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REAL ESTATE AND HOME DESIGN



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WINTER SPRUCE-UP: C
REAL ESTATE POW

DURANGO, CO
Where the smart money
is buying real estate

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Durango, Colorado

Engineer Village homesites are single family homesites located within Durango Mountain Resort. This home won the 2005 Best Luxury Home Award in the Durango Area Parade of Homes.



TUCKED INTO THE FAR SOUTHWESTERN corner of Colorado, Durango isn't the easiest place to reach. During winter snows, mountain passes often close. In summer, those same winding roads can be lined with slow-moving RVs. In other words, coming here takes dedication. And that is precisely what keeps the place magical.

"We are truly a frontier-feeling town," says Geoff Overington, a broker with Prudential Triple S Realty who was raised in Durango. "I left after high school but quickly came back. It's just a fantastic place to raise kids. Just look at our outdoors. Who needs Nintendo?"

Nature indeed rules these parts. Consider that Durango's 15,000 residents occupy a mere five square miles, while the

surrounding San Juan National Forest, replete with pine forests, aspen groves, streams and lakes, covers two million acres. And there's more: epic steep-and-deep skiing at nearby Purgatory at Durango Mountain Resort, fascinating high-country ghost-town touring outside of neighboring Silverton, and mountain biking trails of such renown that some of the sport's top practitioners who have trained here now call Durango home.

And they are not the only ones. As with many of Colorado's lesser-known gems, Durango has experienced a real estate boom in the past few years, and compared to places such as Aspen, the prices seem downright modest. Median home prices are in the high-\$400,000 range, while



building costs run from \$175 to \$250 per square foot, about half of those of tony Telluride and other marquee Colorado destinations.

Even at the upper end of the market, deals—relatively speaking—can be had. A renovated 6,000-square-foot Victorian in the desirable historic downtown goes for \$2.5 million, while a similarly sized five-acre Purgatory retreat 20 minutes outside of town fetches \$4.5 million. Add a couple million dollars more to the mix and you will have a 40-acre estate on the Animas River.

Many of Durango's high-end buyers hail from major coastal cities such as Los Angeles, New York and Miami, and they make use of Internet connectivity to keep in touch

with business while relaxing at their Colorado retreats.

"People interested in top properties are really starting to buy here with a vengeance, and I'd like to think that these are folks who didn't get where they are today by making poor decisions," says Jim Wotkyns of the Wells Group. "A lot of the people we see obviously do have the money to buy in towns like Aspen, but frankly, they come here because they don't want the glitz. People don't go crazy about celebrities here—they leave them alone, and many want just that."

Oprah came to town last summer to film a segment for her TV show. In it, she repeatedly raved, "I love this town," while expressing amazement that "nobody is fat here," a nod to the hard-core outdoor folks who make this place

FACTS & STATS

WHERE AND HOW: Durango (elevation 6,512 feet) borders New Mexico and is served by a few major airlines out of nearby La Plata County Airport, which is the simplest and fastest way to arrive. Driving to the region requires a bit more planning and time. Heading in from Denver (330 miles) during winter months requires a careful eye on road closures, as a variety of mountain passes come into play. Coming from points south such as Phoenix (460 miles) adds a bonus trek through the scenic Navajo Nation and Four Corners areas (800.463.8726, www.durango.org).

CHUGGING INTO THE PAST: Established in 1881, the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad (877.872.4607, www.durangotrain.com) is more of a time machine than mere retro transportation. The steam-powered train, which snakes its way up 45 miles of track to the old mining town of Silverton, offers striking views of the roaring Animas River and soaring Rockies along the way. Spring's lure is thundering runoffs; fall's includes inimitable Colorado foliage. —M.D.C.



Elkpoint Townhomes on the snow, steps from the lifts at Durango Mountain Resort



“STILL A STEAL”

The Award Winning Durango Mountain Resort (DMR), Southwestern Colorado's fastest growing mountain resort community, located just 25 miles north of Durango in the majestic San Juan Mountains is “still a steal” of a deal. A fantastic winter and summer playground awaits, the resort boasts over 3000 acres of skiing, Nordic, snowmobiling, biking, hiking, swimming, horseback riding, shopping, dining and other fun-filled recreational pursuits. The master plan includes over 1600 custom home, patio home, town home, condominium, fractional/PRC residential offerings and related commercial development opportunities. All of this created with careful attention to Mother Nature including; state-of-the-art air quality monitoring, recycling, bio diesel, work force housing, water conservation, dark-sky ordinances and view corridor preservation measures. Truly a masterpiece in master planned resort communities.

Durango Mountain Realty
(800) 693-2399 or (970) 385-2198
www.durangomountainrealty.com

home, including leading snowboarders.

Although Oprah no doubt appreciated some of the town's upscale restaurants and galleries, perhaps the Windy City denizen was charmed most by its striking simplicity and funky feel that is reflected in everything from a farmers market to health-drink purveyors who grind their goodies using stationary bikes as power.

“We're a real town, with grocery stores and hardware stores,” says Jackson Clark, owner of Toh-Atin Gallery, which specializes in art created by Native American artisans from the neighboring Four Corners region.

“There's still a slower pace of life here,” remarks Clark. “A guy who's a multimillionaire could come into my store, dressed in jeans and boots, and I wouldn't have a clue that back in New York he wears a suit to work every day. That's the appeal of this place.”

Another lure is Durango's growing status as a regional hub for the arts, education and top medical care. Festivals such as Music in the Mountains, hosted by Purgatory, feature a range of traditional and classical concerts, while the Bluegrass Meltdown attracts some of the finest pickers in the nation. Fort Lewis College often brings in name lecturers, while helping lend the town a youthful feel. All this variety makes Durango a tough place to peg.

“We have a college, but we're not a college town, and



Artist's Rendering of the New Purgatory Lodge and The Pinnacle-A Private Residence Club. The \$100 million Purgatory Lodge project will create an entirely new, state-of-the-art base village for Durango Mountain Resort.

while we have a ski area, we're not a ski town—we're just a bit of everything,” says Tom Gorton, president of the Home Builders' Association of Southwest Colorado. “While I occasionally will build an 8,000-square-foot home for someone who'll use it a few weeks a year, mostly I'm working on places that people will live in long term. We're a real town, and the people who tend to come here want that.” —MARCO R. DELLA CAVA