

How's this for a backyard?

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The 13th hole at the Brookwater estate, Springfield, Brisbane.

Lisa Carapiet

Golfing estate developers are on the hunt for buyers and they are casting their nets wider than the semi-retired set.

The “tee change” movement may still be occurring, but the niche market is not strong enough to buoy developers’ profit and loss statements.

“The market expected that we were a very expensive product for a very mature audience,” says John Hughes, general manager sales at Sanctuary Cove, Queensland.

“The global financial crisis brought that crashing down. So buyers are expecting value for money and the demographic of buyers is now younger.

“That’s more our market than the mature market. Most golf course buyers actually just want green space,” he says.

Mulpha Sanctuary Cove is embarking on The Winter Collection, a residential offering of designer house and land packages at the Banksia, Tristania and Alpinia areas of the Hope Island gated community.

The development, which starts in August, has cable television personality and residential property professional Andrew Winter as a backer.

A four-bedroom home with land is being priced at \$899,000 but average prices are likely to be about \$1.2 million.

“We have 600 lots to sell and there’s a long future attached to the project, with the roll out expected to take 10 to 15 years,” Hughes says.

He concedes that golf courses can be a financial liability for developers, as they forgo housing stock to build them, but the layout at Sanctuary Cove is guaranteed thanks to state law.

In the decade to 2010, a flood of golfing estates came onto the market. About 49 courses were opened, roughly three-quarters having a residential offering.

Now the golfing estate sector is moving into a different phase, says golf industry analyst Jeff Blunden. “The large supply increase we have had in terms of development is slowing,” he says.

“It had to, regardless of what demand there was for real estate, as there are fewer economically viable sites available.

"[The sector is now] deep into releasing stages of master plans and the secondary selling of what has been developed. It is also learning more about how golf needs to best work within these developments."

Blunden says the property sector has had to adapt to survive. "A reality in this country is that when you build something like this, you have to have something for everybody. Golf is currently suffering flattening levels of participation," he says.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show golf participation levels fell from 875,500 Australians in 2005-06 to 786,300 in 2009-10 – that is, from 5.5 per cent of the population to 4.5 per cent.

"Just like in any development, you have to draw in everybody," Blunden says.

Golfing estates in their purest form are a challenging real estate market, he adds.

They typically require 120 hectares, which is difficult to find close to a city.

Blunden estimates only 25 per cent of golfing estate residents play on the course.

At Waterford Valley Golf Course in Knoxfield, Victoria, owner Gary Thompson has about 12 of 33 villas still for sale from the first stage of its residential offering, at between about \$450,000 and \$650,000.

"They've been selling at a reasonable rate ... but every sale is like pulling teeth," he says. During the first stage, Thompson tried to sell houses along a creek off the plan for \$800,000, but none sold.

"We rubbed that plan out and went back to council with a different plan, so the price points were back at the cheaper end," he says. "It's a lifestyle change property and unique because it's in an internal precinct ... We've brought a bit of Malvern to Knoxfield."

The second stage will be pricier, another 42 villas to be built looking over a creek and the golf course. Prices are expected to range from \$580,000 to \$1.5 million, Thompson says.

Brookwater residents in Queensland's Springfield have access to a Greg Norman-designed golf course, tennis courts, award-winning clubhouse and the Drift restaurant. While values are stable, according to Brookwater Residential executive general manager Terry Honan, buyers are hunting for good deals.

That is why the latest batch of homes to hit the market at Brookwater suit the \$495,000 market. The four-bedroom, two-bathroom homes with bush frontage have generated high inquiry levels.

Now sitting with the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure is Golden Bear, a \$150 million development in the Hunter Valley. It includes a luxury hotel, championship golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus and 300 dwellings.

The development, which has been on the cards for Capital Corporation since 2005, was branded a "Trojan horse for back-door residential sub-divisions" in 2007 by the former planning minister Frank Sartor.

Capital Corporation chief executive Greg Taylor says since then, the developer had made significant inroads with the community, as well as the local and state governments.

But Capital Corporation is sticking to its guns, keeping Golden Bear a "lifestyle residential development".

"There will always be a place for a lifestyle product," Taylor says. "As this is not a pure residential development you can't compare it to traditional residential offerings ... More people are wanting to spend their time participating in leisure activities such as playing golf or visiting wineries."

[Rich Chinese turning to golf](#)

[Lisa Carapiet](#)

Golf investment is heading East. While the popularity of golf may have flatlined elsewhere, Asia has welcomed the sport with open arms, according to *Golf's 2020 Vision: The HSBC Report*.

Consumers, particularly from China, are turning to leisure activities as they get richer.

Between 2010 and 2020, Asia is expected to double its share of global middle-class consumption to 42 per cent, HSBC says.

The number of golf courses in China has tripled in less than a decade, from 170 in 2004 to more than 600 in 2011. There is a push to construct more courses in rural China, as they boost local property and land prices.

Golf was banned by China's Communist Party until 1984. It has experienced a rapid rise in popularity nationally in popularity since its official acceptance.

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