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More Down to Earth in the High Country

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AT first sight, Edwards, high in the mountains of central Colorado, comes across as a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces don't quite fit.

Its cluster of playing fields, uniformly spaced town houses that parallel Interstate 70 and a downtown made up of a handful of commercial centers built in the last 15 years or so make Edwards feel more like a planned suburb than a thriving resort community.

In fact, Edwards, 110 miles west of Denver, isn't even officially a town. Named after a late-19th-century state senator who was also the local postmaster, it's a 40-square-mile swath of former ranch land and lettuce farms that sits in an unincorporated part of Eagle County and has lately been on a development fast track.

But resort community is exactly what Edwards is. With its easy access to skiing, golfing and hiking, Edwards attracts active baby boomers who want recreation coupled with upscale comforts, at housing prices slightly less staggering than those in neighboring Beaver Creek and Vail.

Eddie and Melissa Branscomb of Clemmons, N.C., who love to ski, wanted a vacation home large enough to accommodate their six boys, ages 12 to 25. Last fall they bought a four-year-old, 6,700-square-foot house in Edwards's Single-tree subdivision for just under \$2.6 million.

"If we put this house over in Beaver Creek, it'd be a little over double what it was in Singletree," Mr. Branscomb said. "Edwards is a good place for somebody who doesn't have an unlimited budget."

At an elevation of 7,200 feet, about a thousand feet lower than Vail, which is 15 miles away, Edwards also has a more temperate climate. That appealed to Bernie and Harriet Shavitz when, because of their five grandchildren, they outgrew the Vail duplex they had owned for 28 years.

"We got older and colder," said Mr. Shavitz, whose primary residence is Boca Raton, Fla. In 2006, the couple, who spend about three months in Colorado, bought a 4,600-square-foot duplex in Arrowhead, a gated community about two miles from Edwards's commercial core, for about \$2 million.

"When we first lived in Vail, there was nothing down here except the Gas-house," said Mr. Shavitz, referring to a steakhouse where animal heads still stare balefully from the walls. "Edwards is taking on a life of its own now."

The Scene

Edwards doesn't have the quaint, historic mining town character that draws many to Colorado's mountain communities, but several complexes house a range of shops, restaurants and services. "Edwards was very progressive in developing this area and seeing the need to have density," said Doug Gray, of Forbes Sotheby's International Realty. "You're in walking distance of just about anything you want to do."

The largest complex, Riverwalk, combines clothing and home-furnishings stores, bistros and salons with luxury condominiums in 15 Victorian-style buildings near the Eagle River. "I buy clothes there. I eat there. I buy gifts there," said Gary Finley, an interior designer who splits his time between Edwards and

Laguna Beach, Calif. "And a lot of the store owners are also the storekeepers."

The vibe is hip yet ski-sweater casual. A mix of young resort workers, local professionals and second-home owners mingle at spots like Sato for sushi or Eat! Drink! for artisanal cheese and cabernet. At Ray's, an upscale steakhouse, an all-age crowd rubs elbows — and more — at the bar on weekend nights. The Bookworm, a bookstore and cafe, is enduringly popular; earlier this year it tripled its size.

Many homeowners may be wealthy, but flashiness is frowned upon. "We call it quiet money," said Joyce Krasnow, who with her husband, Paul, spends about eight months a year at their five-bedroom house in Cordillera, a private golf-course community. They bought their place for \$2.8 million in 2002.

Their neighbors, said Mr. Krasnow, an insurance agent from Los Angeles, are "movers and shakers in industry who retired with great resources, but you would never know it."

Pros

Edwards's location at the heart of the Vail Valley means there is no shortage of outdoor sports. The Vail and Beaver Creek ski resorts nearby beckon with more than 7,000 acres of terrain. Three Nordic centers have groomed cross-country ski and snowshoe trails. And in summer, hikers and mountain bikers head for the many trails that rise out of the valley and into the White River National Forest.

Cultural draws include the Vilar Performing Arts Center in Beaver Creek, three miles away, where shows have ranged from the Russian National Orchestra to the jazz and R & B musician George