

Rim Rock Ranch estates pair wine, luxe living

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Lake County is rebounding — and rebranding — in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Pristine air, the state's largest lake and enticing prices are beckoning a flock of wineries and investors hoping to craft California's next wine destination.

Earthmovers now meander hillsides as construction awakens from a prolonged hibernation. Dozens of wineries have set up in the past several years as Napa and Sonoma became cost-prohibitive. And one particular development has already positioned itself as a haven for viticulture and luxury living.

Rim Rock, a blossoming 800-acre community, offers property owners acreage to cultivate a sizable hobby vineyard and erect a vacation home.

“The more I came out here, the more I was trying to think of reasons not to buy,” said Patrick Taylor, who along with wife, Chris Taylor, purchased the development now known as Rim Rock Ranch in 2001. “We saw an opportunity to create a private, luxury enclave where people could plant vineyards or own horses.”

Rim Rock Ranch is in Middletown next to Hidden Valley Lake. The Taylors subdivided the land to give the 26 lots roughly 20 acres each. A 300-acre estate home to Cimarron Vineyards and the Taylors' former home occupies the rest of the landscape.

A ridge of jagged-faced cliffs acts as a partial halo for Rim Rock Ranch's namesake. Each Rim Rock buyer starts out with a well, security gate and roads, and the lots have an abundance of usable land.

The latest buyer, Silicon Valley executive Raj Singh, has big plans for his 25-acre lot.

Singh expects to devote 15 to 18 acres of the volcanic soil to cultivating Cabernet grapes. In a matter of weeks he'll present his construction plans to Rim Rock Ranch's architectural review board before getting county approval. By next year, he expects to spend long weekends in a home with floor-to-ceiling retractable glass walls and a 2,000-square-foot patio.

“Life is fast-paced and hectic,” Singh said. “When I look back over my life, I want to say I worked hard, but I took time to enjoy what I earned with my wife and kids. This will provide that balance I'm looking for.”

Fellow part-time resident Kevin Makley echoes Singh's enthusiasm for Lake County in general and Rim Rock Ranch in particular.

“I fell in love with its ruggedness and tranquility and that it’s still close to excellent grocery and hardware stores, good restaurants and services,” Makley said. “It’s truly the best of all worlds, you can enjoy nature and still be just seven minutes away from a fresh-brewed latte.”

That latte is in Middletown, but Makley and his neighbors can also hop on Highway 29 and head north to Clear Lake towns or south to the Napa Valley for more dining options.

Wander through any lot at Rim Rock and experience the early days of California. Evergreen-dotted hills rule the landscape. Deer and squirrels scamper about, while hawks circle above. Gentle breezes carry the chatter from the local birds. One can almost envision what pioneers witnessed as their covered wagons inched westward. The American Lung Association has ranked Lake County’s air quality as best in the state for two consecutive years.

The Taylors have taken special precautions to keep Rim Rock Ranch like this. Privacy for each owner is paramount. Homes are largely out of view of one another, and most sit far back on their respective lots. Hilltop homes are prohibited.

“We could’ve done just 5-acre parcels, but we wanted people to plant vineyards and orchards,” Pat Taylor said. “One of our residents operates an apiary and sells his own honey.”

Owners are welcome to operate a tasting room on their property on the condition that tastings are by appointment only. The regulation is one way the Taylors intend to maintain the development’s relaxing vibe.

“People come here to kick back, chill and recharge,” Patrick Taylor said.

And they’ve been flocking to Rim Rock Ranch, where seven lots remain.

The Taylors are thrilled with the community’s development and appreciate their neighbors’ diversity. Architects, vintners and creative minds live together on the picturesque estate.

Patrick Taylor believes Lake County is aggressively changing its identity, and he is eager to take part in the process.

“We have the cleanest air in the state, great soil and the right people,” he said.

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