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Luxury springs up in hills of Carneros

\$50 MILLION PROJECT: Resort, housing at crossroads



Keith Rogal, founder and CEO of Carneros Partners, spent years developing the concept for The Carneros Inn, a 27-acre luxury resort and housing development in Napa County.

By **BOB NORBERG**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

A 27-acre luxury resort and housing development is taking shape in the Carneros region, amid the rolling hills at the Sonoma-Napa county line now green with row upon row of some of Wine Country's most prized grapes.

The Carneros Inn, costing \$50 million to develop, will open its 96 cottages, spa and pool, private dining room and a public cafe in October.

At \$350 to \$1,000 a night, it will compete against a limited number of similarly high-priced Wine Country resorts, such as the Auberge du Soleil in Napa, which goes for \$400 to \$2,200 a night, and the Sonoma Mission Inn in Boyes Hot Springs, which costs \$200 to \$1,400 a night.

Construction of 24 three-bedroom homes, priced initially at \$1 million, will start next year, said Keith Rogal, chief executive officer of Carneros Partners, a San Francisco-based investment group.

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CARNEROS INN

Location: Hwy. 121 and Old Sonoma Hwy. in Carneros region of Napa County.

Developer: Carneros Partners of San Francisco.
Cost: \$50 million first phase, \$25 million second phase.

Size: 27 acres.

Private resort: Restaurant, spa, 121 cottages and 24 homes.
Public areas: Boon Fly Cafe, town square and post office.

Prices: Cottages from \$350 to \$1,000 a night; homes from \$1 million.

Construction: 96 cottages and guest facilities open in October; construction of four homes begins next year.

INN: Investment group put \$20 million into development

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For their money, guests and residents will get luxury lodging wrapped in buildings with a plain, agricultural veneer, complete with tin roofs, plus pampering in a spa, fine dining and views everywhere, from cottage decks to the lounge chairs by the swimming pool.

"It is sophistication without pretense," Rogel said. The idea is to "make people very, very comfortable, as they would be visiting someone's nice home."

The project, started when the land was purchased for \$5 million in 1998, was not without controversy.

Opponents concerned about traffic, water use and the agricultural character of the region were able to get the project downsized. In the second phase of construction, only 25 new cottages will be built, instead of 100, according to Napa county planners.

"In the first go-around, it was in hearings for a while," said planner Bob Nelson. "Opposition surfaced late in the game, ultimately resulting in downsizing of project and elimination of an access road to the old Sonoma Highway."

The Carneros Inn is being built by Carneros Partners, a group of 35 investors who have invested about \$20 million in cash and borrowed \$26.5 million from Far East National Bank in Los Angeles.

It is being built on commercially zoned land that housed a storage yard for recreational vehicles, cars and boats.

The project will cost about \$50 million in its first stage, and \$25 million for its second.

From its gently sloping hills, it commands views of the surrounding vineyards, the Napa River and, at night, the lights of Vallejo.

Three large buildings, looking like large agricultural sheds, are visible from heavily traveled Highway 121.

One will house the Boon Fly Cafe, a 40-seat public cafe named for 1800s grape-growing pioneer Boon Fly, open to both the public, resort guests and homeowners.

A second building houses a water treatment plant, which treats all of the wastewater



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and pumps it up to a pond, where it is stored and used for irrigation.

The cottages themselves have a similar, barnyard styling, but inside have heated floors, fireplaces, large bathrooms with soaking tubs, flat-screen TVs, ethernet Internet connections and French doors looking onto private decks and yards.

The cottages, shielded by hedges made up of 2,000 Cherry Laurel trees, march up the hillside in neat rows to the crest, where there is a 4,000-square-foot restaurant building that seats 80, a 4,000-square-foot spa, and the resort administration building.

Next to the central buildings is the swimming pool, hot tub, herb garden and vegetable garden.

Landscaping is extensive, with plants alone costing \$4 million.

Rogel said there also will be a town square that will be built next to the entrance to the resort, near the intersections of Highway 121 and the Old Sonoma Highway, the crossroad that was once the center of Carneros community life.

The square, with bocce ball court and a post office, are near the existing Al Market and the century-old Carneros Grange Hall. The square is intended to be the center of the Carneros community, where the community and guests can intermingle, Rogel said.

"To me, the most interesting places in the world are where you have luxury and comfort in your lodgings, but you get to see the people," Rogel said.

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