

REAL ESTATE



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Are days numbered for the starter home?

Is the shortage of modestly priced homes – and we’re talking Orange County values, by the way – the reason home sales remain historically sluggish, deep into an economic recovery?

Or is a key group of house hunters disinterested in what the lower end of the regional house market offers?

A new poll of prospective house shoppers from Bank of America raises some intriguing questions about the reluctance of local homebuyers to dive into the market. Orange County homes have sold in the past year near the fastest pace seen since the Great Recession, CoreLogic stats show. Six years after the recession ended, though, the market is still 20 percent slower than historical homebuying from 1988 through 2006.

BofA pollsters found only 25 percent of potential first-time buyers in the five-county Southern California region want a starter home, the lowest level of among 10 major U.S. markets studied. And these local first-timers have a plan: 72 percent of those polled “are waiting to save more money and move into a nicer home in the future,” BofA said.

Recent generations have delayed many life events, from marriage to having children. So putting off the first home purchase isn’t a dramatic surprise. Yet the fact that 43 percent of local first-time buyers plan to do the deal solo – again, highest among the 10 markets

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REBUILT HOME ON NEWPORT BAY FOR \$25 MILLION

A four-bedroom house on Linda Isle along Newport Bay that graced the pages of Architectural Digest four decades ago has been rebuilt on speculation and is for sale at just under \$25 million.

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Sea Summit at Marblehead is a 248-acre community perched on the coastal bluffs of San Clemente. Almost half of the area will be devoted to restored habitat.

LEONARD ORTIZ, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

NATURE, NURTURED

SEA SUMMIT AT MARBLEHEAD, A LUXE COMMUNITY IN SAN CLEMENTE, BRINGS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTO A NEW TERRAIN.

By **ALEXANDRIA ABRAMIAN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

FOR SOME environmentalists, a visit to Sea Summit at Marblehead may leave a sense of longing that more coastal developments in Orange County didn’t follow a similar approach: Instead of replacing acres of flora and fauna with water-guzzling sod and golf courses, developer Taylor Morrison is seeing whether nature and luxury housing can live in harmony.

Walk through the 248-acre community perched on the coastal bluffs of San Clemente and you begin to see the results of more than 40 years of planning and refinement. Though all 309 homes are yet to be built, the overall concept is fully formed: Residents will live next to 116 acres – almost half of the entire area – of restored habitat.

“We were stunned that this kind of site was still available,” says Chris Barlow, project director with Irvine-based Robert Hidey Architects, which designed homes at Azure, one of



COURTESY OF ERIC FIGGE PHOTOGRAPHY
Architects connected the inside with the outside in each home with “impactful outdoor spaces,” including backyard areas, side courtyards, interior courtyards and balconies.

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In this Sea Summit home, teak beams and wide-plank wood floors are incorporated.

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four Sea Summit neighborhoods. “The natural habitat – the ravines, bluffs and canyons – is incredibly special. We knew right from the beginning that a strong connection to this setting had to be the top priority for the design.”

Topography dictated the orientation of the homes, which range in price from \$1 million to mid-\$2 million. Barlow and his team determined how to best capitalize on views of the ocean and nature preserve from almost every room in the two-story, Spanish-style houses, regardless of where they were positioned in the development.

“We actually created two versions of the second floor,” Barlow says. “There’s one where the master bedroom and

bath are at the front of the house, and another where they’re at the back. We did that so regardless of which home you live in, your master bedroom will look onto the ocean, day and night.”

Architects also connected the inside with the outside in each home with a series

of what Barlow calls “impactful outdoor spaces.” In addition to backyard areas, they also created side courtyards, interior courtyards, Juliet balconies and cantilevered balconies. “This all underscores a truly exceptional setting,” Barlow says.

Residents will have more to explore beyond their property lines: Four miles of public trails weave through the preserve, connecting five parks.

Native vegetation includes coastal sage scrub, the iconic, yet hard-to-find plant that for many signifies the Southern California oceanfront.

Other species, such as *Dudleya blochmaniae*, support threatened wildlife like ground-nesting bees. Eight acres of new wetlands are now home to endangered birds, such as the California gnatcatcher, already making a comeback at Sea Summit.

All of the open areas are monitored in perpetuity by biologists from the Center for Natural Lands Management.

“When you have something this special, you want it to be there for a very long time,” Barlow says. “We feel that way both about the houses and the setting.”

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In Sea Summit's Azure neighborhood, Corona del Mar-based Objekt Designs did the interiors for the model units. A variety of interior design styles includes Polynesian-inspired motifs, used in this dining room.



Chris Barlow, project director for Robert Hidey Architects in Irvine, sits among native plants at a Sea Summit at Marblehead model home in San Clemente. The project is one of the last stretches of California coast in the area to be developed. About half of the acreage is being kept as a protected nature preserve overseen by the Center for Natural Lands Management.

CINDY YAMANAKA, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER