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Professional Builder

A professional photograph of a modern kitchen and dining area. The kitchen features light-colored wooden cabinets, a black countertop, and a stainless steel oven and microwave. A black dining table with four chairs is set up in the dining area. Large windows provide a view of the outdoors. The text "Surprise by the Sea" is overlaid in the bottom right corner.

**Surprise
by the Sea**

Best Address: Arverne by the Sea

By Ann Matesi, Senior Contributing Editor -- 4/1/2009



Ceiling details and built-in niches contribute to the contemporary, custom feel that characterizes the interiors of the two-family homes at Arverne by the Sea. Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects designed the units to have open floor plans that maximize the views of the sea. Photos: Taylor Photography

An upscale, privately owned home with its own attached rental unit proves to be a winning combination for New York buyers and builder and developer Benjamin-Beechwood at Arverne by the Sea.

The development is situated on the southern tip of Long Island's Rockaway Peninsula that once hosted vacation goers around the turn of the twentieth century but sat abandoned for decades. The oceanfront development is a steal for middle-class buyers: it has a reasonable commute time to downtown Manhattan, a 20-year tax abatement program from the city and housing plans with a for-lease component.

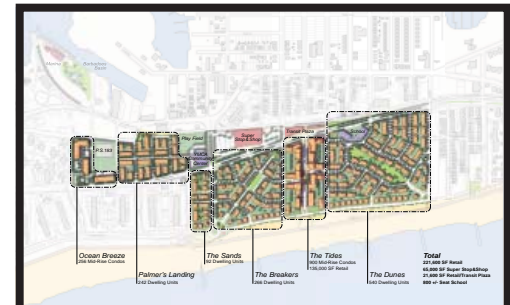
Sales are steady, and its story is strong.

The Community

Arverne by the Sea opened for sales in 2004 and will feature six distinct neighborhoods, including four that feature Benjamin-Beechwood's two-family residences exclusively, plus two others that offer clusters of mid-rise retail/office/condominium buildings. The goal is to introduce employment opportunities, lifestyle flexibility and vitality into the community. The builder has focused on developing Arverne's two-family home neighborhoods, with construction of the office/retail element to begin this spring and sales for the condominium component projected to begin in early 2010.

Palmer's Landing and the Sands, which have two-family residences, are completed and sold out, and the Breakers, also comprising two-family residences, is 95 percent sold out. Benjamin-Beechwood's sales efforts are now directed on the largest neighborhood, The Dunes, which has a planned 270 homes. The first 120 homes, Phase I, were released for sale in a June 2008, with 80 sales.

Peter Cavaluzzi, design principal for Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn, the New York-based architectural firm that developed the site plan for the project and the six models featured there, says the oceanfront location and amount of open land make the project what it is. "The combination of the variety of open spaces and the buildings, as well as the transit element, have resulted in a really unique environment that buyers have really been drawn to," he says. "This development goes against the prevailing economy today, thankfully."



Ocean views were priority for the architects working on Arverne by the Sea's design, says Peter Cavaluzzi of Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects. Three-story buildings stand over two-story residences (below). The development (above) sits on Queens' Rockaway Peninsula, which was a seaside



All of the homes at Arverne by the Sea are Energy-Star-certified and feature low-maintenance exteriors designed to handle the effects of the Atlantic Ocean. Everything from the landscape materials to the vegetation was carefully considered so that they thrive in the beachfront environment.

New York's working middle class is the target buyer for Arverne by the Sea, but the community has captured the attention of other markets as well. One of the surprises, says Cavaluzzi, is that the development is drawing more affluent buyers from Manhattan.

"We have attracted a very vibrant mix of homeowners that is not racially or ethnically divided," says Gerard Ronski, project manager for the joint venture that includes the Beechwood Organization and the Benjamin Companies. "We have a very diverse population here. I call it a gorgeous mosaic."

Sea's the opportunity

The key decision made at the start of the planning process was "to identify what will feel right for the location," says Cavaluzzi.

The plans were developed so that they could be combined in multiple ways to avoid monotonous streets and maximize the views of the Atlantic for as many people as possible, he says. The materials and colors emphasize the beachfront as well.

Arverne by the Sea features a variety of courtyards, walking paths, recreational areas and a boardwalk. Streets are both pedestrian- and transit-friendly.

The two-family homes are elevated 3-feet up from street level. "This is a very subtle change, but one that really makes a big difference when you are inside the homes. It provides better street views and lots of opportunities to create walk-out porches and decks," says Cavaluzzi.

Best seller

The Dunes is the development's best seller and features roof-deck entertaining areas; top-floor living areas in the owner's units that capitalize on views; high-end finishes; and spacious, flex-use bedrooms.

Although the prices for the two-family homes in The Dunes range from \$559,000 to \$1.1 million, the added financial bonus that the rental element offers allows even first-time buyers to have a strong presence in the community.

The Dunes' three-story East Hampton model, priced from \$619,000, has been the best selling model so far. The 3,360-square-foot residence features a 1,711-square-foot, three-bedroom owner's unit with a reverse floor plan that includes a private garage, mid-level master suite and third-floor living area that captures ocean views. The East Hampton also has its own rooftop terrace with a separate storage locker.

To maximize privacy for all residents, the East Hampton's attached, two-bedroom rental unit features a ground level entertaining area and a second-floor master suite and guest bedroom. The third-floor is dedicated to the owner unit.

Cooperation Makes Perfect Partners

For the project to be successful, the Benjamin-Beechwood team had to carefully choose its partners and worked closely with the community to understand its wants and needs.

“Gentrification is not really the way to describe what is taking place today in the Arverne community today,” says John Gaska, Community Board 14's district manager, “because that implies that this is the evolution of an older community. In this case, there was really not much left of the physical community.”

In some ways, long-time residents' insisting that new development replicate the area's past was a challenge in revitalizing the area, he says.

“In order to move forward, it was important to get the remaining community residents to give up the ghost of old Rockaway — the grand hotels, the seaside resorts. These things were no longer there and no longer practical.”

Gaska continues: “The city of New York would have been more than happy to line the seashore with high rises, but we were committed to fighting that scenario. Everyone at the Benjamin-Beechwood organization understood that. The way we saw it, we really had one shot to bring this area back to life. We wanted the developer to be successful; it would make us successful as a community again.”

The builder's relationship with the local community is excellent, he says. “They really listened to us and have met every commitment that they've made.”

What is the developer doing so well? Gaska has these praises:

- * A willingness to make themselves available to community residents to provide information on construction plans and timelines as well as to hear complaints and concerns
- * Coordination with the local community board to time street closures and schedule infrastructure improvements to minimize disruptions for residents
- * Incorporation of community-building features into the master plan such as a recreation center, a school and play areas
- * Creation of jobs through the use of local trades and vendors wherever possible
- * Keeping the stakeholders — the community residents — in on the process from start to finish

“The lesson,” says Gaska, “is that when you are working in a community it is much easier to get things accomplished when the residents that live there trust and support you.”

A Site Ready for Rejuvenation

The Southern tip of long island might be the last place you'd expect to find 300-plus acres of vacant oceanfront property ready and waiting to be developed. But that's the way it was less than a decade ago.

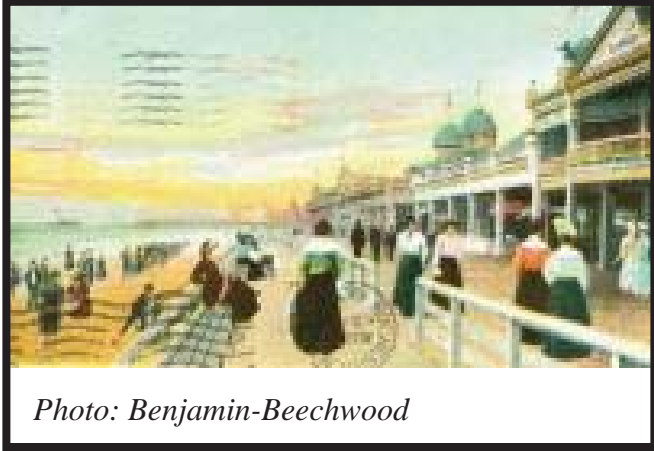


Photo: Benjamin-Beechwood

Arverne, named for its original developer, Remington Vernam, is on the east coast of Queens' Rockaway Peninsula and had been the weekend playground for New York residents at the turn of the twentieth century. In its heyday, the area included a mix of seasonal bungalows, resorts, high-end hotels and boardwalk concession areas that drew crowds to the shore.

Automobile and air travel drew vacationers further afield, and the area's popularity as a getaway spot diminished. The community fell into disrepair and eventually was targeted by the city of New York as the site for several ambitious but unsuccessful public housing projects. In 1968, the area was condemned, and the demolition of the sub-standard housing began. By the early 1970s, this site was totally vacant.

The land did not go unnoticed by public and private ventures — there was talk of creating a casino, theater district or sports center — but numerous proposals failed to find full support. The tract sat vacant for nearly 40 years. “It was literally patrolled by packs of wild dogs,” says Gerard Ronski, Arverne by the Sea's project manager.

Eventually the city of New York's Department of Housing Preservation and Development hired the consulting firm Hamilton, Rabinovitz & Alschuler to work with local community leaders and developers to create a revitalization plan including new housing, employment opportunities, entertainment venues and transit options.

What was the largest undeveloped tract of waterfront property in New York City is today the largest active urban renewal project in the country. Within this, Arverne by the Sea serves as a shining example of “how to do it right,” says Community Board 14 District Manager John Gaska.

Auto-Friendly Design

Even in an urban environment, people still love their cars. That's why Arverne by Sea owner units and even some rental units include attached garages.

“We recognized the fact the homeowners today — even urban dwellers — are very dependent on their automobiles,” says architect Peter Cavaluzzi. “We wanted to provide homeowners with a place for their cars without having them dominate the neighborhood streetscape.”

The solution was to provide plenty of parking options, including:

- * Rear alleys
- * Attached garages
- * Narrow driveways that encourage homeowners to put their cars in the garage rather than leave them outdoors
- * Urban-style mews incorporated into adjoining sides streets, eliminating the need for additional curb cuts
- * Shared parking courts

Project Profile

Community: Arverne by the Sea

Location: Arverne, N.Y.

Model: East Hampton

Size: 3,360 square feet

Builder/Developer: Benjamin-Beechwood (The Beechwood Organization, Jericho, N.Y.; The Benjamin Companies, Garden City, N.Y.)

Architect: Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects, New York
Products Used

Appliances: Frigidaire

Plumbing fixtures: Kohler

Windows: Andersen

Doors: Therma-Tru

Flooring: Shaw; Dal-Tile; Bruce

HVAC: Goodman

Paints/Stains: Sherwin-Williams

Exterior siding: James Hardie

Roofing: Owens Corning

Community Features

- * 2,594 planned residential units including 726-two family residences (total of 1,452 residential units) and 1,142 condominium units
- * Full-service grocery store (Spring 2009)
- * YMCA (2009 construction start)
- * Oceanfront boardwalk (completed)
- * Interior walking paths (completed)
- * Charter school for up to 800 kindergarten through eighth-grade students
- * Multiple transit options to downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn including commuter rail, express bus and express ferry service
- * 270,000 square feet of office/retail space
- * Highest density buildings clustered along a new main street corridor
- * New community infrastructure

Owner/Rental Combo Makes Cents

The rental component to the project makes sense for buyers as well as the community. In fact, Community Board 14, the governing body that oversees local development, was a strong proponent of the two-family home concept, says John Gaska, who has been district manager for Community Board 14 for more than 20 years.

“We knew that rental income would defray costs for potential buyers and make the homes more affordable for a wider range of buyers,” Gaska says. “To us, the two-family building just made a lot of sense for the area.”

Other benefits of the owner/rental combination include increasing the affordability for the project, promoting community diversity and attracting a eclectic mix of middle-income buyers to the area.

“The homeowners manage the rental aspect of their property themselves,” says Gerry Ronski of builder/developer Benjamin-Beechwood. “We would certainly assist our buyers with finding a tenant if they required it, but so far that has not been an issue for us. The demand for the rental units is consistently strong.”

As an added bonus, the attached designs also promote architectural variety by providing the opportunity for variation in entry points, rooflines and orientation.



Both owner and rental residences at Arverne by the Sea feature high-end finishes and open interiors. Ceiling details define the rooms in the best-selling East Hampton model; interior walls would obstruct views.