

Developers Opting for Eco-Estates

As the government cracks down on lifestyle developments in concern over their ecological effects, an eco-friendly breed of developer has emerged who is investing and assisting in preservation of wilderness areas.

Lifestyle estates, particularly those of a golfing nature, have come into question recently for putting local water resources under pressure and disrupting natural areas within SA. The latest Absa residential property perspective for the second quarter of this year showed that about 32 proposed residential estate projects were awaiting final government approval.

On a R2bn Val de Vie Polo and Wine Estate, situated in the Berg River Valley between Paarl and Franschhoek, agriculture and mining altered and destroyed much of the natural vegetation of the valley prior to the developments commencement. Small remnants of original vegetation could be found mainly along the Berg River which forms a boundary along the southern side of the estate.

Developer Martin Venter brought environmentalists on board who discovered a number of rare and endangered plant species within these areas. Their preservation immediately became high priority and a conservation area has been put aside within the estate.

Environmental Control Officer at Val de Vie, Johan Neethling says, "A search and rescue exercise was launched before construction commenced to locate and remove indigenous plants for replanting in the conservation area. Close to 3000 plants and bulbs were thus rescued and replanted and Sour Fig cuttings were planted to help stabilise the area.

"An environmental management plan to protect and manage these natural assets during the current construction period is in place to ensure environmental compliance throughout the development process and beyond this period. An extensive and far reaching landscaping programme has been instituted and large areas within the estate will be replanted and managed in an effort to bring back some of the lost indigenous vegetation of the Berg River Valley."

"Small mammals and birds abound on the estate. Especially water birds occur in fairly large numbers along the Berg River. These animals are very adaptable and the extensive landscaping with large water features and islands will further attract large numbers of birds."

Here plots are selling at between R2.4– R4m and already nearly 80% of the estate has been sold. To ensure their world class polo facilities use minimal amounts of water during the irrigation process the developer has brought in state-of-the-art drainage as well as an automated irrigation system, the second of its kind in the country, to ensure precise and homogenous water distribution minimizing wastage and taking weather conditions into account automatically before watering.

Hilton Campbell of Arun Holdings, who is developing the Baronetcy Estate on the outskirts of the Tygerberg Nature Reserve, on the highest available slopes of the Tygerburg Hills, is one such eco-friendly developer who is reintroducing indigenous fynbos to the estate creating continuity between the nature reserve and the estate on which it borders.

"We are currently removing the majority of alien vegetation which in my opinion will result in greater return on investment for us, for buyers and for the environment. Those looking to buy into this type of estate are looking for property within an ecologically-sound environment."

Campbell says under their current zoning application they have requested the ability to construct a network of footpaths allowing residents to explore the surrounding reserve with minimal disruption to the indigenous flora and fauna. In time, an incorporated green belt and dam within the estate will attract small mammals and birdlife onto the grounds of the estate.

At Baronetcy, which is already 80% sold out with all infrastructures in place, 850 – 1200 sq m stands are priced from R1.2m upwards and "green" buyers are more than willing to pay more to invest in an estate that has been responsibly developed. The estate forms part of 190Ha of the De Grendel wine estate sold to Arun Holdings in 2005, just 10 minutes from Cape Town's CBD. A commercial site of about 3.6Ha is currently being developed further down the slopes that will incorporate retail space, a gym, restaurant and a small supermarket, all within walking distance of the estate.