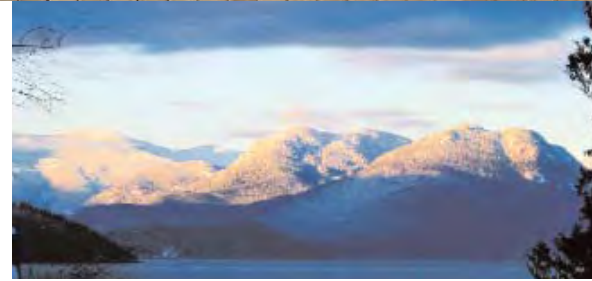


# Laid-Back Living



The cosmopolitan cities of the Pacific Northwest rival the likes of New York and Los Angeles with their scenic vistas and contemporary conveniences. If you are looking for a break from big-city living, however, the region has plenty of alternatives that allow for laid-back living not far from these fast-paced environments.

BY ALEXIS RUBINSTEIN



## WASHINGTON

While Seattle has been recognized for its amazing abodes (not to mention its coffee), the areas surrounding the city have been gaining attention. Jean Groesbeck, an associate broker at Windermere Real Estate, works about 60 miles northwest of Seattle. She describes the luxury real estate market as "Going from being a balanced market to a seller's market with rapid price escalations, appealing to baby boomer and retirees, to a buyer's market. Now, it's moving towards a balanced market again."

One area in particular, the San Juan Islands, a small group of islands off the coast of Washington, has been discovered by second-home buyers looking to take a break from their urban lifestyle. Baby boomers have taken interest in the real estate of the islands and make up the majority of Jean Groesbeck's clients.

"Their first priority is main-level living," Jean explains, "then guest facilities. They have kids with grandkids and parents coming to visit." While there is a \$4.6 million property on Samish Island in the San Juans currently on the market, most homebuyers are finding their luxury homes, not to mention some peace and quiet, in the \$1 million to \$2 million range.

## OREGON

Though not often noted for its mega-mansions, Oregon has reaped the benefits of the Pacific Northwest's increase in popularity, and offers many options for a luxury homebuyer. Eugene, Oregon, with its clean air, proximi-

ty to the ocean and mountains and fairly moderate climate has seen the impact of this real estate trend.

"Luxury homes used to be more for the elite of our area," says Kathie Robidou of Coldwell Banker Curtis Irving. "As incomes have risen here, as more buyers are choosing to relocate here and as buyers in general have started placing higher value on the comfort and quality of their home, luxury homes have become more common."

Many people relocating to the Eugene area are those professionals who, because of technology, are not required to work from the office. A surprising 13 million-dollar-plus homes sold in the community in the last 12 months.

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

In the Pacific Northwest, island-living translates to crisp, clean breezes and extraordinary scenery. The Southern Gulf Islands, about 2 hours from Vancouver, are like park reserves and offer a limited amount of land, making real estate more treasured. Li Read, a Realtor for RE/MAX Salt Spring, considers the islands a "destination venue."

"The islands are summer-only, because access isn't as good year-round, except Salt Spring Island", Li adds. Consequently, Salt Spring Island is the most expensive of the islands, offering luxury homes from \$3.5 million to \$6 million CDN, while the other islands average listings from \$1.7 million to \$2.9 million CDN.

Another notable gulf island is Bowen Island, a 30 minute ferry ride from

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BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

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## Laid-Back Living

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Vancouver, where eco-friendly construction is being combined with high-end design. Here, the community of King Edward Bay, the brainchild of David Sorenson of Sorenson Fine Homes, "is a culmination of the best waterfront, waterview and forest/meadow lots," Sorenson states.

Started in 2005, the project entailed mapping out the community with minimal interruption to the natural surroundings. From \$400,000 to \$1.5 million CDN for a waterfront lot, clients can use an in-house design team or hire an architect, but must follow design guidelines placed to control the ecological integrity of King Edward Bay homes, and not the aesthetic.

David Sorenson calls King Edward Bay on Bowen Island the "equivalent of Martha's vineyard because of its pure romance and charm." Only here however, can you live well for yourself and the preservation of your environment. **UH**



Kathie Robidou of Coldwell Banker Curtis Irving recently sold this home in Deerwood, just outside Eugene's city limits, for \$1.269 million.

### Fun Facts

The San Juan Islands have the largest concentration of nesting bald eagles in Washington State, with about 130 pairs. They seem to enjoy the average 247 days with sunshine a year and about half the annual rainfall of Seattle, Portland or Vancouver.

Eugene was the first city to have one-way streets and is rated by "Bicycling Magazine" as one of the top 10 cycling communities in the United States.

British Columbia has the largest and oldest trees and the largest fishing industry in Canada (salmon, halibut, clams, cod, crab, oysters, rockfish, shrimp and herring).