

It's a matter of fact that the farther north you travel through Scottsdale, the more spectacular this desert destination becomes. The road acquires a certain turbulence as it climbs from the vast flat reaches of metropolitan Phoenix into the foothills of the McDowell Mountains; the landscape is gradually reclaimed by the stunning flora of the Sonoran Desert; and suddenly you find yourself in a rugged wonderland of long-armed cacti and immense boulders (strikingly interspersed, as every serious golfer knows, with oases of the brightest emerald green). In the 1880s, the journey through the McDowell Mountains was punishing, and the stagecoach paused at Reata Pass to refresh its horses and passengers. At every side, rocky canyons — each a potential hideout — conveyed a sinister beauty.

The mode of transportation, of course, has changed. The hideouts, still there, are welcome these days, and the best of them is in a canyon near the top of Reata Pass, where a collection of exclusive villas lies concealed among scenery as dramatic as it was a century before. This is The Rocks Luxury Residence Club Scottsdale: not a residential development, not a high-end resort, but something that offers the best of both worlds with the disadvantages of neither. It's a unique fractional ownership property, the first of its kind in the desert Southwest. And it's an entirely new standard in convenience, luxury, and service.

"The Rocks redefines what vacation living is all about," says David Burden, president of Timbers Company, the property's developer. "We've combined the best elements of a private golf club with the amenities of an intimate luxury resort. The result is a perfect lifestyle option for people who want to enjoy the best of Scottsdale without the responsibilities or cost of a traditional vacation home."

The concept is brilliant, yet simple: members purchase undivided one-seventh shares in a three- or four-bedroom luxury villa, then pay annual dues to cover maintenance expenses. In exchange, they receive the right to book unlimited vacation time at the property according to a proven reservation model (flexible enough to admit both long-planned and last-minute travel). The residences are as spacious and as comfortable as any private home. The service and amenities are on par with, or exceed, the finest hotel's. But best of all, you own your stake outright — at a fraction of the cost of a second home, and with none of the headaches.

"It makes a lot of sense for so many people," says Timbers Company vice president Gary Moore, explaining why members love the ease of this high-end fractional model. "Everything is in place for you when you arrive. You're vacationing from the moment you step off the plane."

Consider some of the perks that The Rocks members enjoy:

- The best architecture and the finest appointments, bar none.
- Fireplaces, private outdoor plunge pools, and the same top-of-the-line brands (like Wolf and Sub-Zero) that you'd select for your private home.
- Daily housekeeping, full maintenance, a bell staff, and complete concierge services — just like you'd find at a fine hotel.
- Pre-arrival grocery shopping, personal wine storage, and in-residence catering for special occasions — things you won't find at a hotel.
- A stunning clubhouse with a community spa and fitness center; a lap pool, recreation pool, and hot tub; a bar and lounge area; even a billiards room.
- Preferred access rights to some of the best golf courses in Arizona — and, by extension, the nation — including Troon North, Legend Trail, Talking Stick, and others. The Rocks' concierge will make all arrangements.

"The personalized service and access to that service are something you couldn't get in a private home unless you hired a dedicated staff of 12 to 15 people," says Moore.

It's not surprising that, as word spreads, the fractional market is catching fire. But Timbers Company was one of the first in the business; according to its members, it's still the best. The legacy began near Aspen, Colorado, where Burden jumped on the chance to develop "the last piece of ski-in, ski-out land in Snowmass Village." Several factors influenced his vision, beginning with his own background in private golf club management. He also saw developers experimenting with fractional properties in other ski towns, where land was similarly scarce and expensive. And concurrently, he saw a broader disillusionment with multiple home ownership. Moore puts it this way: "People were acquiring these high-end vacation homes and finding that the management and hassles of owning that home typically took away from the vacation experience."

Thus was born The Timbers Club, a new paradigm for luxury travel, a ski property that combined the security of ownership with the intimacy of a country club — and the service of a five-star resort. Compelling as it was on paper, the venture was

not without risk. “I wasn’t sure the Timbers Club was going to work,” Burden now admits with a grin. “We always had a bail-out strategy.” In fact, it succeeded brilliantly. Memberships sold out just two years after The Timbers Club opened its doors. While a handful of resales are on the market, their going price is 150 percent of the original.

That points out one of the chief attractions of Timbers Company properties (which now include the stunning Residences at Esperanza, in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, as well as the clubs in Snowmass and Scottsdale). Simply put, they offer excellent value. Their members may have money to burn, but that doesn’t mean they want to. Like traditional property ownership, fractional ownership can be outstanding investment. In the case of The Timbers Club, The Residences at Esperanza, and The Rocks, that investment is further solidified by the inherent value of their real estate: a prime slopeside location in Snowmass; spectacular beachfront property in Cabo’s Punta Ballena; an authentic corner of the rugged Old West. It’s “the location within the location,” says Moore, “having the best place possible.”

“We are dealing with one-of-a-kind experiences that really match the locale,” says Burden, who is convinced that the fractional experience, like a country club, is defined by its exclusivity. In the face of lower-tier imitators, “I still think it’s very high-end,” he says. And extending the country club comparison, he notes that owners at Timbers properties absolutely do enjoy each other’s company. United by your successful backgrounds and exacting standards, “you really feel that you are a member of a private club,” he says — which, come to think of it, is not unlike owning a Rolls.

Five-star listing:

The Rocks Luxury Residence Club Scottsdale. A unique fractional ownership property in the most exclusive reaches of north Scottsdale. Enjoy spacious luxury villas, resort amenities, world-class golf, and outstanding service, with the security of ownership and none of the hassles. 877-668-6068. www.therocksclub.com.