

Luxury builders look forward to a bright future at Babcock Ranch

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Divco Custom Homes' Sawgrass model.

It's all about the vision.

Four custom home builders are pretty unanimous in citing the vision of developer Syd Kitson as a primary reason they've set up shop at Babcock Ranch.

Located northeast of Fort Myers, Babcock Ranch was created by Kitson & Partners with respect for the natural environment and the philosophy that smart growth and sustainability work together. It is the nation's first solar-powered town. Half of its 18,000 acres is set aside as greenways, parks and lakes.

"I think Kitson is building a nice development with sustainability and a green approach," says Bill Ennen, president of Fort Myers-based Florida Lifestyle Homes.

"I believe in what they're doing."

That seems to be the consensus among Florida Lifestyle Homes, Arthur Rutenberg Homes, Divco Custom Homes and Stock Classic Homes, all custom builders at Babcock Ranch.

Babcock Ranch one day will be home to 50,000 residents.

“We recognize this is going to be a largescale community that is going to be a very desirable place to live for a lot of different people,” says Scott Carter, sales consultant for Fort Myers-based Arthur Rutenberg Homes. “We see the desirability of Babcock for all the reasons they created this community — from a smaller footprint on the environment to that small-town feel.”



Florida Lifestyle Homes' Lauren model.

Claudine Leger-Wetzel, vice president of sales and marketing for Stock Development, sees Babcock Ranch as a serendipitous fit for the Naples-based builder.

“We just see it as a wonderful opportunity to be part of a new town and the vision of Syd Kitson,” she says. “There’s so much potential for long-term growth, and we’re so pleased to be a part of it.”

Stock Classic Homes

Stock Classic Homes' Wisteria model in Lake Babcock Estates features more than 2,400 square feet of living space and has three bedrooms plus study, three baths and a three-car garage. An optional fourth bedroom is available. It is listed for \$479,990.



Stock Classic Homes' Wisteria model.

“We believe our homes are designed with indoor and outdoor living in mind,” Ms. Leger-Wetzel says. “Stock is known for its expansive lanais. And Babcock Ranch’s eco-friendly lifestyle strikes a chord with our buyers.”

The builder’s Plantation IV model in the Lake Timber neighborhood has more than 3,000 square feet, four bedrooms, 3½ baths and a three-car garage on Lake Timber. It lists for \$529,990.

“We want our homes to attract families to early retirees and empty-nesters — anyone who wants to help populate a brand-new town and take advantage of the amenities and lifestyle it offers.

“It’s all coming together.”

Florida Lifestyle Homes

Florida Lifestyle Homes has been creating Old Florida and Farmhouse architectural style homes since 1993. Its website cites “uncompromising craftsmanship, functional design and attention to detail” in homes with roomy interiors and creative outdoor living spaces “filled with captivating details at every turn.”



Arthur Rutenberg Homes' Shearwater model.

At Babcock Ranch, Florida Lifestyle Homes features models ranging in price from the mid-\$500,000 to a little more than \$900,000.

The Lauren at Lake Timber is a particularly intriguing model. With more than 4,000 square feet of living space, it's a two-story that features four bedrooms and three bathrooms, not to mention a two-story great room overlooking the lake. The second floor offers two loft areas, a bonus room and en suite fourth bedroom. And there's a designer pool. It is priced at \$925,500.

Priced at about \$549,000, the Sydney by Florida Lifestyle Homes offers a welcoming covered front porch leading to a wide-open entryway. Inside, more than 2,300 square feet hold two bedrooms, two full baths and a spacious den. The great room and kitchen provide a large open space for gatherings. The kitchen includes an extended island and cooking space as well as a walk-in pantry.

"We were just talking to a retired couple, and green was the whole selling point for them to come to Babcock," Mr. Ennen says. "We also built a custom home on the water for a German couple. We built to their requirements.

"In a way," he laughs, "we're like Silly Putty. "We change shape to match the tastes of our clients."

In his years as a builder, Mr. Ennen has seen how communities grow. And he has noticed that growth dynamic taking place at Babcock Ranch.

"Overall, Babcock will attract lots of families with kids," he says. "Our buyers are moveup buyers. They might come here part time and decide to come down full time. As a community matures, you'll get people who buy homes or condos, live in them and

then and decide to move up and buy single-family. I've seen it in numerous communities."

Arthur Rutenberg Homes

Established in 1953, Arthur Rutenberg Homes has developed a reputation for building high quality custom homes that reach the peak of design and craftsmanship. It is the largest network of independently owned custom home building companies in the nation, according to its website.

At Babcock, Arthur Rutenberg Homes offers a wide variety of floor plans. A Novara model that sold in December for \$1.2 million features more than 3,000 square feet, three bedrooms, 3½ baths, a den and a great room.

Company President, Tim Rose, says the Fort Myers office began looking at Babcock Ranch "years ago."

"It's very exciting to be out here," he says. "We like the Babcock Ranch concept and style. It's a good match for us."

The Arthur Rutenberg Homes furnished model open for viewing is the Avila, a new design on Lake Babcock created specifically for the Babcock Ranch lifestyle. It offers more than 2,800 square, three bedrooms, three baths, a den and a bonus room. It is priced at \$1.365 million furnished.

The Shearwater is a three-bedroom home with 3½ baths, a three-car garage, a den and a great room, priced at about \$1.2 million.

"One of our key strengths is that we have a lot of floor plans to choose from," Mr. Carter says. "That said, we listen to our customers and try to guide them. We'll modify floor plans according to our customers' needs.

"We're getting tons of traffic at Babcock Ranch," he adds. "They hold so many events to help bring visitors out to see our homes. I'd say we've had 500-600 people come through the model. It's a fantastic opportunity for us to be here."

Divco Custom Homes

On the company website, Divco Custom Homes bills itself as an opportunity to showcase personal lifestyles while offering the buyer a sanctuary.

Every home is an expression of its owners. "In short, it symbolizes who you are."

Divco Custom Homes, which has been around since 1984, has built more than 1,200 custom homes in gated communities and waterfront neighborhoods throughout Naples, Marco Island and Bonita Springs.

Its model at Babcock Ranch, the Sawgrass, is designed to provide privacy and accessibility to the outdoors. The model is situated on a preserve in Babcock Lake Estates South. The Sawgrass is available for purchase and immediate occupancy upon completion. It is priced at \$1.115 million.

It features more than 4,000 square feet of space and offers four bedrooms 4½ baths, a study and a three-car garage, not to mention a porch leading to a defined foyer and a great room with vaulted ceilings.

Perhaps Arthur Rutenberg Homes' Mr. Carter best sums up the feelings of Babcock's custom builders: "We're off to a good start," he says. "We're excited about the future here."