

# Builder Big on California

By Josh Skapin, Calgary Herald January 25, 2013 12:22 PM



**A huge fireplace adds a cosy touch to the great room of the 8,200-square-foot home of Jay and Karen Westman in Bighorn Properties in Palm Desert, Calif. (click on the photo for our 10-picture tour).**

**Photograph by: Photo , Bighorn Properties**

Just as top chefs have a discerning eye for restaurants, award-winning builders don't take property purchases lightly.

And Calgary real estate mogul Jay Westman is no exception. Westman co-founded Jayman MasterBuilt, the reigning Calgary region Builder of the Year.

With their main home in Calgary and another in Kelowna, Westman and his wife, Karen, extended their collection of houses to an exclusive estate development south of the border.

The couple landed in sunny Palm Desert, Calif., with an 8,200-square-foot home in a luxury community called Bighorn Properties.

“Our home had us as soon as we walked through the front door,” says Jay of the soaring four-bedroom plan with wide-open spaces and 25-foot ceilings.

“The sense of arrival took my breath away,” he says.

Jay’s home boasts what he calls a desert contemporary design.

“The architecture is totally different from anything I have seen around the world,” says Westman, of features that include stylish rounded windows with wood treatment and a four-barrel ceiling.

Like any master builder, Westman took a breathtaking home and made it better. His additions to the home include an expansive, triple-car garage — a high-end home to Westman’s high-end cars, which include a Ferrari and an Aston Martin.

The garage features a black lacquer ceiling with a glass refrigerator next to a Scotch and smoker’s bar.

Every movie buff dreams of having a theatre at home. Well, the Westmans did just that, with a cinema boasting an expansive curved 3-D screen and 4-D chairs that add an extra element to the movie-going experience.

“If you’re doing the James Bond thing and watching a speeding car go around the corner, the chair is vibrating,” says Jay. “It adds a whole new dimension.”

It’s also a new dimension in the bathroom, where a screen in the mirror plays the same movie currently on the big screen — which means there’s no need to hit the pause button.

Part of the movie-going experience is the snacks, which wasn’t lost of the Westmans, who included a fully-stocked concession stand in their luxury home cinema.

Jay’s Jayman MasterBuilt is a noted brand across Alberta and his neighbours at Bighorn are no less accomplished in the business world. The residents at the estate community are leaders of major corporations, including department store and fast-food restaurant chains that span the U.S.

The homes at Bighorn Properties average between \$1.8 million and \$12.9 million US. And a few are much pricier than that. “

“This is their Disneyland,” says marketing director, Theresa Maggio. “They come here to relax and rejuvenate.”

Homes at Bighorn range from 2,500 to 32,000 square feet and the community has 550 home sites, 421 of which are completed.

But beyond their fantasy home, which the Westmans live in about 100 days out of the year, a number of qualities made the couple take notice of Bighorn — including the area, itself.

Their first trip to Palm Desert was about five years ago and from the start, Jay was impressed.

“The airport is an open-area airport, like Hawaii, except it’s only two hours and 45 minutes away by WestJet,” he says.

The first thing Jay and Karen noticed in Palm Desert was its sprawling mountain range and land covered in lush green grass and palm trees.

Another perk is that although Palm Springs is much smaller compared to other Sun Belt centres such as Phoenix, Ariz., it comes with shopping amenities that Jay compares to Beverly Hills’ Rodeo Drive.

“It has art galleries and incredible restaurants — all the big brand names for shopping are on it,” says Jay. “That’s just a mere few minutes away from the community of Bighorn.”

When the Westmans toured communities in the Palm Desert, they were stuck by the exclusivity of Bighorn. As Jay says, “I couldn’t get in.

“They wouldn’t let me in the gates without an appointment there. Even though I listed off two or three people that I knew were living there, there was no getting in the gate.”

Apart from “business golf,” Jay doesn’t have the fiery passion for the sport others in the community may have, although he appreciates its history. “They have photos of Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and all the famous golfers who have played there.”

The Mountain Course was designed by Arthur Hills, while the Canyons course was designed by Tom Fazio. Both are 18 holes.

The golf culture at Bighorn extends past the greens, says Jay. He and others in the community zip from place-to-place within the project on golf carts, many of which are customized.

The Westmans aren’t the only Canadians at the property.

Maggio says residents of Calgary and Vancouver count as the third highest demographic of those whose primary residences are outside southern California.

While Jay believes Bighorn has pretty much everything one could ask for, he saw the need for a children's playground — so he challenged the other Canadians to put up enough money to fund the addition to the property.

“I'm actually quite proud of that,” he says.

Together, the Canadian residents put together \$80,000 to pay for the play centre that includes a kids' putting green.

The property includes a marketplace with groceries and a Starbucks next to a large dog park.

It also has a large health and wellness centre with a fitness centre, full-service salon and spa with a number of service options including body treatments and facials.

The community also has seven dining options, including Canyons Steak House and The Pour House.

Jay says Canyons, which offers a formal dining experience, has a “beautiful ambience,” with a central, round-stone fireplace with a high-pitched ceiling and stunning views.

“It views down the entire valley because Bighorn probably sits at its highest point,” he says. The Pour House is a more casual dining option, which Jay calls “always full and always fun.”

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

**Project:** Bighorn Properties is a secure luxury community. It has custom estate homes and villas. It boasts two 18-hole golf courses and a spa and wellness centre.

**Prices:** Homes average between \$1.8 million and \$12 million US.

**Area:** Palm Desert in southern California.

**Information:** Visit [bighorngolf.com](http://bighorngolf.com)

## **THE BUYERS**

Jay and Karen Westman.

**Background:** Jay is co-founder and chairman of Jayman MasterBuilt, a prominent Calgary home builder.

The company offers a variety of housing options, including single-family, front-attached garage homes and townhomes through its Jayman modus and Innovations by Jayman divisions.

Jay and Karen own homes in Calgary and in B.C.'s Okanogan — and now in Palm Desert, Calif., at Bighorn Properties.

The home they purchased includes four bedrooms and was renovated to feature a high-end, three-car garage and a 3-D movie theatre.

### **TRIP BECOMES STAY**

In the early 1970s, R.D. Hubbard and his wife, Joan Dale, were on a trip in the Coachella Valley of California.

They discovered land they believed to have big potential and purchased two home sites and built their own residence.

Hubbard and a group of investors developed the land, kick-starting Bighorn Properties as a private luxury golf community.

The land was once owned by Westinghouse Corp. Hubbard also owns a breeding farm that has produced champion horse racing studs.

He and his wife, Joan, started the Hubbard Museum of the American West in Ruidoso Downs, which includes cowboy artifacts.

Visit [bighorngolf.com](http://bighorngolf.com)

### **MAKING THEIR ESCAPE**

Palm Desert is a city in the Coachella Valley in southern California.

It is known as a popular retreat for snowbirds escaping Canadian winters.

That's no surprise, considering its average annual high temperature is 32 C.

This makes for ideal conditions for golfers and has inspired a number of area resorts.

Palm Desert is also home to many celebrities, including Microsoft boss Bill Gates and golfer Michelle Wie.

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