



Vietnamese Vista

VIETNAM MIGHT NOT BE THE FIRST COUNTRY THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN CONSIDERING A SECOND HOME, BUT LA VALLÉE DE DALAT MAY JUST CHANGE THAT. BY **JEFF MAPUA**

While it's long been de rigeur to have second homes in exotic locations such as the Caribbean, Southeast Asia or Europe, few people would put Dalat, in Vietnam, on their list of desirable locations.

French- and Asian-influenced Dalat has traditionally been a vacation destination for tourists from the surrounding region because unlike the rest of Southeast Asia, which swelters in hot humidity from November through April or May, it has cool year-round temperatures, with mild days of less than 75 degrees in the summer.

Dalat, the capital of Lâm Đồng province in Vietnam, is getting a boost in profile as developers move in and the jet-set discovers

it. City officials have put their backing behind La Vallée de Dalat, a development built on the highest point in the metropolitan area, and they are hoping to bring in wider foreign interest through its success.

The premier situation of La Vallée de Dalat's seven estates afford clear views of the city and the surrounding landscape. Part of the development is located behind a historic palace that once belonged to Bao Dai, the last emperor of Vietnam. Such a fortuitous situation protects the property from large-scale development in this burgeoning city and ensures that the area remains peaceful and uncrowded.

Local developer Le Ngoc Khanh Tam has completed various projects in the area, including

A refined colonial style dominates the beautiful landscape. OPPOSITE TOP: Outdoor space takes advantage of the comfortable climate. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Designers have opted for a modern feel inside the large homes

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY LA VALLÉE DE DALAT

the Sofitel Dalat Palace Hotel, the Dalat Novotel and the Dalat Palace Golf Club. A resident of Dalat, Tam has developed 13 villas on two of the three parcels of land she owns in the area, and she has reserved the third for apartments or a luxury boutique hotel.

Tam's advisor, Barry J. Israel, a lawyer and an experienced local developer, is very bullish on the prospects for the new development.

"Vietnam is the safest country to do business and live in Asia," he explains. "It's developing rapidly, and the government is encouraging investment by foreigners. And foreigners—including Americans—are welcomed with open arms. I have worked in every country in Asia during my legal career, and Vietnam is the most welcoming."

Vietnam's architecture is influenced by the French who came to the country in the early 1900s. La Vallée de Dalat intends to continue the tradition. Israel says, "There is a definite French influence on the many villas found in Dalat. Many of those villas have been renovated for tourism projects, but few for high-end housing. The project hopes to encourage other developments to continue the traditional French style."

Every house in La Vallée de Dalat consists of three bedrooms, a maid's room and an office or an exercise room in addition to a master bedroom. The houses are being built to meet the highest luxury standards, and residents may work directly with the designer of their home to accentuate the serene basic layout and achieve maximum positive feng shui.

According to Tam and Israel, contemporary Vietnamese architecture calls for multiple levels on each floor (similar to a sunken living room), but the two have chosen to adopt a more modern aesthetic. When you enter the door on the main level, you stand in a foyer looking down a hall to a great room wrapped by an outdoor deck looking out to the view, which includes the valleys and the mountain ridge that surround Dalat. The main floors will be either cherry or teak hardwood, while the lower-level family room floor will be made of stone. All floors will be accented by custom designed floor and ceiling moldings. The ground floor of each house has three bedrooms; the main floor can be used as a common area. Each house has a master suite that covers the entire top floor and has its own balcony lookout. It also includes an office or exercise area that can



serve as an extra children's room if required, and each floor can be sectioned off from the other for extra privacy.

Depending on the design, the house will come with six or seven bathrooms—including his-and-her bathrooms in the master suite—each with marble countertops and a combination of tile and marble floors. There are fireplaces throughout, including one outside on the main-floor deck. Each house will be fully wired for sound, television and internet. A large kitchen with granite countertops will come with a walk-in pantry and will be wired to service all modern appliances. Wine connoisseurs will appreciate the underground wine cellar. For entertaining or a relaxing night at home, each residence will have an outdoor Jacuzzi. And as a nod to the green movement, Tam and Israel are installing

solar water heaters in each home. To battle weather that can affect the solar heaters, such as cool temperatures, cloud cover and afternoon showers that come during the rainy season, they are backing each home with electric heaters. Water will go through two treatments to make the tap a source of clean and fresh drinking water. The gated and guarded community will have a common garden area and tennis courts, and each home comes with a family membership to the Dalat Palace Golf Club. "It is the oldest in Vietnam and was developed originally for the last emperor. It is consistently ranked the number-one course in Vietnam and in the top ten in Asia," says Israel. "I tell people that once they have teed-off on the course, they will think of it whenever they play elsewhere. Most agree." For more information, visit www.valleedalat.com □