

Somersby - A Lovely Neighborhood

By NELL PACH

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YOU wonder on the drive in, looking for Somersby Way, how exactly a new subdivision will fit into this landscape. Probably not at all, you're thinking - this is Farmington at its most pastoral: open fields; an eponymous farm with produce stand, greenhouse and grazing horse; stately older houses set back from the road among old trees. A development is bound to stick out, you think. And then you almost miss the entrance.

Not because it's difficult to spot - it's well-marked, in fact - but because the Somersby community's main road, set off with an old farm stone wall, is completely in keeping with all the other long, shady avenues you've passed.

The road is winding and overhung with leafy branches, houses interspersed

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along it with stands of tall, full trees - no transplanted saplings, these - and arranged around occasional cul-de-sacs. The Somersby houses are uniformly graceful in design, but otherwise notably, pleasantly different from one another. Some are sided in brick, some fronted with stone. There's a gentle gambrel roof on one, gables on another. Were you to wander in unaware of the work that produced this harmony,

you'd think it just happened to be a particularly lovely neighborhood.

That's the idea, says Chris Nelson, president of Nelson Construction, sister company to Landworks Development. Somersby is a community built to the landscape, not in spite of it, Nelson says.

"We would move roads just to make them go around existing trees," says Nelson, who is also currently the president of the Home Builders Association of Connecticut. There are no straightaways in this 51-lot community - all the roads are, as he says, "meandering." The houses, while large, don't have a mass-produced feel: the architecture is classically New England, consistent with the rest of the houses in the area.

This continuity is mirrored in Somersby's demographics. "About half of the homes were bought by local Farmington people who wanted to move up," says Nelson - people looking to upgrade to more space



and better houses. The Somersby residents have created a tight-knit and dynamic neighborhood, says Landworks Realtor Gary Emerito. There are regular community activities and block parties, and lots of kids.

The houses are dynamic too. They're at once grand and demure; traditional in design and cutting-edge-modern in engineering, with environmentally conscious innovations - tankless gas hot water heaters, energy-efficient windows and doors, thorough insulation - that reflect Nelson Construction's and Landworks' commitment to green and sustainable building practices.

"The word for Somersby is 'understated,'" says Nelson. "Understated elegance." "Understated luxury," Emerito offers. Either works.

The development has understandably been popular; just three lots remain, along with a spec house that is also for sale. That house serves as one example of what's available, but customers have enormous freedom in customization. Buyers work with builders to plan a house according to their own specifications.

"Good design means a number of really special comfortable spaces," says Emerito. Comfortable, and attractive, as demonstrated in the spec house. A recessed entrance leads to a wainscoted foyer; to the right is a parlor lit by large windows, to the left a similarly bright dining room painted a warm earthy red. Throughout the house, colors are subtle but rich; the rooms have definite personality. Next to the parlor is a study that overlooks the backyard, which abuts the Farmington Memorial Forest; a window seat suggests a moment of reading or quiet reflection after hard work.

A gracious family room with a striking bluestone fireplace and a coffered ceiling flows into the kitchen; windows in both rooms look out on the backyard as well, and sliding doors open onto a stone and brick patio. The kitchen is opulently outfitted: exquisite cabinetry including pilaster legs; granite-topped counters and island; tiled backsplash and sleek appliances. Buyers are able to choose appliances that suit their needs.

Off the kitchen is a mudroom accessible

by a side entrance and from a door in the three-car garage. The mudroom walls are lined with raised beadboard that incorporates a deacon's bench. Built-in cubbies and hooks along the bench, as well as a closet, provide storage space for outerwear. There is also a half-bath.

A T-staircase offers access to the second floor from the dining room and the foyer. At the top of the stairs, on a sort of landing, is one of the special - really special - comfortable places Emerito is talking about, a nook big enough for a couch or a few chairs, with tall windows, a place where children might gather to hear a bedtime story.

"People are moving away from the inefficiency of a two-story foyer," Nelson says. They're considering the financial and environmental cost of heating so much empty space. The result is this extra area, a cozy bonus.

"Comfortable, not huge," says Emerito. The master suite fits this description as well - there's certainly ample space, but it doesn't feel unfillably cavernous in the way that some master bedrooms can. More important are the lush details - the coffered ceiling, the walk-in closet with built-in drawers and shelves, the marble-tiled bathroom, the oversized glass shower with a seat, the jetted Jacuzzi tub set in tile below a broad window that looks out onto the surrounding woods.

Next door is a guest room with its own bathroom. Down the hall are three more bedrooms and a bathroom designed for children, with two sinks, as well as a tiled laundry room.

Children - and parents too - will appreciate the house's finished, carpeted basement, an ideal space for a playroom or a pool table. The house's tight insulation - even the foundation walls are insulated - keeps its basement warmer and drier than most, Nelson says.

Each house is not just built but tested for energy efficiency, he adds - lots of builders claim energy efficiency for their constructions, but "very few are tested." The Somersby houses have Home Energy Rating System (HERS) ratings of 54 to 56, meaning that their energy consumption is well under the new-house standard of 100. Buyers can rest assured that lower energy

use doesn't mean drafty corners or cold showers - in fact, Nelson once tested this by turning on every water-using appliance in a Somersby house at the same time. He reports that all stayed hot.

That experiment perhaps sums up Somersby neatly: steadfast dedication to practicality and luxury, sustainability and indulgence. It blends in flawlessly with its environs. But it also stands out.

For additional photographs of this property, go to www.courant.com/realestate.

Nell Pach is a free-lance writer based in Middle Haddam.

Property: Somersby, Farmington

Builder: Landworks Development / C. Nelson Construction, Inc.

Price: \$995,000 to \$1,500,000

Style: Classic New England

Rooms: 10 to 15

Bedrooms: minimum 4

Baths: minimum 3.5

Square Footage: 3,500 to 6,000 square feet

Acreage: 1 acre

Tax Rate: 18.76 mills

Best feature: Beautiful community; luxurious, customizable houses

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