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Great Golf Resort Communities of 2015 Revealed

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In my 15-plus year of specializing in golf and resort-style real estate, I've had the pleasure of visiting many of the finest private clubs and resort communities in the world. From the exclusive Ke'olu Course at Four Seasons Resort Hualalai on the Big Island of Hawaii to Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago mansion in Palm Beach to Tavistock Group's ultra-private Isle worth and Lake Nona golf and country clubs in Orlando, my global travels have given me unique insights and access to the best of master-planned golf and resort development.

In some cases, even my family has been treated to the taste of the quintessential life. Case in point was a memorable trip to Park City last summer where I visited one of the world's top family-friendly private club communities: Promontory (read more below).

What follows are a handful of dynamic new and reimagined private club and resort-style real estate communities to keep on your real estate radar this year and discover first-hand.

Bluejack National, Montgomery, Texas

Golf great Tiger Woods is back. Back at Bluejack National that is. After a previously announced golf project at the massive Cliffs Communities near Asheville, N.C., never came to fruition during the financial crisis, America is finally getting its first Tiger Woods-designed golf course.

The new Bluejack National 18-hole championship layout is under construction and part of a 755-acre private club community northwest of Houston. Bluejack National is the vision of Beacon Land Development partners Michael Abbott and Casey Paulson, two of the industry's most respected private club operators previously associated with Discovery Land Company's ultra-exclusive private communities such as Kukio on the Big Island of Hawaii, the Madison Club in Palm Springs and Vacquero in Dallas.

Woods' golf course is being grassed in now and expected to be open this fall. Beacon Land is partnering with Dallas-based Lantern Asset Management on Bluejack National, which is located at the former home of Blake tree National Golf Club.

"When I first came here I was absolutely shocked," Woods says in a promotional video for Bluejack National. "I view Texas as being flat. I just didn't expect this to be just outside a major metropolis like Houston."



Tiger Woods at Bluejack National

In addition to Tiger Woods Design, Beacon is working with Beau Welling Design, Nick Fullerton Architects, Jones and Carter engineering and Medalist Golf course developer/builder on the master-planned private golf and residential community.

Beacon Land is already starting to accept reservations and the community will be limited to 386 private residents and 550 memberships.

Besides a championship golf course and family friendly alternative short course to play, Bluejack residents and members will have other world-class amenities, including tennis, spa, wellness center, dining, corporate entertainment options and an array of indoor and outdoor family recreational activities. Among the outdoor pursuits are 35 acres of fishing lakes and approximately seven miles of beautiful hiking, biking and running trails that link the amenities to the Bluejack National neighborhoods.

The Abaco Club on Winding Bay, Great Abaco, Bahamas

Originally developed by Peter de Savary in December 2004 during the Bahamas boom in resort-style development, The Abaco Club was one of the few that survived the planning stages during the financial crisis. After being affiliated with the Ritz-Carlton destination club and eventually being acquired by Marriott Vacation Worldwide Corporation in '08, this high-end private sporting community is starting a new chapter with Southworth Development.



Bluejack National Golf Course Zeon Zoysia

Southworth Development, an internationally recognized developer and manager of residential resort communities, announced last Dec. 11 that it acquired The Abaco Club on Winding Bay from Marriott Vacation Worldwide in an all-cash purchase, in partnership with a consortium of members and residents of club.

The acquisition is the second former Ritz Carlton-managed community purchased by Southworth. The first was Creighton Farms, a private Jack Nicklaus designed golf club and residential community located in Northern Virginia, which Southworth acquired in 2009.

"We have found the perfect partner in Southworth," said Michael McCormick, spokesperson of the Abaco Club homeowner consortium. "Their track record of investing in and developing world-class communities offers us a real sense of security that The Abaco Club on Winding Bay will become the pinnacle of barefoot luxury in The Bahamas. Southworth's 20-plus-year track record speaks for itself, and we are delighted to be joining with them to make an already special place even more desirable."

Located in Great Abaco, The Abaco Club on Winding Bay is one of the world's great sporting clubs, with residences that rival the finest in any island setting. The club features over two miles of white-sand beach; a highly acclaimed tropical links golf course, which has been consistently ranked as one of the top courses in the Caribbean by Golfweek; tennis; a wide range of water sports, world-class bone fishing, deep-sea fishing and boating off Abaco's famed shores and surrounding islands.

Southworth is planning a multi-million dollar renovation of the existing facilities which will begin immediately. In addition, a new state-of-the-art golf practice facility will be added, along with a new marina and boathouse.

"The Abaco Club has everything money can't buy," said David Southworth, President and CEO of Southworth Development. "It's a gorgeous setting, with a well thought out master plan and a passionate membership. It's a perfect complement to our existing properties and we look forward to taking this world class facility to an even higher level."

Real estate offerings start at \$375,000 for 1-bedroom, 650-square-foot cabanas and go up \$3-\$4 million for ocean-view estate lots.

The Right Honourable Perry Christie, Prime Minister of The Bahamas, said: "We welcome Southworth Development's involvement in The Abaco Club on Winding Bay and look forward to working with such a renowned group. Renewed interest and long-term investment in the property will benefit Great Abaco and The Bahamas in the form of increased home building, tourism and jobs. "

Promontory, Park City, Utah

As a host site for the 2002 Winter Olympics, Park City solidified its place as one of the world's great winter playgrounds, a fact avid skiers had known for decades. Now, this fabulous leisure destination is getting a lot of attention for its private golf and country club living.

The biggest statement, at least in sheer size, is being made at Promontory, a high end private 6,500-acre recreational second-home community that features the only Pete Dye-designed course in Utah and a second Jack Nicklaus Signature Course called Painted Valley.

Located minutes from the quaint town of Park City, Dye's Canyon Course opened in 2002 and the Nicklaus course opened four years later. Sitting approximately 7,000 feet above sea level, the Canyon Course meanders through sagebrush hillsides and offers wonderful vistas of Park City and Deer Valley.

Overall, the Promontory plan calls for more than 1,600 mostly second-home residences and more than 350 multi-million homes are already built. Besides championship golf, Promontory members have a plateful of amenities that rivals the finest anywhere, including one of the coolest clubhouses for kids and those who are still kids at heart, The Shed (see photo).



Promotory Homes

The Shed Clubhouse and Café features delightful food and full bar, not to mention a bowling alley, basketball court and other gaming attractions. For the more refined setting, Promontory also features a world-class Ranch Clubhouse and Spa, the Dye Clubhouse, Outfitters Cabin and Equestrian Center.

What's also important to point out is Promontory couldn't be stronger financially after emerging from bankruptcy court nearly six years ago under the same ownership of the original developer, Francis Najafi, chief executive of Phoenix-based Pivotal Group. Case in point are dozens of new homes and custom lots that have been sold in the past year and numerous new homes in construction throughout the double-gated community.

Another sign of growth is the new clubhouse and fine restaurant under construction at the top-rated Painted Valley Nicklaus Course (see photo). Construction began last spring and Promontory anticipates a grand opening for the 2015 golf season. Designed by esteemed Swaback Partners of Scottsdale, Ariz., the clubhouse will combine luxurious golf and dining facilities with an unparalleled design experience and room for five courses, according to Rich Sonntag, managing director of the development.



Promontory – Jack Nicklaus Course Clubhouse

Sonntag, who had a hand in developing such signature golf communities as Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, likens the Park City phenomenon to Squaw Valley's early years

"(Squaw Valley) used to be this sleepy little mountain nobody could get to," Sonntag says. "Then it opened up for the Olympics and the next 20 years it just took off. ... The same thing is happening here thanks to a wonderful transportation system between Salt Lake City and Park City.

"At Promontory, we like to think we have something for every member of your three-generation family here. And the serious golf guy considers this a serious golf course."

Sonntag is excited about the architecture of the newest 17,000-square-foot clubhouse. He said the building's architects are proficient in incorporating the principles of organic architecture from Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin School of Architecture.

"This clubhouse will complement the site because it doesn't dominate the topography, it rises up out of it," Sonntag said. "It will take advantage to the fullest extent of the vistas looking both south and west across the back nine of the Nicklaus course."



Promontory – The Ranch

Architect John Sather, who did much of the original land planning for Promontory, said the goal was not to create something large, but rather a clubhouse of great quality and special design. The clubhouse incorporates glass, contemporary-cut stone and steel and is informed by the work of sculptor Alexander Calder.

"As we've explored architecture at Promontory, we think it's time to begin to weave in contemporary expressions of mountain architecture," Sather said. "Golf clubs are often noted as a big white house on the hill with bad food. We wanted to match the quality of the golf course with the architecture."

Reynolds Plantation, Greensboro, Georgia

Less than three years after New York-based financial conglomerate MetLife and longtime commercial and residential real estate developer Daniel Corporation acquired financially troubled Reynolds Plantation, the Ritz-Carlton Lodge-anchored golf and residential community is stronger than it's ever been. And even more luxurious and desirable.

After being taken over by a receiver, Reynolds Plantation's new owners have committed millions of new capital investment and new improvements in the community, enhancing nearly every facet of the award winning residential golf community from the 117 holes of breathtaking championship golf to The Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation.



Reynolds Plantation Home Exterior

Residents, members, and visitors to Reynolds Plantation - located on 19,000-acre Lake Oconee between Atlanta and Augusta - are abuzz over the new vitality the improvements have infused in the community.

And it's translating into some of the strongest real estate activity in the development's history.

For example, real estate leads and tours were up approximately 16 percent through October 2014, compared with the previous year, according to Reynolds Plantation.

Most importantly, real estate closings continued its torrid 2013 pace of being "up 75 percent year-over-year," and that comprises everything from a \$300,000 cottage to a \$2 million premium lake lot, according to Reynolds Plantation president Rabun Neal. Overall, the 12,000-acre community has more than 63 homes currently under construction.

John Gunderson, Daniel Corporation President-Communities, has been involved in several successful high-end residential golf communities in the Birmingham, Ala., market, but Reynolds Plantation is a special place that represented the "perfect real estate investment opportunity."

Gunderson also believes golf will continue to play a high-profile position at Reynolds Plantation, and high-end master-planned residential development in general.

"I believe the game of golf will always be important to resort properties, and will be for the next generation as well," adds Gunderson, whose Birmingham, Ala.-based organization is responsible for overseeing Reynolds' six golf courses, four marinas, Ritz-Carlton Lodge and nearly 6,000 acres of undeveloped land. "The game of golf is alive and well. It's not going away. It's constantly trying to reinvent itself, reaching



Reynolds Plantation Great Waters Aerial

a broader audience; younger players; women. ... But it's the one game that can be enjoyed your entire lifetime and that can be played by people and families of all different skills on a wonderful afternoon.

"It's recreation enjoyed by people, not only in this country, but all over the world. There's not another sport that really compares to that. Plus when you think about the beauty, the nature, the heritage of the sport. ... That image, that practicality, will always be a differentiator for real estate and will always be an important part to community development."

Copala at Quivira Los Cabos, Mexico

Quivira, one of Mexico's premier luxury residential resort communities featuring more than three miles of pristine Baja Peninsula golden beaches, picturesque desert cliffs and panoramic ocean views, is progressing quickly on an exciting new deluxe golf and resort community called Copala.

Situated next to the spectacular new Jack Nicklaus-designed Signature Golf Course, Copala is a full-time home and condominium community that fans out in the mountain foothills at Quivira Los Cabos and takes advantage of the dramatic site's panoramic ocean views, white sandy beaches and sheer rocky cliffs.

This ocean-view, master-planned development will showcase luxurious 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom condominiums, the Nicklaus-designed championship course, and full access to adjacent restaurants and award-winning spas. According to the developer, renowned resort developer Ernesto Coppel, Copala Residences and Condominiums at Quivira Los Cabos captures the "timeless charm and Cabo flair of casual elegance with unmatched quality and superb service."

Taking advantage of its elevated position along the foothills of gently rolling desert bluffs, Copala offers the rare opportunity to reside in style in a community with panoramic views of the place where the Pacific Ocean meets the Sea of Cortes. Also in view is the historic Old Lighthouse at Land's End, the region's oldest standing structure, along three magnificent miles of pristine beaches.



Quivira Clubhouse Vista

Part of a full-service resort community, Copala will offer an array of hospitality and activity amenities, including a beachfront clubhouse, spas, restaurants, natural conservation areas, walking/hiking trails, gardens and golf as part of the overall 1,850-acre master-planned Quivira.

"Our team has worked with the canvas Mother Nature provided to create what we hope is one of the most spectacular courses in the world," Nicklaus said of Quivira, a 7,319-yard, par-72 layout. "This property afforded us a rare opportunity because of its topographic diversity and natural environment."

The new Nicklaus course features more oceanfront holes than any other development on the Baja Peninsula, highlighted by a dazzling array of windswept dunes, sheer cliffs and desert foothills.

Copala's first home was completed last December, and the community's first apartment building was scheduled to be finished in April. At full completion, Copala will feature 85 houses and seven 6-floor buildings, each with 36 apartments, including 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom units. In addition to the Quivira Beach Club, the development will also offer its own clubhouse.