




THE HAMMOCKS

*A neighborhood like no other
on an island like no other.*

By Katherine Pettit, Photography by Harry Taylor

Flexibility, yet no responsibilities. That's a charming combination if you can find it. When it comes to vacation ownership, both add a certain luster to an already appealing destination. On Bald Head Island, The Hammocks' deeded vacation ownership structure, plus an extraordinary level of owners' services, allows second home owners to enjoy one week on the island in each season and leave the responsibility to others.



The Hammocks homes are built around three beautifully landscaped courtyards called mews, appropriately named for seasons: Summer, Spring and Autumn.

For the VanSant family, matching the number of weeks they can enjoy to the weeks they own seems a perfect fit.

“We’ve owned at The Hammocks since day one,” said Jerry VanSant. “It’s the perfect option for us because we can enjoy the island in different seasons, but with work, we can only get away for a few weeks each year.”

Jerry was born in Lincoln, Neb., but he and his wife Sondra have lived in Chapel Hill, N.C., for 25 years. They bought the first home

vacation ownership. Those reservations are put to rest after one visit, because The Hammocks neighborhood shares no comparison with early programs developed 30 years ago in overbuilt resort locations.

For one thing these are single family homes, not highrise condominiums. The quality is far superior, with design elements and furnishings more like owners would choose at home. And, the concept is a new one, created from a recognition that baby-boomers (among others) want to have their vacations now, even as they invest

“With the ability to switch weeks with other owners, and the staff that accommodates every request, the result is a carefree vacation, with more things to do and see right here in our own community.”

Sondra and Jerry VanSant

completed in The Hammocks, aptly named Indian Summer.

“During the past three years, we’ve forged friendships with other Hammocks owners and have met most of the people who share ownership in our house,” he explained. “We discovered that several families live close to us, and we see one another socially when we’re off the island.”

For the VanSants, also owning a cozy efficiency cottage called a Crofter, gives them the flexibility to stay on the island even when another family is at home in Indian Summer. That’s how they began to meet others who shared their love of The Hammocks and the island.

The Crofters are built above The Hammocks cart garages, and come equipped with a queen-sized bed, full bath and efficiency kitchen. Crofter owners are guaranteed seven pre-reserved days each year, along with the opportunity to reserve a Crofter for up to seven days on a first-come, first-served basis, as many times per year as one is available.

For Katheryn and Jim Mims, buying at The Hammocks was a logical next step in their 30-year love affair with Bald Head Island. “We’ve been visiting this island since there were only seven houses here,” Katheryn Mims laughed. “I’ve got to tell you, when I heard that there was something like a time-share being developed here, I fought it tooth and nail.” Then, she went in to see the place on a lark and they bought that same day.

“We owned two villas on the island, but had begun to realize that with four houses, we had too much to keep up. But, we loved coming here and wanted to continue.” Jim Mims is a retired banker and the couple have many real estate interests—including a farm near Greensboro and a home in Blowing Rock—but Bald Head Island has a special appeal.

“These are beautiful homes that are kept up well, and it’s a wonderful concept,” she said, noting that four times each year is about all the time they can allocate out of other interests and family. They, too, own a Crofter, and use it to bring the entire family at one time, while giving one daughter and her husband a bit of privacy during their stay.

It’s not surprising that some people have reservations about

in their future and try out a potential retirement community. Nor do they want to purchase more home than they have time to use. To them, it seems wasteful, somehow.

Perhaps most appealing to a generation of busy professionals are the services offered, which at The Hammocks include on-site concierge assistance and membership in the nearby Bald Head Island Club (allowing full access to the championship golf course, tennis courts, croquet greenswards, swimming complex, fitness center, dining room and lounge). Hammocks owners also enjoy full membership privileges in the oceanfront Shoals Club, opening summer 2004.

Another plus is the private Hammocks Club, a remarkable on-site facility, which offers a workout room with top quality equipment, sauna, outdoor hot tub, heated pool, sun deck, billiards room, lending library and administrative offices for the on-site concierge.

“My husband has had several heart attacks and he uses the exercise room every day,” Katheryn Mims explained, noting that she intends to bring books to donate to the lending library. They, too, have made good friends in other Hammocks owners, but they also delight in introducing friends from home to their piece of heaven.

The Mims family history is so intertwined with island life that their daughter chose to get married in the community chapel near the lighthouse. They brought 65 people with them to celebrate, and had parties and gatherings all over the island, including a wedding reception with a seven-course meal. With so many happy memories, there was no way they could leave the island, even though they wanted to downsize from full-time home ownership.

Matt Dyer’s family is just beginning to build those lifelong memories, and on one January day, his three children and a friend

Clockwise from top left: Interiors of these homes are of a quality found in high-end custom homes. Architectural details, such as columns, arches and moldings, add interest and sophistication. Every bedroom has a private full bathroom, creating multiple master suites in every home. The Hammocks are furnished by professional designers down to the most minute decorative details.



were frolicking in the outdoor hot tub, oblivious to the chill in the air.

“We’ve owned at The Hammocks for three years,” he said, although he and his wife Mary have been vacationing at Bald Head Island for a decade. They particularly enjoy the private clubhouse, with its pool and the aforementioned hot tub. The children can have the freedom to move from house to pool because they are only a few steps apart, and the lack of vehicles provides an even stronger sense of safety and well-being.

In January, the crackle of fireplaces and warmth of hot cider in the clubhouse added the same kind of inviting atmosphere one would find in any private home that welcomed friends and family in from the cold. In the summer, he adds, the children enjoy the community bicycles, and practically live in the pool.

For Teresa and Bruce Fritch, the three-and-a-half-hour drive from their home in Weddington (just south of Charlotte) to the ferry is a time to decompress. She is a North Carolinian by birth, and he came by way of Illinois. With the Charlotte area as their home for more than 15 years, they had begun to look around for a vacation home destination. Four years ago, they found their way to Bald Head Island.

“We have a friend who lives in Wilmington, and she kept telling me about the beauty and nature of Bald Head Island,” Teresa Fritch explained. In spring of 2000, the couple received an Island Passport Package invitation to spend a few days visiting the island, so they took off in the middle of the week to see for themselves. In the midst of gorgeous weather and budding flowers, they decided to

look for a house to buy. The Bald Head Island Limited real estate sales executive was “wonderful” and gave them an extended tour of all the island has to offer.

“It was during the tour that we discovered The Hammocks,” she said. “Instantly, we knew it was an opportunity that would work for us and our lifestyle.” The couple owns an independent consulting practice that focuses on business strategy and executive leadership coaching. They often work weekends and have irregular hours. The Thursday-to-Thursday schedule is perfect for them, as is the turnkey professional management.

“With our four weeks on the calendar now, we have time booked for relaxing,” she said. And, with their purchase of a Crofter, they extended their options by another week or more. “I actually stayed on Bald Head Island for seven weeks last year,” she said with a laugh. “Can you believe that?”

The comfort of going to their own great house, named Whitecap Cottage, is enhanced by the frequent presence of their new granddaughter. “We want her to be able to remember coming to the beach, and this is a great way she can enjoy these amenities as she grows.”

These baby-boomers are finding the way to have it all, enjoying life with family, growing a business that is rewarding and creative, and buying exactly the amount of time that matches their energetic lifestyle. They don’t play golf, but frequently use the bikes available at the clubhouse to take rides of 10 miles or more. Canoeing and kayaking are on the to-do list, and the clubhouse staff can arrange those outings as well. During the cooler months, they still take long walks on the beach and nature trails, and they settle in with good books and quiet gatherings with family.

“Even though we are on an island, it’s no big deal to hop on the ferry to Southport for a day of shopping, or a day jaunt up to Wilmington,” she explained. “We really love it, because the island is perfect and The Hammocks neighborhood is perfect for us. It’s a wonderful place to entertain family and friends. We don’t know anyone who hasn’t been happy here.”

Larry and Mabel Caringer, from Stratford, Conn., originally bought property on Bald Head Island intending to build at a later date. “Over the next two years we thought about how to make this work,” Larry said. “Finally, we realized that it didn’t make sense to build a house we weren’t going to see very often.”

Soon after, the Caringers heard about The Hammocks, walked through the house, and asked to sign the papers. They love it, especially the friends they’ve made as a result of spending time at their Hammocks home. They have chosen to join the Interval International Exchange Program, but aren’t sure whether they’ll make a trade. “My wife wants to go to Bermuda, and we might do that,” he said, “but the thing is, we love the island so much, I’m not sure we want to trade.”

For Jerry and Sondra VanSant, their frequent visits to The Hammocks have encouraged them to become more involved in





their island home. They have met most of the families who share ownership of their house, and Sondra sings in the Chapel choir when she's on the island. She serves on The Hammocks Association, Inc. and Jerry is on the Bald Head Island Conservancy Board. They've also purchased additional property on the island.

"Some day, we may decide to build, but for now, this is just right for us," he said. "With the ability to switch weeks with other owners, and the staff that accommodates every request, the result is a carefree vacation, with more things to do and see right here in our own community."

"This property is so well executed, it takes all the stress out of vacation ownership," he explained. Jerry and Sondra, like Matt and Mary Dyer, Larry and Mabel Caringer, Katheryn and Jim Mims, and so many others, have referred their friends and family to The Hammocks. It's the whole package that works for them—the respite to relax on Bald Head Island, and the freedom to enjoy that respite with a staff at the ready to handle maintenance and any other needs that arise.

For each family, whether beginning their Bald Head Island adventure of a lifetime, or winding down their island history with less responsibilities, the choice has been to buy into a new lifestyle option that works for vacation home ownership now, while investing in the future. It's the choice, over and over, that for many makes the most sense. 🌿

Katherine O. Pettit has worked as a writer, magazine editor, printer and public relations consultant. The Chapin, S.C., resident's writing explores a variety of subjects, including travel, lifestyles, relocation, business and management.

Above and opposite page: The Hammocks Club, reserved exclusively for the use of Hammocks owners and their guests, features a clubhouse with a workout room, billiards room, business center and lending library, as well as a swimming pool and hot tub.



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