

No-Fuss Hamptons Living

By ROBIN FINN MAY 1, 2015



Marlo Golub-Spilko dropped the idea of a Hamptons house when she saw a five-bedroom condo with concierge service at Bishops Pond in Southampton. Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

The intimidating wish list flaunted by discriminating house hunters in [the Hamptons](#) is nothing new. These shoppers are like diners who blithely order dishes nowhere in sight on the restaurant menu: Their sense of entitlement is accompanied by a desire for a totally customized experience.

The latest residential trophy for these buyers is an elegant new abode with services attached. They want an injection of sophisticated city-style amenities in blissed-out beach country, the better to spend their time enjoying their getaways, not fretting over mundane details like upkeep.

One result of this craving is the appearance of luxury condominiums, a commodity not traditionally identified with the Hamptons. They seem to be the of-the-moment alternative to the sprawling shingled, tricked-out McChateaux that have held sway for the last few decades.

New high-end developments in the villages of Sag Harbor and Southampton have already attracted buyers. A handful of other condo/townhouse projects are in various stages of the planning and approval process, among them a 48-unit townhouse project proposed for Water Mill; a 25-unit condo community on the site of the Lobster Inn in Southampton; and a 37-unit townhouse development just across the Shinnecock Canal from the historic Canoe Place Inn in Hampton Bays, whose restoration was part of the approval package.



An exterior and sunset view at Harbor's Edge, a luxury condo in Sag Harbor.
Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

“In the Hamptons, the word condo used to be like a punch line,” said Andrew Saunders, the president of Saunders & Associates, a real estate brokerage. “But that isn’t the reaction the new luxury developments like Watchcase in Sag Harbor and Bishops Pond in Southampton, which is already into its second phase, are receiving. What we’re seeing as a sort of mini-trend relating to condos is really part of an overall evolution in 2014 and 2015 of buyers wanting everything to be new.

“Interest in the condo lifestyle is particularly acute among aging baby-boomers who may already own big homes out here,” Mr. Saunders added. “They want to stay in the Hamptons, and they want updates, but they don’t want to deal with the headache of renovating or building.”

However, the prevailing civic sentiment on the South Fork regarding condo developments leans heavily toward barring the gate. In general, local officials and longtime residents are not fans of multifamily housing developments, no matter how upscale they might be.

“Right now it’s almost like we have two societal forces colliding,” said Keith Green of Halstead Property Development Marketing, the sales manager for [Harbor’s Edge](#), a condominium development in Sag Harbor, with the baby boomer demand for luxury condos “running up against a tradition of civic pressure against condos that is common all across the Hamptons. It’s a Nimby-ism that says: ‘We don’t want more traffic or more crowds, and we don’t want more change.’”

Mr. Green said that Harbor’s Edge, much like [Bishops Pond](#), was approved in no small part because it marked a clear improvement over what had preceded it on the site — a waterfront nightclub that kept late and loud hours. Bishops Pond replaced a derelict sand mine. And [Watchcase, Sag Harbor](#) represented the inventive repurposing of a long-vacant [Bulova factory](#) in Sag Harbor village.

Condo sales held just a 4.3 percent share of the Hamptons market in the first quarter of 2015, according to Jonathan J. Miller, the president of Miller Samuel, the appraisal firm. “But I would expect their market share to expand in the coming years with the rising popularity of condos on the East End,” Mr. Miller said. “Luxury condos are a relatively new phenomenon out East, but today’s weekend warriors evidently like the idea of little to no upkeep.”

Another twist on the theme are high-end subdivisions, like [Barn & Vine](#), 37 single-family houses off Scuttlehole Road in Bridgehampton, with, for those residents who want it, a menu of concierge extras aimed at making homeownership a truly turnkey experience.

Barn & Vine, on 50 acres adjacent to the [Channing Daughters Winery](#), offers seven house styles, from the Twin Gable to the Sonoma Barn, priced at a proven market sweet spot, \$2.75 million to \$3.99 million, all in varying shades of cedar, with brick or stone fireplaces and a 40-foot pool in the backyard.

Determined to make life easy for residents from the get-go, the developer, a collaboration between Continental Ventures and Pinewood Development, is providing a free move-in package, 30 hours of concierge services that can include meeting the moving van. For instance, Jane Gol, the president of Continental Ventures, suggested, “We’ll move them in, have their beach passes ready and their cable and Wi-Fi installed, and all they really need to do is bring their toothbrush.”

Ms. Gol said that two years of market research guided the creation of the final product: “The market spoke strongly of a need for more homes in the \$3 million range, and we saw a big desire for this size home, around 4,000 to 4,700 square feet, not counting the lower level,” she continued. “People don’t want something too large if it’s not their only home and they’re only using it for vacations or weekends.”



Susan Sokol and her home-to-be at Barn & Vine, a high-end subdivision in Bridgehampton. Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

Susan and Michael Sokol, [Manhattan](#) fashion executives who had built and sold three houses in the Hamptons and relied on summer rentals for the last four years, were looking to downsize a little and were among the first buyers at Barn & Vine.

“We did a lot of shopping around, and the value and quality of finishes exceeded that of the other spec homes we saw,” said Ms. Sokol, who runs her own consulting firm. “Throughout the process I’ve been impressed by the thoughtfulness that went into the design.”

“The idea is fully curated,” she said, “but you put your own personal stamp on it with your choices of tile, stone, lighting and hardware, whatever. We actually changed the formal dining room to a family room. At 4,100 square feet, it feels manageable and not overwhelming, and the concierge service is another lovely perk.”

For house hunters who want turnkey but prefer a little more privacy and acreage with their acquisition, there are options like Black Barn, a fledgling brand from the designer [Mark Zeff](#) that bills itself as the anti-McMansion and, more to the point, looks it.

Mr. Zeff built a Black Barn prototype for his family near a bay beach in East Hampton after he couldn’t find anything on the market that appealed to him. His 6,200-square-foot house is stark on the outside and bursting with industrial chic on the inside. And thanks to investors like Robert Dankner, the president of Prime Manhattan Residential, and the developer/physician Jerry Lubliner, the place has spawned a potential franchise.

“I fell for it and I don’t fall for anything,” Mr. Dankner said. “It’s like the coolest Manhattan loft you’ll ever find, crossbred with the greatest Hamptons house: It’s the Labradoodle of houses. It’s an art project, but it’s livable and the antithesis of show-offy.”

The second Black Barn is under construction on Noyac Path in Sag Harbor. The \$4 million house will have nearly 8,000 square feet of living space; outside will be a pool and a tennis court. Mr. Zeff said he can build Black Barns on a fast track — his house took just seven months, and the Sag Harbor house is expected to be completed by autumn of this year. Furthermore, he says he can bring in a Black Barn for about half the cost per square foot of a typical Hamptons spec house.

“Not everybody can go and spend \$37 million to live on the ocean in a 1910 cottage, but you don’t need to spend that kind of money to have a unique living experience in the Hamptons,” Mr. Zeff said. “My aesthetic is: Take out the faux Tudor, the faux Normandy cottage, take out all the fauxness and give buyers elegance without all the trim.”

For buyers seeking luxury without guilt, there’s 183 Bull Path in East Hampton, an environmentally friendly \$3.995 million newcomer that generates its own energy. The house was developed by [Marc Cléjan](#), the owner of GreenLogic, a renewable energy firm.

Like Mr. Zeff, he used his own home as a guinea pig for what he hopes will become a sought-after brand, a “net zero energy” house that provides as much energy as it consumes. Built in a cubist style, Mr. Cléjan’s 3,800-square-foot [geothermal](#) house is performing just as he’d hoped. “It’s the Tesla of houses,” he said. “I have no utility bills except the propane for my stovetop.”



Mark Zeff's prototype Black Barn house in East Hampton is a stark rebuttal to the ubiquitous Hamptons McMansion. Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

His spec house at 183 Bull Path is decidedly grander — it has six bedrooms, six baths, four decks and five gas fireplaces — but incorporates all of the same technology. “This is a house that literally works for you instead of you working for it,” said Meg Salem of Saunders, the listing agent. “We are selling relaxation in an environmentally aware package.”

But in the haute assemblage of hamlets and villages in the Hamptons, the emergence of a very visible cadre of luxury condo developments is probably the most surprising addition to the horizon.

Doormen? Pool attendants? Dog-walkers? Wine cellar restocking? In-house interior decorators? Groceries not just shopped for but delivered and unpacked? All these services are potentially available. There is now an opportunity to be shamelessly pampered 24/7, without having to pay the salaries of, and surrender space and privacy to, live-in staff.

“We do everything for our clients as long as it’s legal,” said Chaloner Chute, a Scotsman who with his wife, Kathleen Doherty, operates [Chaloners of the Hamptons](#), a concierge service with 40 clients and, thanks to an affiliation with Bishops Pond and Barn & Vine, more on the way.

Mr. Chute describes himself as a middleman between wealthy residents and the blue-collar workers who provide the services that streamline the homeowner experience.

“To be effective in this business, you’ve got to have the attitude that anything is possible,” Mr. Chute said. “Maybe three or four years ago, if you mentioned the word concierge out here, people’s eyes would glaze over, but it is catching on like wildfire. I’ve had to fish a dead raccoon out of a swimming pool, make coffee and lemon stains vanish from marble counters, remove a ball stuck in the pocket of a billiards table and, what was probably the hardest task, build a Barbie dollhouse.”

Bishops Pond, 69 units on 13 lush acres that were formerly zoned for industrial use, considers itself a pioneer of the upscale Hamptons condo genre.

“This was an untested product,” said Steven Dubb, a principal of the Beechwood Organization, the developer of Bishops Pond and, more recently, of 10 townhouses ranging from \$1.75 million to \$2.2 million on an adjacent site called the Enclave at Bishops Pond. “We build condos all over [Long Island](#), but when you go east of the Shinnecock Canal, in some ways it’s like a different state; it really is the ‘Land of No.’ ”

Mr. Dubb said he feared his project would face a communal taboo against condos. “But we got past that hurdle and got the development approved in 2011-2013 by convincing people we were going to do it the nice way, with every detail up to the standards of a typical Hamptons home or mansion,” he said.

Apparently plenty of people liked the idea. Of the 69 Bishops Pond condos, just two are not yet spoken for. Prices, which began at \$837,000 when the sales office opened on a snowy March weekend in 2013, have been raised six times. “As it turned out,” Mr. Dubb said, “people prefer to have certain things done for them.”



Mark Zeff on the stairs of his Black Barn house. Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

Marlo Golub-Spilko and her husband, Howard Spilko, a lawyer, live in Port Washington, N.Y., and had searched for an appropriate weekend home for years before pouncing on a \$1.7 million five-bedroom, four-bath condo at Bishops Pond.

“It’s a dream house, I felt like I custom-built it,” said Ms. Golub-Spilko, one of the 25 or so buyers who have opted for the concierge service. “It gives me peace of mind to know that Chal has a key to my house and can come by to check the thermostat or be there for a furniture delivery.”

Mr. Green, the sales manager at Harbor’s Edge in Sag Harbor, where the 18 condos range from \$2.25 million for a two-bedroom to \$6.5 million for a penthouse with a garage, described the ease awaiting owners. “People buying at Harbor’s Edge and similar new developments really only need to have two skill sets: They have to be able to write a check and they have to be able to turn a key.”

Besides offering manicured grounds, underground parking and water views from all of its units, Harbor’s Edge, which is aiming for summer/fall occupancy, will have a rooftop pool, a sun deck, a spa, a bar and, of course, an on-premises concierge.

“These developments are answering the demand for a different kind of lifestyle,” Mr. Green said.

Owning in a development with a concierge, he added, is “a rational grab for freedom from having to deal with the 14 different service companies you rely on to keep your single-family home functional and beautiful. Move into a condo and you don’t worry about the plumber, the landscaper, the pool guy. You can spend more time with the grandkids, or traveling, or doing whatever you moved to the Hamptons for in the first place.”

The Watchcase, the former Bulova plant, was resurrected as luxury condos in late 2013. It has 47 units ranging in price from \$1 million to \$10 million for a penthouse, as well as nine adjacent new townhouses and seven new bungalows. The project is 72 percent in contract, according to Cee Scott Brown of Corcoran Sunshine Marketing, the listing agent and the future resident of a “little retirement pied-à-terre” there.

When James Wilson and his wife, Katy, went to see the Watchcase, they already had a “showcase, five-bedroom, five-bath house in Sag Harbor,” Mr. Wilson said. The couple’s plan was to buy a unit as an investment. “Then what intrigued me was the thought of being able to go out for the weekend and not have to worry about taking care of a house and pool, which gets kind of exhausting,” said Mr. Wilson, the creative director for a men’s apparel firm and, with his wife and two children, a weekday resident of Dumbo, [Brooklyn](#).

The Wilsons wound up selling their house and buying a 1,200-square-foot unit at the old factory for themselves for just under \$2 million. “At Watchcase, the time management quotient is zero — we just show up and enjoy the amenities,” Mr. Wilson said. “It feels more like a vacation.”

Vacation mode is, after all, the pulse of the Hamptons.

“Our weekend residents will be able to pull into their driveways on a Thursday or Friday night and see that their house is ready and waiting for them,” Ms. Gol said of the potential Barn & Vine hospitality packages. “The lights will be on, the wine will be chilled, and the pool will be heated.”

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