

Place in the sun

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CALGARY HERALD
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The quarter moon danced across the Sea of Cortez, nudging the tiny waves along until they folded onto the sand beach.

In the evening's quiet, dolphins could be heard calling out as they passed Casa Del Mar, a fractional ownership home on the beach in the quiet, master-planned community of La Bella Vita.

Further out in this 160-kilometre-wide bay separating mainland Mexico from the Baja Peninsula, lights from a line of shrimp boats sparkled as fishermen began their night-long harvest.

For Calgarian Sam Sidhom — who is developing this sandy, seven-hectare strip of land within the larger, 15-hectare gated development of Playa La Jolla — the going down of the sun ends another day of playing developer/host/salesperson/financier/ambassador.

In its early stages, Sidhom considers La Bella Vita a “diamond in the rough.”

But when it's completed in the next five to six years, it will consist of 120

bungalow-style walk-up apartments, 46 town-house villas in two- and three-storey layouts, and 62 single-family homes.

The latest release for the project is the custom

homes.

The custom homes that will dot the property will be built around a series of cul-de-sacs that will leave sufficient space for natural space and desert landscaping.

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Photo, Arturo Romero Guerrero

Buyers Bryce and Connie Bonneville, with son Cole, 2, on the balcony of their villa at La Bella Vita overlooking the Sea of Cortez in Mexico.

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PLACE: 'It's easy for us'

Boathouses and garages are also under construction.

Twenty-four apartments and the custom home sites have been released. As well, 21 townhomes have been snapped up, along with all eight shares of the Casa Del Mar home.

Available full-ownership, two-storey villas are priced from \$289,000 to \$334,900 US.

The units measure 1,400 square feet with three bedrooms and 2.5 baths.

Fractional ownership is also available on other existing villas. Quarter shares start at \$89,900, with one-eighth shares running from \$48,800 to \$58,000.

Phase four bungalows measuring 696 to 940 square feet are priced from \$145,900 to \$194,900. Three-storey villas at 2,000 square feet are priced from \$399,000 to \$429,900.

Casa Loudon is available for \$584,900. It's a spec home with a double-attached garage, three bedrooms and 2.5 baths measuring 2,500 square feet.

It's in a location that will near a proposed amphitheatre and miniature golf course.

Calgarians Bryce and Connie Bonneville were looking for a quiet vacation property — and had even visited Belize three years ago — when they heard about La Bella Vita.

Bryce, 38 — a lawyer who mostly does oil and gas work through his own company — met with Sidhom at La Bella Vita's Calgary sales office near the Springbank Airport. After visiting the resort, he purchased as three-storey villa.

"I liked the development and liked the fact there was something already there to look at — and I know and trust Sam," he says.

The couple and their two-year-old son, Cole, spend a month in their villa during Christmas and try to get down to their property three to four times a year for two-week periods.

"I can work from here — not too hard, though — so it's easy for us," says Bryce.

Connie, 36, likes the fact the development is safe and family-oriented.

From their balcony, a Hobie Cat boat with a colourful sail can be seen skimming past getting the most of an afternoon breeze.

At the controls is Mesh Dayal, a Calgary accountant who introduced Sidhom to the seaside prop-

erty 11 years ago and has a small home there.

Along for the ride is Al Kuysters, Edmonton-based district manager for PCL Construction Management and a fractional owner in Casa Del Mar.

Dayal says the reason for buying property and having a home constructed at La Bella Vita was simple — location on a secluded beach far enough from Puerto Penasco to be quiet, but close enough to get to for a meal or to do some shopping.

Right now, his home is for vacations, but when he decides to retire, it will become a winter retreat.

At 64, Dayal spends his vacation time walking the beach, sailing his catamaran, visiting with fellow residents, and swimming and reading.

"I go six or seven times a year, as often as I can," he says.

He also has a place in Mesa, Ariz. While he was there on a holiday, it was suggested that he should

check out the Puerto Penasco region because it was close to the ocean.

"I came two or three times and decided to buy," says Dayal.

J9 Kuysters, 49, not only has the fractional ownership that he and his family uses for six weeks a year on a rotating schedule, but has purchased two bungalows in the development as an investment.

Kuysters and Sidhom knew each other through the development and construction business and became friends.

"I had always dreamed about having an oceanfront property and when the house was being built in 2004, I knew Sam had the vision and I bought in," says Kusters.

At the centre of the development is the Playa La Jolla Beach Club with two pools, tennis courts and gathering areas for social functions.

As development continues, there will be a coffee shop, a spa and a wellness facility that will include private massage and spa areas, exercise studio with weights and cardio equipment, and a lounge.

While the Sea of Cortez is the star attraction of the community, a main boulevard leading up to the community will be lined by palm trees.

The second of three pools and lounging area will be complete within weeks, with yet another pool, miniature golf course and



Marty Hope, Calgary Herald

The rear of the two-storey villas at La Bella Vita, on Mexico's Sea of Cortez, will have infinity-edge pools, a barbecue area and gardens.

other passive areas yet to come.

The rear of the property is drawn by the Morua Estuary, an ecotourist's haven for fishing, snorkelling, or just casually discovering the myriad shoreline and water habitat. There is also a protected bird-nesting area.

Just along the estuary is an oyster shack where visitors can try their hand at shucking — and eating.

Beyond the estuary to the north are a line of desert mountains.

It was all of this, plus the serenity and natural beauty, that attracted Sidhom to the region — first as a homebuyer 11 years ago and later as the developer.

"There was very little three years ago," says Sidhom during a walking tour of the property. "It wasn't a concrete jungle then — and it won't ever be."

La Bella Vita is a four-hour drive from Phoenix, including an hour's drive into northern Mexico.

Located at Encanto Beach — which is recognized as one of the best beaches in the entire state of Sonora — La Bella Vita is only a 15-minute drive by highway from the quaint, abundant shopping and dining areas of Puerto Penasco, where a monument on the Malecon (waterfront esplanade) honours the shrimping industry.

"You'll never have better seafood anywhere else," says Sidhom from a seaside table at the *Aqui es con Flavio* restaurant.

Sitting over a feast of fish and seafood, Sidhom says an international airport has opened just a few minutes drive from the development.

It will initially be for private and executive flights with the hope that commercial flights from Tucson and Phoenix will be using it by January.

As well, a major highway has

been built that will cut travel time from the San Diego area of California to the Puerto Penasco region.

"I'm hoping to have some meetings with WestJet officials regarding the possibility of this being a seasonal destination for them," says Sidhom. "It would have an unbelievable impact — something similar to what happened to the Comox area on Vancouver Island."

La Bella Vita is being developed as "something affordable for the masses" says Sidhom, adding that it is not his intent to sell to speculators because they "can ruin the market."

La Bella Vita is a place for people looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of big cities and to be near water for their vacations.

It's a place where leisure time is exactly that — read a book, take a swim, gather shells while walking the beach, or relaxing under a rooftop palapa (palm-thatched umbrella).

That was the lifestyle Sidhom was looking for when he bought his home there and it continued as his vision when he became involved in the development as the owner when his business partner died unexpectedly.

"I saw the potential of the property," he says.

"But growth here started to occur faster than we thought due in part to 9/11. People decided they wanted to vacation closer to home and for many, La Bella Vita fit the bill." Sidhom, an Egyptian-born mechanical engineer, has a history of retail and commercial developments from Australia to Fort McMurray.

He emphasizes that the project is totally funded, unlike other developments in this economy.

Experience he gained from constructing hotels and shopping cen-

IN SHORT

PROJECT: La Bella Vita, a master-planned development that covers seven hectares within a larger 15-hectare piece of property that faces the Sea of Cortez. It will be made up of 120 bungalow villas, 46

townhouses and 62 custom single-family homes. Currently, bungalows and two- and three-storey villas are available, as well as custom home lots. Existing amenities include pools, tennis courts, a beach club. Future amenity development will include more pools, barbecue area, miniature golf course, amphitheatre, spa and fitness centre.

DEVELOPER: Calgarian Sam Sidhom.

AREA: Puerto Penasco in Sonora, Mexico.

WHAT'S NEW: Release of 62 custom home lots priced from \$76,000 US.

PRICES: Vary depending on the style of home being considered.

LOCATION: It's a 3 1/2-hour drive from Phoenix, Ariz. Go west to Gila Bend and pick up Highway 85. Cross the international border at Lukeville, Ariz., and take Highway 8 into Puerto Penasco. From there, take the Caborca Highway east and follow the signs.

OPEN HOUSE: La Bella Vita will be holding an open house at its sales centre near the Springbank Airport Sunday and again Nov. 14 and 15 from noon to 4 p.m. The company has a mock-up of one of its villas on the site. To get there, take Highway 1 west to exit 169. Go north to Township Road 250. Turn left and then right on Noorduyn Park. Watch for the La Bella Vita signs.

INFORMATION: Visit www.la-bellavita.com. For appointments, call 403-288-3777.

tres helped bring about the vision for La Bella Vita.

"I'm involved in every aspect of development, construction and design," he says. "I have a very capable staff, but I like to keep my hand in."

As its billboard says: "Here, we overlook nothing but the Sea of Cortez."