




out of the  
**BLUE RIDGE**

North Carolina's mountains showcase an abundance  
of views, gorgeous homes and fabulous golf

BY PATRICK JONES



**G**eorge Vanderbilt set the ultimate standard for second-home options in the North Carolina Mountains. The heir to a shipping and railroad fortune handpicked the mesmerizing views of the Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville to construct his mammoth 125,000-acre Biltmore Estate in the 1880s.

Vanderbilt's 175,000-square-foot summer mansion—covering four acres of interior space—required six years to complete. It houses 35 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms and 65 fireplaces. Furnishings include artwork by Renoir and a chess set once owned by Napoleon Bonaparte. The Biltmore House is no longer used as a residence, but it remains the largest privately owned home in the United States.

The mountainous beauty and temperate climate that attracted Vanderbilt to this region of the Carolinas more than a century ago continues to lure a burgeoning number of second-home buyers with their own luxurious tastes.





Hole No. 12 at Trillium Links



The Biltmore Estate

"We arguably have the best four seasons in the country," says Richard Lutovsky, president and chief executive officer of the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce. "We have a high quality of life. Asheville has definitely been discovered. We have a large number of vacationers who come here each year with the intent of looking at us more closely for either retirement or vacation second homes."

Mount Mitchell, just outside of Asheville, towers over this part of the state at an elevation of 6,684 feet. As the highest peak east of the Mississippi River, it looms atop the spine of a dramatic stretch of geological uplift that defines all of Western North Carolina. From the hamlets of Highlands and Cashiers in the southwest, northward through the eclectic city of Asheville and onward to the university town of Boone, you will find—nearly tucked away—a wealth of upscale communities rich with

stunning homes, private airstrips, world-class golfing and breathtaking vistas.

Asheville is the logical launching point for a second-home tour of the North Carolina Mountains. It is the region's showcase city with approximately 70,000 residents. The non-profit National Trust for Historic Preservation selected Asheville as one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations, recognizing it as one of the best-preserved and unique cities in the country.

Asheville remains comfortably mild even in the heat of summer. Its average temperature in July is an agreeable 73 degrees. Its downtown area features more art deco architecture than any Southern city outside of Miami. Its wide array of restaurant fare ranges from Mediterranean to vegetarian, and craft, music and film festivals are held year round. Hollywood films such as *Dirty Dancing*, *Forrest Gump* and *Last of the Mobicars* were shot in the area. All of





Hole No. 18 at T

this must factor in on the 29 percent increase in the total dollars of home sales from 2004 to 2005.

The Cliffs at Walnut Cove is the Asheville area's only private gated golf community. It features a Jack Nicklaus Signature course that hosts the Nationwide Tour's BMW Charity Pro-Am. Club members hold reciprocal rights at three other The Cliffs communities just across the border in South Carolina, granting access to a total of six courses by various architects, including Tom Fazio.

The 1,300-acre Walnut Cove community is bordered by the Pisgah National Forest and sits at the foot of the Blue Ridge Parkway, a scenic byway that meanders through this part of the state. Homesites range from \$500,000 to \$2.5 million; custom homes start at \$1 million.

Biltmore Forest is one of Asheville's most elegant and historic neighborhoods. The planned residential community of approximately 600 homes was designed in

the 1920s. An incorporated municipality, it has its own town hall and police department.

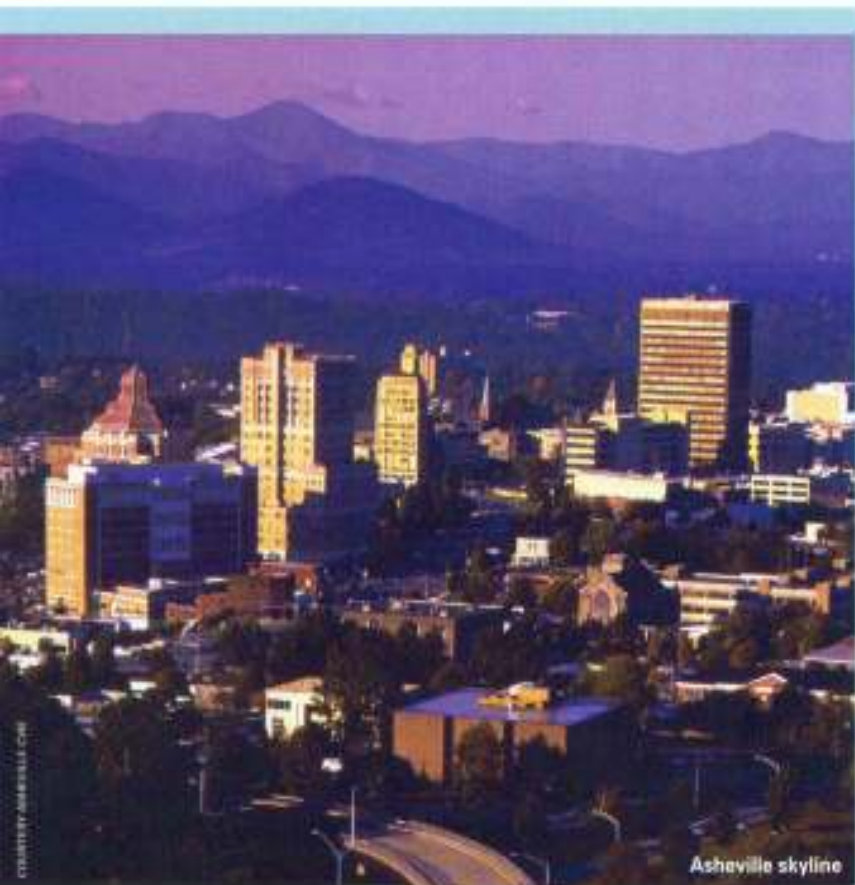
Champion Hills is a private, equity member-owned club on 700 acres in nearby Hendersonville. Its Fazio-designed layout has been ranked among the state's top 10 best layouts by *Golf Digest*. Existing homes in the community range upwards of \$3 million.

The town of Boone, located in the northwestern corner of the state, is home to Appalachian State University. Two of North Carolina's premier ski destinations—Beech Mountain and Sugar Mountain—are found within a short drive of each other in this region aptly dubbed the High Country.

Boone and surrounding towns Banner Elk and Blowing Rock claim one of the state's highest concentrations of exclusive communities. Elk River Club, Linville Ridge and Grandfather Mountain Golf



# THE COMMUNITIES OFFER HIGH-END HOUSING ALONG WITH GOLF COURSES THAT PROFFER SOME OF THE MOST AWE-INSPIRING, PANORAMIC HOLES THAT A GOLFER COULD EVER PLAY.



Asheville skyline



The Cliffs Walnut Cove Clubhouse

and Country Club are within minutes of each other. All feature multimillion-dollar homes and all have golf courses ranked among the top 10 in the entire state by the North Carolina Golf Panel.

Elk River Club is home to a Jack Nicklaus Signature Course that is bordered by a private airstrip. The community also contains six miles of equestrian trails. Sports celebrities Don Shula and Bob Griese have been listed on Elk River's membership roles.

Drive approximately 90 minutes southwest from Asheville and you will find an additional abundance of high-end communities in the peaks and valleys around the towns of Cashiers and Highlands. The area is a haven for Atlantans, who can escape to this mountainous serenity for the weekend in less than a two-hour drive.

Highlands Country Club is the area's most established private community. Its 300-plus homes range upwards of \$5 million.

Along the scenic drive on Highway 64 between Cashiers and Highlands, you will find the Cullasaja Club, featuring an Arnold Palmer-designed golf course. Also along this stretch of road are Highlands Cove and Trillium. The two communities offer high-end housing opportunities along with golf courses that proffer some of the most awe-inspiring, panoramic holes that a golfer could ever play.

Lake Toxaway Country Club near Brevard is another upscale community worthy of consideration. Architect Kris Spence is in the midst of a redesign of all 18 holes of the club's course. The project is expected to be completed in the middle of 2007.

High country or low, it's obvious the opportunities for elite living, golfing and relaxing in North Carolina's mountains are sky high. ■