

## Modulars Making It In Ford's Colony

While some modular builders still struggle to get their homes into high-end subdivisions and developments—victims of nagging misperceptions about their product and jealous site builders unable to match the modular system's speed or quality—John Garrett is successfully building in Ford's Colony in Williamsburg, VA.

Haven't heard of Ford's Colony? It's been voted the No. 1 master-planned community in America. Over the last 20 years since the development's launch, its land planning and eco-friendly

sit on those boards have a good education. As architects and engineers, they aren't swayed by many of the common misperceptions about our product. When I approached them, they were very open to the concept. If I had listened to all the naysayers, telling me I was wasting my time, I wouldn't have stuck my neck out. But I was crazy enough to try it and it's paid off."

It also helped that Garrett was able to offer homes to buyers who didn't have the time to wait for lengthy build times or those who couldn't afford the higher prices of site builders. "Site builders



design has been studied and imitated by countless other developers nationwide.

From serving fine wine to protecting the environment, the Ford's Colony has quietly racked up a number of other accolades from the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and The College of William and Mary—among others. The development's recent awards include:

- ★ The American Automobile Association has awarded Five Diamonds to Ford's Colony Country Club for eight years running.
- ★ *Wine Spectator* magazine has awarded the country club a Best of Award of Excellence every year since 1989.
- ★ The development's three Dan Maples-designed golf courses were awarded four-and-a-half stars by *Golf Digest's* Places to Play—the highest ranking received in Virginia. The pro shop has repeatedly been selected No. 1 in the Mid-Atlantic by the PGA.

### HOW DID HE DO IT?

"There's a lot of site builders who can't get approved to build here," says Garrett of John Garrett Contracting (Aylett, VA), who uses Ritz-Craft Corporation (Mifflinburg, PA) as his modular supplier. "It's an achievement I'm proud of."

Garrett spent two years working with sales associates at Ford's Colony to refine his designs before tackling approval from the architectural review board. "I was at the right place, at the right time. That certainly helps—that and not taking no for an answer.

"What I have found is that with a lot of these higher-end neighborhoods with the architectural review boards, the people who

are averaging 13 months. I can reduce that to six weeks. Then most of the site builders are offering prices in the range of \$160 to \$180 a square foot. Using the modular building system, I can reduce that with better quality to \$100 to \$130 a square foot. Lot prices are running \$100K to \$125K and there's a lot of retirees who want to live here who don't want to spend over a half-million. So I'm targeting the lower end of the market. But it's not bad to be a bottom feeder in a million dollar market."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45

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MODULAR PROFILE | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

## EDUCATING NEIGHBORS, EARNING REFERRALS

Garrett, who built eight custom homes in 2006 (six within Ford's Colony, two elsewhere in the community) ranging in price from \$300K to \$600K, says it wasn't a cakewalk to start. "It takes six to eight weeks to get your plans approved. The architectural review board is far more stringent than any building inspector."



Once you've cleared that hurdle, don't ignore the neighbors who may have misperceptions about trucks delivering a home in sections, Garrett advises. Be proactive and spend time educating the neighbors about the advantages of modulars, how it's less disruptive to their lives, and a quieter and cleaner way to build.

"The first home was a little rough. But once people walked through it, they were like, 'Wow!' They were impressed with the quality and design capabilities." With these kinds of testimonials from both neighbors and salespeople for the development, Garrett was able to earn positive word of mouth.



Another group able to spread the word about the quality of his homes was the security force for Ford's Colony. "Security guards here double as site inspectors and they have a laundry list of regulations that builders have to adhere to. They will shut you down if the building site is unkempt, messy or if you're not practicing erosion control. I've had security guards tell me that by setting a home in one day, I eliminate six months of headaches for them. Once they knew how the process works, they earned me some of my best word of mouth among buyers." ■