

**BUSINESS**

# Goodbye golf course, hello olive groves! New Palm Springs enclave to become an ‘agri-hood’



An overview of Miralon in Palm Springs, where an 18-hole golf course is being replaced with dozens of olive groves. (Rendering courtesy of Freehold Communities)

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The olive – that familiar little fruit lolling around in your martini – is about to make a splash in the Southern California real estate market.

The developer of a new residential enclave in Palm Springs is swapping out an 18-hole golf course for dozens of acres of olive groves.

The 300-acre sustainable community, named Miralon, is planned as one of the nation’s largest agricultural neighborhoods, or “agri-hoods,” where new homes crop up around community farms.

Agri-hoods are a hot trend. There are about 150 so-called farm-to-fork neighborhoods around the U.S., says Ed McMahon, a senior resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute. They're as close as Rancho Mission Viejo in Orange County and The Cannery in Davis near Sacramento, and as far-flung as Serenbe in Chattahoochee Hills, Ga.; Willowsford in the rolling hills of Loudoun County, Va., and Kukui'ula in Hawaii, where Kaua'i residents can harvest guava, papaya and pineapples.

"It's a concept whose time has come," said Paul Habibi, professor of real estate at UCLA's Anderson School of Management. "We're increasingly looking to sustainability as an important objective in real estate development."

The Olive Oil Times, which touts itself as "the world's No. 1 source for the latest olive oil news," recently devoted a spread to the planned olive oasis. "Golf courses require a lot of water to stay lush and playable," the story noted.

Olives groves, on the other hand, aren't that expensive or demanding. The groves flourish in hot environs and can withstand a drought, said Brad Shuckhart, who heads the California division of Freehold Communities, Miralon's developer.

A bonus: Critters don't like olives.

"There's nothing that's attracted to an uncured olive," Shuckhart said. "No rats, no bunnies or birds."

### **The harvest**

While the golf course at Miralon was part of a stalled project by a different developer, the transformation to a farm is part of a larger trend. McMahon said more than 100 golf courses have closed around the U.S. in the past five years.

"In many places, golf courses are being turned into other things," he said.

In addition to the 70 acres of olive trees envisioned for Miralon, former tee boxes and greens will become smaller groves.

The Temecula Olive Oil Company will harvest the olives, and olive oil will be pressed on site, according to Freehold Communities. Other produce from common gardens will offer homeowners a farm-to-table lifestyle.

Amenities will include an outdoor demonstration kitchen.

The community also will include dog parks, exercise stations and firepits, and roads built for golf carts will turn into 6.5 miles of hiking paths.



A vision of how the clubhouse at Miralon in Palm Springs will look. The design is by Robert Hidey Architects of Irvine. (Rendering courtesy of Freehold Communities)

### **A modern look**

The development has been approved for 1,150 single family homes, townhouses and condos. Homes are expected to be priced from the high \$300,000s to the \$700,000s or more.

Irvine-based Robert Hidey Architects designed the clubhouse and is setting the standards for the homes, which will have solar panels installed as standard features.

The firm's portfolio includes properties around Southern California, China and the United Arab Emirates.

Hidey created the prototypes for homes and community buildings at Esencia at Rancho Mission Viejo. While those styles included farmhouse interpretive, Spanish and Monterey and California bungalow, the residences at Miralon will be modern, said Colin Liu, title studio director at Robert Hidey.

The designs will draw inspiration from the work of iconic modernist architects such as Richard Neutra, A. Quincy Jones and Donald Wexler, Liu said.



The entrance to the Miralon community, an agri-hood – or agricultural neighborhood – being developed in Palm Springs. When completed it is expected to have 1,150 homes, dozens of olive groves and other farm-to-table features. (Rendering courtesy of Freehold Communities)

## Farming with freedom

Miralon is slated to break ground late this year or early in 2018. Shuckhart said he expects to attract buyers from around Southern California. And not just retiring baby boomers or those seeking weekend getaways.

At Rancho Mission Viejo, the agriculture-related program involving its three farms includes culinary workshops, wine pairings, a Lil' Chef program for kids, and an annual harvest celebration, says Amaya Genaro, director of community services.

“We make it easy for residents to participate. By working together to tend communal crops, residents have the freedom to do other things without the responsibility of tending to a personal planter bed,” she said. “We think it is more fun to share the responsibility with neighbors and reap the benefits of a wide variety of fruits and vegetables while forming new friendships.”

As Habibi sees it, agri-hoods represent a “confluence of economic profits, environmental good and social benefit.” That mix is particularly appealing to younger homebuyers, he said, because Millennials tend to want to do more than just buy something.

“They actually want a benefit to society,” he said.



### Marilyn Kalfus

Marilyn Kalfus covers news, issues, and trends for The Orange County Register's award-winning Sunday Real Estate section, which in 2015 and 2017 snagged the top prize for best U.S. newspaper real estate section from the National Association of Real Estate Editors. She also writes stories, edits photos and puts together slideshows for our popular Hot Homes feature about iconic, big-ticket and unusual properties on the market. On weekends, she edits police, breaking news and general assignment reporters.

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