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The Oregonian

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HOMES & GARDENS OF THE NORTHWEST

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COMMUNITY
BUCKS THE
SUBURBAN
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COTTAGE CRAFT

A pondside community bucks the suburban McMansion trend

By Ruth Mullen | Photos by Marv Bondarowicz | THE OREGONIAN

Barbara Ball wakes each day to the sun rising over Salish Ponds, a restored wetland ringed by native grasses and shrubs tinged gold in the pale morning light.

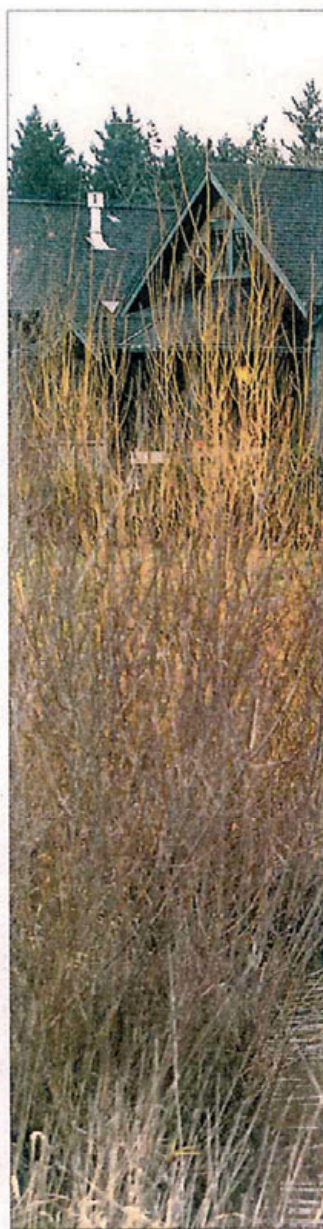
Once an abandoned gravel pit and illegal dumping ground in a forgotten corner of east Multnomah County, the ponds now teem with trout and Canada geese.

Three years ago, Ball traded her 2,400-square-foot home in a nearby Gresham subdivision for the 1,100-square-foot cottage in this pioneering development perched on the edge of a nature preserve in suburban Fairview. Drawn to its cedar-clad charms and natural setting, Ball snapped up her waterside retreat with its wide-plank floors before it hit the market.



GATHERING SPACE | The development's community building, with its natural wood interior, gives residents extra room to host weddings, birthdays and private family gatherings. Alison and Ollie Batdorf, right, say the neighborhood feels like "a whole different world."

Retirees Alison and Ollie Batdorf were the first to buy into the project seven years ago. Avid bird-watchers, they were immediately drawn to the pondside setting with its snow-capped view of Mount Hood.



"I absolutely love it," says Ball, who works for a local title company. "It spoke to me personally because it's so very unique."

So unique, in fact, Gresham dentist and developer Michael McKeel barely scraped a profit out of the \$2 million project when it was completed in early 2001. However, McKeel says profit was never his primary motivation. He joined forces with award-winning Washington architect Ross Chapin to create a community of 10 lakeside cottages that would



challenge conventional suburban development.

But times have changed since 2001. Today the cottages at Salish Ponds are a hot commodity in a cooling market, indicating that Portland's appetite for small homes and friendly neighborhoods is catching up with McKeel's vision. Call it the cottage comeback.

For the past 50 years, Americans have valued large homes on lots so private that residents rarely see their neighbors. Now a passionate few are taking a look at smaller, more

community-oriented alternatives that celebrate the kind of craftsmanship we associate with much older homes.

"A lot of what you see in development nowadays are just curb-appeal facades," says McKeel. "These were well ahead of their time."

A Gresham native, McKeel set out to transform this industrial eyesore at the edge of his hometown into a model for east Multnomah County. Back then, his approach was almost unthinkable: He was asking potential buyers to separate their houses from their cars and open up their private yards to a

shared commons. In return, they each got a water view and access to 19 acres of woods and wetland that McKeel donated to the city of Fairview for a public park.

Today, the cottages often change hands before a "for sale" sign goes up. A 913-square-foot, two-bedroom cottage sold in October for \$266,250. Two days later, a two-bedroom, 933-square-foot cottage went for \$270,000.

Both McKeel and Chapin, a nationally known architect, share a passion for well-planned communities that balance privacy with the need to

HOT COMMODITY | Slow to catch on, Salish Ponds cottages are now coveted real estate in east Multnomah County. Developer Mike McKeel also designed the naturalistic landscape, which includes the fiery branches of red- and yellow-twig dogwoods. "Some see what's there, and they don't see what it could be," he says.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

ow your neighbors. Families have
ten smaller even as our houses
ve gotten bigger, says Chapin, and
r social fabric is fraying. In the
st, small towns would be filled with
ended families and real neighbors.
"Now we live in oversized houses
lated in the suburbs, but we still
ve needs that the extended family
ed to offer," he says.

McKeel and Chapin bet on a
rket of young adults and retired
ples who crave the charms of a
all, well-crafted home. Besides,
apin added, if you really think
out the rooms people use on a
ily basis, they rarely add up to
re than 1,200 square feet. As oil
ces continue to climb, many are
ginning to view their homes as
ergy hogs. For these folks, small
ily is beautiful, especially when it
cludes reclaimed old-growth cedar
d pine, casement windows, built-in
okshelves and water views.

Retirees Alison and Ollie Batdorf
were the first to buy into the project
seven years ago. Avid bird-watchers,
they were immediately drawn to the
pondside setting with its snow-
capped view of Mount Hood. "When
we first saw it, we thought it was
some sort of camp," says Alison.
"You're right off Glisan, but it's a
whole different world."

Ranging in size from about 900 to
1,200 square feet, the cottages cost
about \$200 per square foot to build.
Every inch oozes craftsmanship, from
the all-wood windows, wainscoting
and built-ins to the tiled bathrooms
to the porches built from cedar
salvaged from an old Alaskan
cannery.

Seven years ago, many potential
buyers balked at the \$200,000-plus
asking price, especially when
conventional homes twice that size
were fetching similar prices.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

Barbara Ball says her large extended family always insists on
gatherings at her house, even though six adults can barely
squeeze into her eating nook.



REAL CHARACTER | Barbara Ball,
above, loves the salvaged butcher-block
countertop that warms up her cozy cot-
tage kitchen. She often hosts family
gatherings in the built-in eating nook,
right, simply because that's where every-
body wants to be. Her sleeping loft,
below right, is a favorite retreat tucked
under exposed rafters and sloping eaves.



LATER VIEWS | Ball's living room, which boasts a real working Dutch door, looks out onto Salish Ponds, offering magnifi-
cent sunrises with Mount Hood in the distance.

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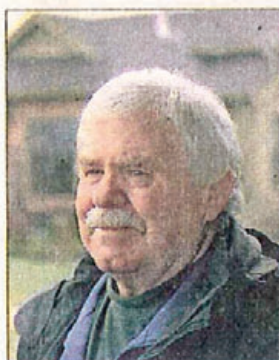
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A Gresham native, Michael McKeel set out to transform this industrial eyesore at the edge of his hometown into a model for east Multnomah County.



Valerie Correa, a single mom, loves knowing her neighbors. And she marvels at how many of her friends want to come over simply so they can nap. Walking in her front door at the end of a long day, she says, is like stepping into a warm, comforting embrace.

"It's nice to walk into a place that feels peaceful, because my job is so stressful," she says. "You really have a sense of quiet. It's like a retreat."

The 2,000-square-foot lot her home sits on is plenty of space for this full-time marriage and family therapist to handle. Monthly homeowner fees cover the cost of maintaining the grounds and the community building. Correa and her 8-month-old son, Tate, often explore the park's wooded pathways in search of frogs and rabbits. And her next-door neighbor, Alison, always makes sure her plants are watered.

"I wrote a poem about the place when I bought it," says Correa. "That's how much it inspired me." •

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"People couldn't cope with paying that much per square foot," says McKeel, especially when the garages — gasp — weren't attached.

A far cry from the "bang-it-up Sheetrock box" with a two-story foyer and attached three-car garage, the cottages have two bedrooms and one full bath with a stacked washer and dryer tucked into one corner. There is no basement, only an attic loft with an exposed-beam ceiling that evokes the seaside cottages of old.

Ball says her large extended family always insists on gatherings at her house, even though six adults can barely squeeze into her eating nook. A freestanding cast-iron gas stove heats her entire space.

"Here you're buying a lifestyle," she says. "It's not just real estate."

Architect Chapin is a master at capturing views and natural light, creating a sense of space without superfluous square footage. Windows, porches and landscaping are designed to enhance privacy between the closely spaced houses, while the development itself encourages casual social interaction. The homes' graceful proportions and nostalgic cottage style only heighten their appeal.

The emphasis on community and walkability evokes the small-town feel of McKeel's youth, when "everybody walked around and sat on their front porches, and everybody knew each other."

It's a way of life he's trying to recapture, one development at a time. Each house comes with an oversize single-car garage tucked at the back of the development, requiring residents to wander a well-lit pathway from their garage to a communal mail drop, past the community building and through their landscaped commons to their front doors. "The social dimension of architecture is the critical part," says Chapin. Unfortunately, he adds, that's the element so many developers leave out.

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