiveEquus.com

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FLORIDA HOME NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE WEEK

How residents live, and how homes are selling in one South Florida community

This week: **Equus**

ALAN BERKIN and KIMBERLEE THOMAS
(with Spencer, 4; Sabrina, 3, and Victoria, 18 months)

THEIR HOME: 5 bedrooms, 3 1/2 bathrooms with 3,700 square feet of living space on a lake and next to a horse trail.

WHEN THEY MOVED IN: May 2006

WHAT THEY PAID: \$1.2 million

WHY THEY LOVE IT: Open spaces, plain and simple.

Alan and Kimberlee grew up in New York and New Jersey. Alan recalls everyone living in two-story homes with big back yards and open spaces for running and playing and enjoying the view.

But looking around planned communities in Broward and Miami-Dade counties, they couldn't find anything that felt like home. One day they headed north from their home in Deerfield Beach, planning to visit an equestrian community in Wellington. Instead, they saw an ad for Equus, pulled off and made a deposit that day.

They like the shingles, brick work, landscaping and design of the community. Combine that with the Florida lifestyle and weather and "it's the best of both worlds," Alan says.

And since their family has grown since they moved in, they've already signed a contract for a bigger home on a bigger lot in Equus. They should move in early 2009.



"I'm committed to the community," says Alan, who is the only resident on the board of the homeowners association. "We love it here. We'll be here for a very, very long time."

They love the clubhouse and recently threw a big birthday bash for their two older children there, complete with horseback riding and catering.

Serenity is the best word for what Alan loves here, he says. After a day at work (he's an executive at an over-the-counter pharmaceutical company in Boca Raton), he just likes to sit in his family room and relax, watching the sun set over the Everglades.

"It really is something special - and they didn't pay me to say that," he says. "You could have had the worst day and you come back home here, you take a deep breath and it's just magnificent."

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ANDREA and ZANE MORGAN
(with dogs Chewy and Zoe)

THEIR HOME: 4 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms plus an office with 4,715 square feet under air

WHEN THEY MOVED IN: June 2007

WHAT THEY PAID: \$1.26 million

WHY THEY LOVE IT: Andrea jokes about this house: It would have been the perfect house for raising kids. Of course, when their two kids were young, they couldn't afford this house.

The kids might be gone, but Andrea and Zane, who sell medical equipment, finally get to enjoy their dream house.

They were living in Parkland when they found it, and they weren't even really looking to move.

But Andrea likes looking at model homes, "as a hobby," she says. And when she found Equus, she was stunned.

"For the size and what you got in the house just standard, you just couldn't compare this to anything else," she says. And she had looked at everything from Jupiter to Miramar.

They jumped at the chance and they love it.



Of course, some people cringed when the Morgans announced they were moving to Boynton Beach, thinking of early-bird specials. But that didn't bother Andrea and Zane. They love the variety of restaurants nearby, and they love the variety of people in their community.

Lots of children, of course, but also people their age and some fabulously young retirees. And unlike their former community, "people don't boast about what they have," she says. "They're just quietly doing very well and shut up about it."

But her favorite thing is the quiet.

"I like that you don't hear any highway noise whatsoever," she says. "When you open your door, day or night ... crickets. That's all you hear. It's very, very peaceful."

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MATT and SHANNON HURLEY
(with daughter Caidyn and son Roan, both 4)

THEIR HOME: 3 1/2 bathrooms, plus a playroom and an office with 3,800 square feet of living space and a pool.

WHEN THEY MOVED IN: September 2005

WHAT THEY PAID: \$950,000

WHY THEY LOVE IT: Great neighbors and a Northeastern atmosphere make the Hurleys feel at home in the horse country of western Boynton Beach.

Before they discovered Equus, they were living in Delray Beach on the Intracoastal Waterway with two newborns. That water was their biggest fear, and they decided it was time to move.

Now, Matt and Shannon love the look of their new community, especially the oak and magnolia trees in the landscape. Palm trees aren't allowed along the roads or in common areas, although homeowners can put them around their pools in pots.

"That was more homey to us," says Matt, who grew up outside Philadelphia.

Shannon commutes to Fort Lauderdale for her job in the recruiting and staffing industry, but it's just a mile to the turnpike. Matt is self-employed in rentals and real estate.

They recall worrying a little about whether there would be kids for their children to play with, considering the price ranges of the homes.



"Nearly every neighbor has kids, and almost every weekend we have get-togethers where we put together water slides in the back yard or bounce houses," Matt says. "I think we've got some really great neighbors."

The Hurleys aren't horse owners, but they like the look of the fences and enjoy seeing the horses.

"It's so nice to come out in the evening or the morning and see them out in their corrals," says Matt, who gave Shannon riding lessons at the neighboring equestrian center as a Christmas present.

Still, the neighbors make a neighborhood, and the neighbors are really the best thing about Equus, Matt says.

"There's a real feeling of camaraderie," he says. "If you ever had a problem, somebody's right there."

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