

January/February 2008

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Classic Rock

St. George's Upscale Communities Blend Man and Nature

Art Attack

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cover



Classic

St. George's Upscale Communities Blend Man and Nature



Rock

In the center of St. George, near the intersection of Tabernacle and Main Streets, stand a variety of commercial, government and religious buildings. The St. George Tabernacle, a two-story, red sandstone building dedicated in 1876 with a towering white spire, graces the intersection. The city's new red and yellow sandstone library stands next door. A large Zions Bank branch, also sandstone, sits one block north. Like the library and all the other buildings in the four-block area around the intersection, the bank appears as though it was built at about the same time as the Tabernacle. In fact, it was dedicated less than 10 years ago.

"City planners wanted to preserve the historical look in this area, so all these buildings were constructed to look as if they were built in the early days of St. George," says Russ Behrmann, president of the St. George Area Chamber of Commerce.

By Greg Taggart

Photos by Kevin Kiernan

“Nature defines everything we do at Entrada.”

About six miles to the northwest, a few minutes from the mouth of majestic Snow Canyon, sits Entrada, an upscale development at the outermost edge of St. George's city limits. On a roundabout inside the development stands a towering hand-like slab of red rock, its fingers stretching toward the blue sky. The figure of a Native American climbs toward the top, his loincloth flapping in the breeze. And like the sandstone buildings in St. George's historic district, the slab — with its loin-clothed climber — is a recent creation that adds to, rather than subtracts from, the surrounding natural beauty.

That, in a few words, describes Entrada, one of the most extraordinary private, gated golf course communities in the Southwest and home to Utah's No. 1 rated year-around golf course, according to *Golf Digest* and the clubhouse setting for the movie “High School Musical 2.” “Nature defines everything we do at Entrada,” says Kent Bylund, a managing partner at Split Rock Development and the person everyone credits with being the visionary behind the 12-year-old project.

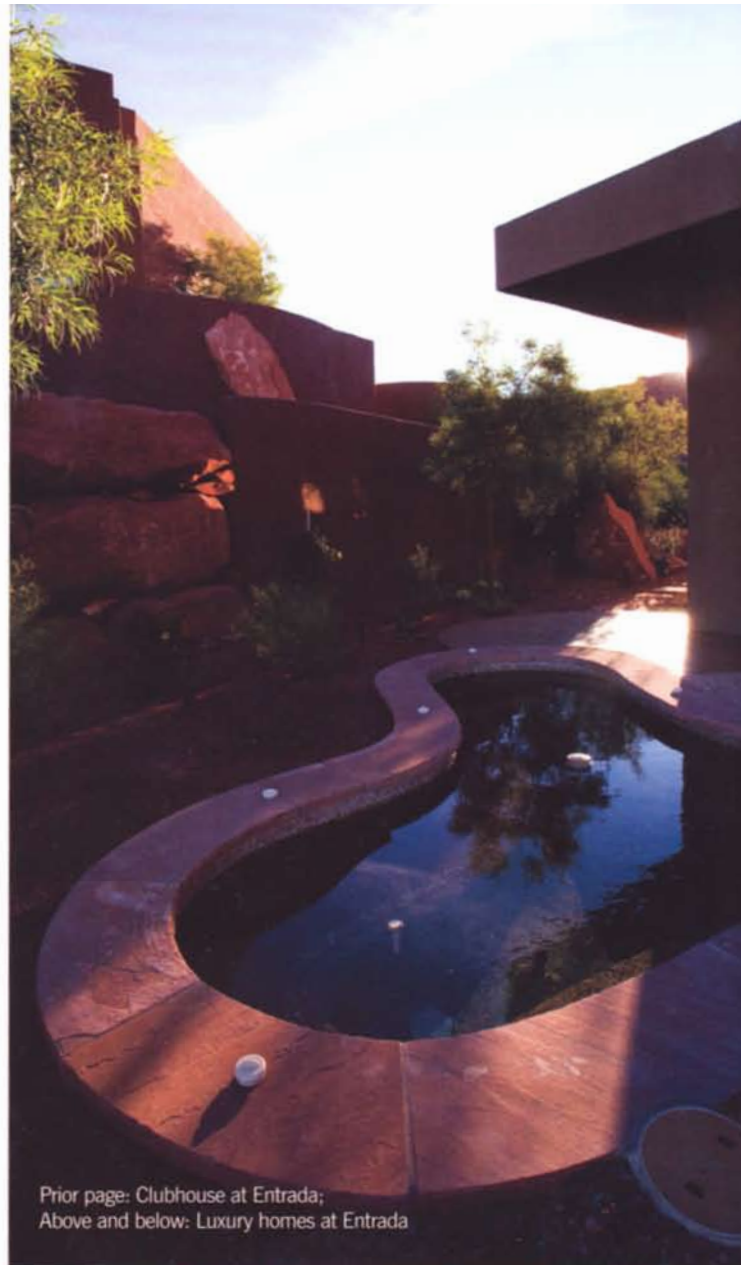
Nature's Palate

To appreciate what he means, you need to understand what nature looks like around Entrada. Five-hundred-foot-tall red rock cliffs sit less than a half-mile to the east, forming a horizon with the brilliant blue sky that runs north to south for about three miles. To the north, more mountain-like red rock formations define the opening to Snow Canyon State Park and stand in stark contrast to white sandstone cliffs at the far end of the canyon. To the south, the horizon radiates the blue, gray and white hues of the hills surrounding the Virgin River Gorge. And adding one more color to this desert palate, black rivers of a centuries-old lava flow break up the virtually continuous landscape of red rock and desert sand.

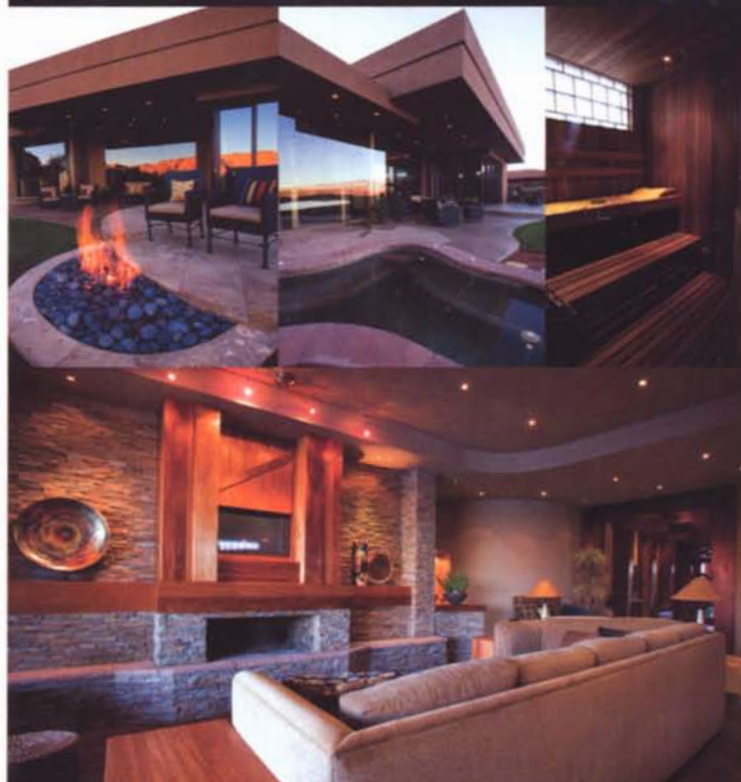
“We're surrounded by the Mojave Desert, which has low vegetation, so all these natural geological wonders are right here to see,” Bylund says. As is Entrada, though by design, Bylund attempts to “blur the line between what nature has done and what man is doing.”

There are no manmade scars on Entrada's landscape. For example, while most gated communities are surrounded by fences — typically tall, angular structures that virtually shout “stay out” — at Entrada low, undulating fences wind snake-like around each community in the development; their soft, rounded edges acting as more of an invitation to the eye than a barrier to the body. If a particular community sits among red rocks and desert, its fence will be formed of desert red stucco. If the surrounding area is lava or white sandstone, so is its fence.

“The layout of the landscaping is very much an integral part not only of each community,” says Lesley Mendenhall, director of galleries for Split Rock. “It is also very closely tied to the natural landscape of the area.”



Prior page: Clubhouse at Entrada;
Above and below: Luxury homes at Entrada



The Ledges

A Step Up and 6 Degrees Cooler

Overlooking Snow Canyon and 1,000 feet above Entrada, sits The Ledges, St. George's newest gated golf course and residential community. So new, the developers turned the first shovel of dirt less than two and a half years ago.

Today, there's an 18-hole championship golf course and clubhouse, a Jack Nicklaus "Academy of Golf," and 50-plus homes in various stages of completion, including a couple with views into Snow Canyon State Park that will take the breath away of even the most jaded home buyer.

"Our property line backs up to Snow Canyon on one side, and on the other side stands some 660 acres of protected habitat," says Mike Visser, director of sales at The Ledges. "In other words, there is a lot of land around us that will never be developed, so these views will never be obstructed."

The project consists of 1,150 acres that in time will feature more than 2,000 homes, two golf courses, two clubhouses, a community center, and a five-star condo hotel with a 35,000-square-foot spa. Lots range in price from \$200,000 to \$2 million. Homes start at \$600,000, with a couple of existing homes selling for well over \$5 million.

"The west side of the development, the Snow Canyon side, will be gated," Visser says. "In fact, we'll have gates within gates to give a sense of privacy and seclusion." And seclusion is what you'll find, particularly if you build on the red rock rim overlooking Snow Canyon.

"We have access to hiking trails, biking trails, and hundreds and hundreds of acres of trails for horseback riding just off the property," Visser continues. "We'll also have hiking and biking trails within the community."

At this point, the Matt Dye-designed golf course is the focal point of the development. Graced by a clubhouse that matches the upscale plans for the rest of the development, the course features a links-style front nine with lots of rolling hills, and a back nine with a rough of desert sand, cactus and rock outcroppings. "It's more of the traditional desert target golf that people are used to in this area," explains Colby Cowan, director of golf. "There's a lot of undulation to the greens; that's where the challenge is."

The Nicklaus Academy that opened in September 2007 includes three indoor hitting bays for those two or three days of cold weather St. George experiences each year, a launch monitor that tells you what your ball is doing, and a K-Vest that tells you if your body is in the right alignment to hit the ball properly. "While wearing the K-Vest, an almost choir-like sound goes off when your body is in proper alignment," Colby says. "It's phenomenal technology and the only (one) of its kind in this state."

The views surrounding The Ledge are the perfect capstone to what promises to be another extraordinary development in Utah's Dixie.

Faux Rock, Real Art

What really sets Entrada apart from other gated communities is its art, especially the faux rock art that graces its roundabouts. Created by faux rock artist John Carlson, each heroic-sized piece helps create an almost gallery-like ambience. There's a slender bronze Indian maiden sitting on a rock, wringing actual water out of her newly washed hair. An Indian warrior, mallet in hand, carves petroglyphs into the red rock. And a mother cougar overlooks her cubs, casually lying atop a huge piece of red rock, her bronze paws draped over the side. Each piece is more stunning than the last.

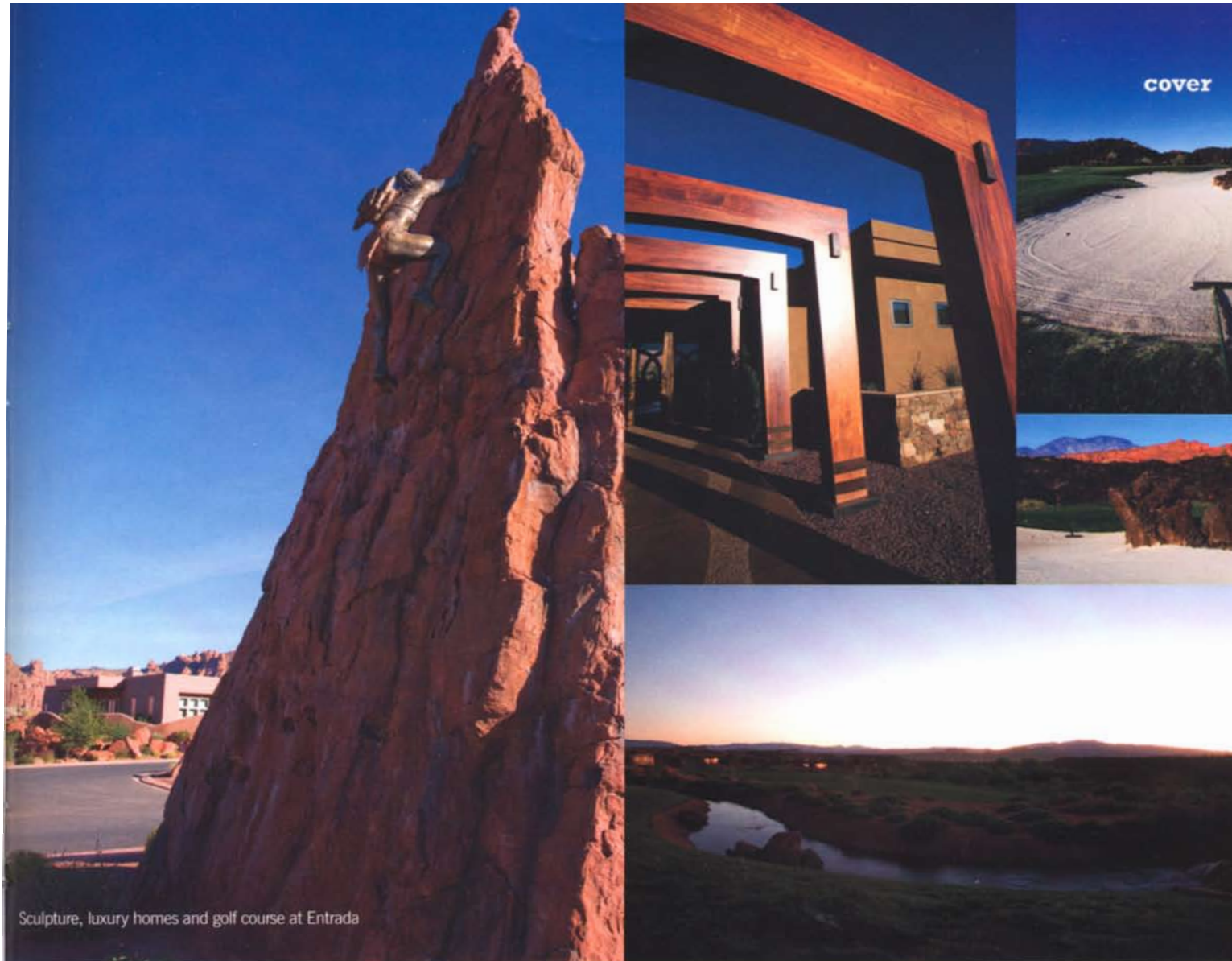
"A lot of people cringe when they hear the words 'fake rock' or 'artificial rock,'" Carlson says. "I used to cringe, too, but we really treat the rock as an art form as opposed to just slapping up something to cover something else."

Bylund needs faux rock for his creations because state law — and the laws of physics — often won't allow him to move the massive rocks he needs. The hand-like piece with the climber, for example, is close to 20 feet tall and 40 feet in circumference — hardly a rock that would fit on a flatbed.

The faux rock is solid, as well. "The armature is usually a three-eighths-inch rebar," Carlson explains. "And the shotcrete (concrete sprayed through a pressurized hose) averages 4 to 6 inches thick, while the plaster coat adds an additional 2 to 4 inches. When you touch or hit it, you're not going to hear any hollow sounds."

To achieve the realism he demands, Carlson and his crew use trowels, dental picks, and air or water hoses to carve and sculpt the integral colored concrete and plaster into often stunning rock formations. "An acid stain is etched into the cement, so it won't fade like most paints," he says. "Our rock will outlast most of the homes that are built around here."

Carlson's attention to detail mirrors Bylund's, down to the hand-painted lichens that dress up his rock. In fact, it's often hard to tell where the real ends and the faux begins. "We have some techniques that allow the paint to crack, and then we use a filler paint, so you have three-dimensional looking lichen. Most people can't tell the difference."



Sculpture, luxury homes and golf course at Entrada

And that's good, because Bylund incorporates faux rock and lichens into virtually every aspect of the development, including inside and outside the homes and five-star hotel, throughout the clubhouse and restaurant, and around the fitness center and pool. Whether he needs red or white sandstone or black lava rock — or even petrified trees — he turns to Carlson and says, "Make it so." "What John allows us to do is control the rock," Bylund explains. "So we can interface the natural rock with the faux, where they are built right into each other."

Rivers of Lava, Streams of Water

That blending of the natural with the manmade describes holes 15, 16 and 17 of the golf course, where the luscious greens and fairways are built in and around rivers of real black lava. "Other than what we've put in, there is very little vegetation on those holes," says Rob DeMore, general manager at Entrada Country Club and an employee of Scottsdale-based Troon Golf, operator of more than 190 top-tier golf courses worldwide. "You go from the red sandstone cliffs to where the course is completely in the lava. Like the development, the golf course is pretty organic."

Designed by golf great Johnny Miller, the course has just 80 acres of green turf spread over 130 acres. Compare that to 200 acres of turf that cover the course in McCall, Idaho, where DeMore

worked before coming to Entrada. "This course is designed specifically for the desert," he explains. "The less turf you have, the less irrigation."

Even though Entrada owns the rights to most of the water it uses, Bylund takes care not to waste it, whether on the course or in the development. At first glance, this may not be obvious. Water cascades down the hills behind virtually every house or sprays from fountains throughout the development. "However, it's not city water," Bylund says. "It's secondary water, the same water the golf course uses."

There are currently about 800 homes at Entrada, with about 300 lots left to develop in the 800-acre project. "Even with the current weakness in the market, our real estate prices have not budged because we have a very limited resource," Bylund says.

Entrada has something for anyone with a big checkbook and an artistic sensibility, whether that is an \$800,000 patio home built on a 5,200-square-foot lot or a \$7 million custom home on a two-acre lot. Buyers work with Split Rock Development's architects, builders, artists and interior designers to create a home that fits their needs even as it virtually disappears into the surrounding landscape.

"Whether it's natural beauty, architectural beauty or artistic beauty, we want to find that common chord that all people are attracted to," Bylund says. ▬