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BAY AREA // REAL ESTATE

Gated mansions and golf: Why buyers still flock to the East Bay's most exclusive neighborhoods

By [Sarah Ravani](#), Staff Writer
Dec 7, 2025

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Exterior of the Fieldhaven home, located at 7 Country Oak Lane, in Alamo, Calif., on Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2025.
Yalonda M. James/S.F. Chronicle

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The most expensive home for sale in the East Bay may be a bargain for the right buyer. The homeowner of a 22-bedroom, 10-bath compound on 21 acres in the ritzy, swanky town of Alamo dropped the price by \$12 million after two years on the market, a move that his real estate agent said reflects his motivation to sell the mansion.

The homeowner will likely take a loss from the sale of Fieldhaven Estate, a French-country-style residence that features a geese fountain from the 1800s, an aviary and car barn for 20 vehicles. The seller bought it for \$19 million and spent \$7 million on upgrades, but is asking \$23 million for it.

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The price drop reflects a broader cooling housing market in the Tri-Valley — and throughout the Bay Area — due to rising interest rates and economic uncertainty. Real estate agents say homebuyers remain attracted to the Tri-Valley's three most opulent, luxury home neighborhoods — Alamo, Blackhawk and Diablo — despite the market, but it can take a long time to sell these higher-priced properties.

While the Tri-Valley's extravagant neighborhoods are often overshadowed by Atherton and Woodside on the Peninsula, the area has historically been a prime location for wealthy Bay Area residents seeking to build grand estates. Further south in the foothills of Pleasanton, William Randolph Hearst's parents built a 53-room mansion in the 1890s on the 500-acre Hacienda del Pozo de Verona.



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The area's appeal to top-end buyers endured as the exclusive neighborhoods were developed, including Blackhawk in the early 1980s.

"We had a lot of high-level executives from San Francisco that said, 'I want to live in Blackhawk. I'm tired of living in the city,'" said David Behring, the son of Blackhawk's developer, adding that eventually Blackhawk grew in popularity. "There was just a lot of panache that came with the name Blackhawk."



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Today, the neighborhoods attract tech executives, Fortune 500 CEOs, retired Chevron brass, former professional athletes and others at prices that are steep, but more affordable than for similar properties in Atherton and Woodside.



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Realtor Joujou Chawla at Bella Diablo Vista, a multimillion-dollar home, bordering Mount Diablo State Park on the top of Eagle Ridge Drive in Blackhawk, Calif., on Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025. The residence has 5 bedrooms, 6.5 bathrooms, a 5 car garage and is 9,383 square feet sitting on 1.17 acres. The property also includes an 1,138-square-foot guesthouse.
Scott Strazzante/S.F. Chronicle

"It's lifestyle, security, gated and phenomenal school system," said Joujou Chawla, a longtime real estate agent who moved to Blackhawk in 1985. "A lot of privacy and greenery."

Chawla added that homes in Blackhawk and other parts of the Tri-Valley that cost \$3 million would cost up to \$6 million in Atherton due to proximity to tech job centers in the South Bay.



View from the backyard at Bella Diablo Vista, a multimillion-dollar home, bordering Mount Diablo State Park on the top of Eagle Ridge Drive in Blackhawk, Calif., on Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025. The residence has 5 bedrooms, 6.5 bathrooms, a 5 car garage and is 9,383 square feet sitting on 1.17 acres. The property also includes an 1,138-square-foot guesthouse.
Scott Strazzante/S.F. Chronicle

Blackhawk, Alamo and Diablo boast scenic views, hiking trails and heightened security thanks to additional taxes residents pay for increased police presence. Tucked away in gated estates are homes ranging in price from \$2 million to tens of millions, offering high-end country club-living that appeals to tech executives, corporate leaders and deep-pocketed Californians seeking seclusion and status.

Much of the Bay Area experienced a drop in median home sale prices this year — a phenomenon that played out slightly differently in these private, luxury neighborhoods.

Median detached home sale prices in Alamo dropped from \$2.7 million in 2024, with an average of 26 days on the market, to nearly \$2.5 million in 2025, with an average of 28 days on the market, according to data from Compass, a real estate company. In Diablo, the median sales price was higher in 2025 but homes took longer to sell — with the median sales price at \$3.3 million with an average of 35 days on market compared to \$2.8 million in 2024 with an average of 23 days on the market.

Comparable data is not available for Blackhawk, but median home prices there typically start at just over \$2.4 million, though home prices can surpass \$12 million. Currently, homes are typically on the market for about a month. At the peak of the market in 2021, homes took an average of 17 days to sell, Chawla said. Real estate agents say that homes in these neighborhoods remain highly desirable and prices are dependent on whether the properties are newly renovated. Residents are attracted to the three communities' architectural and natural beauty and access to open space.

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One real estate agent said a selling point for these communities is that they will never be overbuilt — the open space that dominates the area will remain. Blackhawk stands out among the three for its privacy; visitors must get through fortified gates to even enter the neighborhood. Alamo is known for its Italian villas and craftsman-style ranches. Diablo maintains its own distinct character with older restored homes that are reminiscent of properties in New England.

"These are very distinct communities. Sometimes in the South Bay ... it's like you are one mega region as opposed to unique distinct communities that each have their own feel," said Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen, who represents all three areas.



Real estate agent Marilee Headen, seen at the Diablo Country Club on Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2025, said many homebuyers are drawn to Diablo, Calif., for the club.
Yalonda M. James/S.F. Chronicle

While Fieldhaven has been on the market for nearly two years, Marilee Headen, a real estate agent with Compass who represents it and other properties in Alamo and Diablo, said that's typical for a listing of its kind and that interest has been significant. As part of its effort to reach more potential home buyers, Compass advertises its luxury listings on websites in China to lure residents flocking to the region for its good schools.

David Duffield, the co-founder of PeopleSoft and Workday built Fieldhaven over seven years at a cost of \$135 million. To build the estate today would cost \$250 million, Headen said.

Duffield eventually sold the property to J. Taylor Crandall, founder of the New York-based private equity firm Oak Hill Capital.

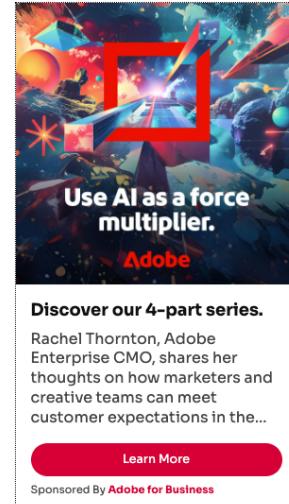
"Alamo has wealthier people who want to live a little bit more of an understated country life where they can have a lovely home but they also know their neighbors, they go to the music in the park each summer at Livorna Park," Andersen said.

Residents aren't always open to change. For the first time in more than a decade, a multifamily housing project has been proposed in Alamo, but residents feel tense about the proposal for 60 condos.

Alamo is the only community among the three that the state has required to zone for new housing — Diablo and Blackhawk were off the table because they're located in high-risk fire zones. Alamo must permit 300 new homes, mostly in its downtown, by 2031, which some Alamo residents pushed back on, Andersen said.

Nearly 5 miles away at the base of Mount Diablo is the 1.4-square-mile community of Diablo of 385 homes. Headen, who has lived there for 40 years, said the enclave was first built as a resort community with a country club in 1914 meant to entice San Francisco residents for a scenic getaway. A train brought visitors from Oakland to the country club.

The Diablo Country Club is still a prominent fixture in the community. The club — which has restaurants, tennis courts, an 18-hole golf course, bocce ball courts and a swimming pool — just completed a [\\$35 million renovation](#) in 2024.



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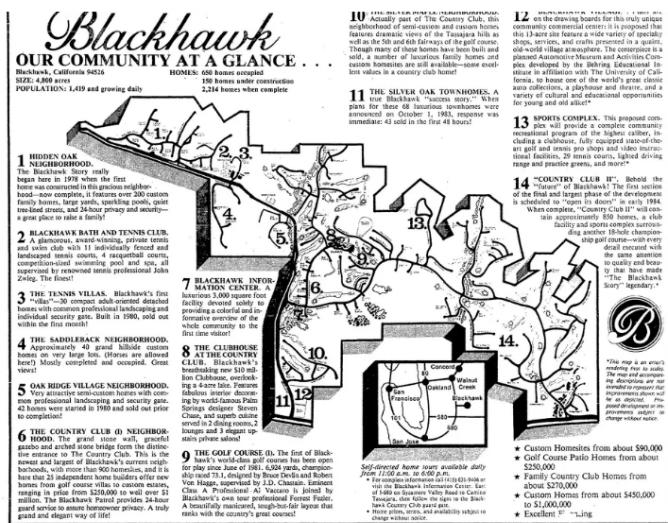
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"A lot of the people who are buying homes in Diablo are people who belong to the club and then want to move into the immediate area so they can golf cart to the club," Headen said, adding that the entrance to Diablo "is the most beautiful street in the East Bay."

Diablo residents include the developer of Bishop Ranch in San Ramon, tech workers, and scientists at the Lawrence Livermore National Lab.



Advertisements for Blackhawk that were published in the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper in the 1980s when the first homes were ready to be sold.

San Francisco Chronicle

Similar to Diablo, Blackhawk was built to accommodate members of the local country clubs. Kenneth Behring built about 2,500 homes in seven visually distinct gated neighborhoods dotted with sycamore trees. His son, David, said he has lived in four different Blackhawk homes since first moving there in 1981.

"I saw the potential the house had," David Behring said of his current home. "It had a beautiful creekside setting. It was a bigger house for entertainment. It had an incredible family room with a giant Lake Tahoe type fireplace that's very unusual."

Chawla said part of Kenneth Behring's vision was to build a community that could accommodate different stages of life. Many of her clients are Blackhawk residents looking to either upgrade or downsize depending on their circumstances.

That's the case for Annette and Emory Anderson. The couple moved to Blackhawk in 1984 on the golf course's 18th hole, but had their eyes on an empty lot on top of a hill with views of Mount Diablo. Nearly 12 years ago, the lot came on the market and the couple jumped on it.



Movie theater in the Fieldhaven home, located at 7 Country Oak Lane, in Alamo, Calif. on Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2025.
Yalonda M. James/S.F. Chronicle

They built a six-bedroom and eight-bathroom home featuring a dog-wash room with hand-painted tiles of every dog that Annette Anderson has ever loved, a massive

kitchen at the heart of the home and a vineyard.

Now they're selling their custom-built home for \$12.3 million, which went on the market in May. But the couple doesn't intend to leave Blackhawk. They're looking to downsize as they embark on retirement.

Emory Anderson said he doesn't want to leave the neighborhood's golf courses.

"To me, the perfect day is not getting in a car," he said, "it's just getting in a golf cart."

Dec 7, 2025



Sarah Ravani

TRI-VALLEY REPORTER

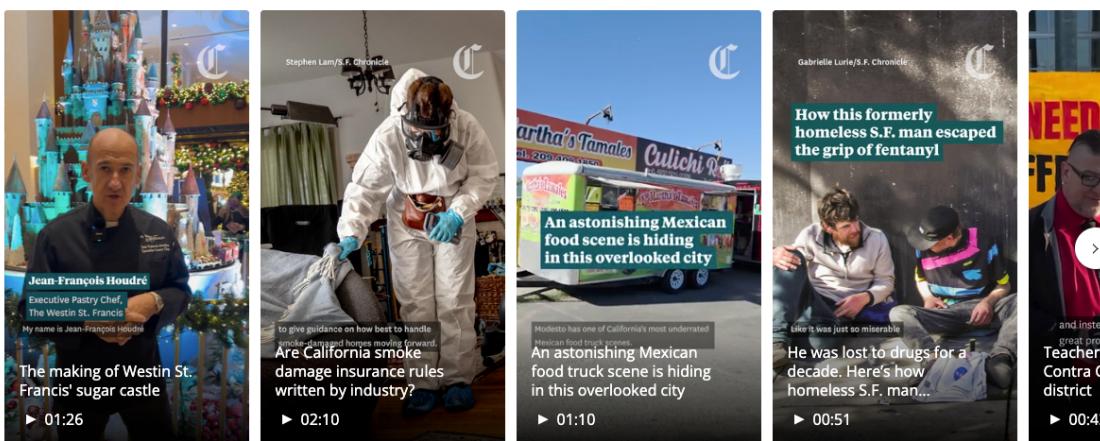


Sarah Ravani covers the East Bay's Interstate 680 corridor, which includes the booming Tri-Valley region, focusing on growth and transformation.

She joined the Chronicle in 2016 and previously covered the cities of Oakland and Berkeley. Ravani was part of the team that investigated the political corruption case that led to former Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao's recall and eventual federal indictment. She has covered news stories and features about housing, public safety, homelessness and local elections.

Prior to covering the East Bay, Ravani was a breaking news reporter, covering shootings and wildfires. She's a graduate of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Ravani teaches a reporting class at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism.

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