NO PLACE LIKE HOME

On the manicured streets of a master-planned community

By David Guterson

To the casual eye, Green Valley, Nevada, a corporate master-planned community just south of Las Vegas, would appear to be a pleasant place to live. On a Sunday last April—a week before the riots in Los Angeles and related disturbances in Las Vegas—the golf carts were lined up three abreast at the upscale "Legacy" course; people in golf outfits on the clubhouse veranda were eating three-cheese omelets and strawberry waffles and looking out over the palm trees and fairways, talking business and reading Sunday newspapers. In nearby Parkside Village, one of Green Valley's thirty-five developments, a few homeowners washed cars or boats or pulled up weeds in the sun. Cars wound slowly over clean broad streets, ferrying children to swimming pools and backyard barbecues and Cineplex movie theaters. At the Silver Springs tennis courts, a well-tanned teenage boy in a tennis togs pummeled his sweating father. Two twelve-year-old daredevils on expensive mountain bikes, decked out in Chicago Bulls caps and matching tank tops, watched and ate chocolate candies.

Green Valley is as much a noun as a verb, a place in the process of becoming what it purports to be. Everywhere on the fringes of its 8,400 acres one finds homes going up, developments going in (another twenty-one developments are under way), the desert in the throes of being transformed in accordance with the master plan of Green Valley's designer and builder, the American Nevada Corporation. The colors of its homes are muted in the Southwest manner: beiges, tans, dun browns, burnt reds, olive grays, rusts, and cinnamons. Its graceful, palm-line boulevards and parkways are conspicuously devoid of gas stations, convenience stores, and fast-food restaurants, presenting instead a seamless facade of in-terminable, well-manicured developments punctuated only by golf courses and an occasional shopping plaza done in stucco. Within the high walls lining Green Valley's expansive parkways lie homes so similar they appear as uncanny mirror reflections of one another—and, as it turns out, they are. In most neighborhoods a prospective homeowner must choose from among a limited set of models with names like "Greenbriar," "Innisbrook," and "Tamaron" (or, absurdly, in a development called Heartland, "Beginnings," "Memories," and "Reflections"), each of which is merely a variation on a theme: Spanish, Moorish, Mexican, Territorial, Mediterranean, Italian Country, Mission. Each development inhabits a planned socio-economic niche—$99,000, $113,900, $260,000 homes—and on into the stratosphere for custom models if a wealthy buyer desires. Neighborhoods are labyrinthine, confusing in their sameness; each block looks eerily like the next. On a spring evening after eight o'clock it is possible to drive through miles of them without seeing a single human being. Corners are marked with signs a visitor finds more than a little disconcerting: WARNING, they read, NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM IN...
FORCE. WE IMMEDIATELY REPORT ALL SUSPICIOUS PERSONS AND ACTIVITIES TO OUR POLICE DEPARTMENT. THE SIGNS ON GARAGES DON'T MAKE ME FEEL ANY BETTER. WARNING, THEY READ, YOUR NEIGHBORS ARE WATCHING.

I'd come to Green Valley because I was curious to meet the citizens of a community in which everything is designed, orchestrated, and executed by a corporation. More and more Americans, millions of them—singles, families, retirees—are living in such places. Often proximate to beltway interchanges and self-contained office parks of boxy glass buildings, these communities are everywhere now, although far more common in the West than elsewhere: its vast terrain, apparently, still lends itself to dreamers with grand designs. Irvine, California—the master-planned product of the Irvine Company, populated by 110,000 people and one of the fastest-growing cities in America—is widely considered a prototype, as are Reston, Virginia, and Columbia, Maryland, two early East Coast versions. Fairfield Communities, Inc., owns fourteen "Fairfield Communities": Fairfield in the Foothills, Fairfield's La Cholla, Fairfield's River Farm, and so forth. The Walt Disney Co. has its entry—Celebration—under way not far from Florida's Disney World. Las Colinas, Inc., invented Las Colinas, Texas, "America's Premier Master Planned Community," "America's Premier Development," and "America's Corporate Headquarters." The proliferation of planned communities is most visible in areas of rapid growth, which would certainly include the Las Vegas valley, the population of which has nearly doubled, to 799,381, since 1982.

That Sunday afternoon I made my way along peaceful boulevards to Green Valley's civic center, presumably a place where people congregate. A promotional brochure describes its plaza as "the perfect size for public gatherings and all types of social events," but on that balmy day, the desert in bloom just a few miles off, no one had, in fact, gathered here. The plaza had the desultory ambiance of an architectural mistake—deserted, useless, and irrelevant to Green Valley's citizens, who had, however, gathered in large numbers at stucco shopping centers not far off—at Spotlight Video, Wallpaper World, Record City, and Bicycle Depot, Rapunzel's Den Hair Salon, Enzo's Pizza and Ristorante, A Basket of Joy, and K-Mart.

Above the civic center, one after another, flew airplanes only seconds from touching down at nearby McCarran International Airport, which services Las Vegas casinos. Low enough that the rivets in their wings could be discerned, the planes descended at sixty-second intervals, ferrying fresh loads of gamblers into port. To the northeast, beyond a billboard put up by a developer—WATCH US BUILD THE NEW LAS VEGAS—lay a rectangle of desert as yet not built upon but useful as a dumping ground: scraps of plastic, bits of stucco, heaps of wire mesh and lumber ends were all scattered in among low creosote bush. The corporate master plan, I later learned, calls for hauling these things away and replacing them with, among other things, cinemas, a complex of swimming pools, restaurants, and substantially more places to shop.

Inside the civic center were plenty of potted palms, walls of black glass, and red marble floors, but again, no congregating citizens. Instead, I found the offices of the Americana Group, Realtors; Lawyer's Title of Nevada, Inc.; RANPAC Engineering Corporation; and Coleman Homes, a developer. A few real estate agents were gearing up for Sunday home tours dressed to kill and shuffling mail folders, their BMW's parked outside. Kirk Warren, a marketing specialist with the Americana Group, listened patiently to my explanation: I came to the civic center to talk to people, I wanted to know what brought them to a corporate-planned community and why they decided to stay.

"It's safe here," Warren explained, handing me a business card with his photograph on it. "And clean. And nice. The schools are good and the crime rate low. It's what buyers are looking for."

Outside the building, in the forlorn-looking plaza, six concrete benches had been fixed astride lawns, offering citizens twenty-four seats. Teens had scrawled their graffiti on the pavement (DARREN WAS HERE, JASON IS AWSOME), and a footlight beneath a miniature obelisk had been smashed by someone devoted to its destruction. Someone had recently driven past on a motorcycle, leaving telltale skid marks.

The history of suburbia is a history of gradual dysfunction, says Robert Greenspun, whose family owns the American Nevada Corporation (ANC), the entity that created Green Valley. Americans, he explains, moved to the suburbs in search of escape from the more undesirable aspects of the city and from undesirable people in particular. Time passed and undesirable showed up anyway; suburbia had to mean to prevent this. But in the end that was all right, Greenspun points out, because master planners recognized the problem as an enormously lucrative market opportunity and began building places like Green Valley.

Rutgers history professor Robert Fishman, author of Bourgeois Utopia: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia, would agree that suburbia hasn't worked. Suburbia, he argues, appeared in America in the middle of the nineteenth century, offering escape from the squalor and stench of the new industrial cities. The history of suburbia...
reached a climax, he says, with the rise of Los Angeles as a city that is in fact one enormous suburb. Today, writes Fehlman, "the original concept of suburbia as an unspoiled synthesis of city and countryside has lost its meaning." Suburbia has become what even the greatest advocates of suburban growth never desired—a new form of city. These new suburban cities have, of course, inevitably developed the kinds of problems—congestion, crime, pollution, tawdriness—that the middle class left cities to avoid. Now, in the Nineties, developers and corporate master planners, recognizing an opportunity, have stepped in to supply the middle class, once again, with the promise of a bourgeois utopia.

As a product of the American Nevada Corporation, Green Valley is a community with its own marketing logo: the letters G and V intertwined quite cleverly to create a fanciful optical illusion—two leaves and a truncated plant stem. It is also a community with an advertising slogan: ALL THAT A COMMUNITY CAN BE. Like other master-planned communities in America, it is designed to embody a corporate ideal not only of streets and houses but of image and feeling. Green Valley's crisp lawns, cul-de-sacs, and stucco walls suggest an amiable suburban existence where, as an advertising brochure tells us, people can enjoy life more than they ever did before. And, apparently, they do enjoy it. Thirty-four thousand people have filled Green Valley's homes in a mere fourteen years—the place is literally a boomtown.

They have come from Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and New Haven, riding Las Vegas's boom economy—100,000 new jobs in the past four years—but fearful of Vegas's storied sins. Yet "The New Las Vegas," as its promoters like to say, is more than casinos and burlesque shows; it's a place where companies such as Citibank and Montgomery Ward have located back-office operations and where the rate of new employment outside the casinos now outstrips the rate of growth inside them. Distributors like the city's advantageous position—tucked into the desert between Phoenix, Los Angeles, Denver, and Salt Lake City—where the cost of land and labor is much lower than in neighboring California—ultimately sign mortgage contracts and stay. ANC, meanwhile, banks on more of them coming; its development plan extends to the year 2005, by which time Green Valley's population is expected to double to more than 60,000 residents—larger than the current population of Nevada's 134-year-old capital, Carson City.

Such growth may seem rather odd in a locale whose central fact of existence is barren desert. Green Valley is neither green nor a valley—it's brown and flat. Its stark dry washes lie strewn with sun-faded Budweiser cans, bits of tattered black construction tarp, and leftover concrete hardened into lumps in the desert sand. Green Valley's water flows from the Hoover Dam, twenty miles to the southeast, through ditches, canals, and aqueducts. Like most of the rest of the American West, Green Valley is a desert remade in the image of a garden, a temporary Eden, a mirage.

On weekday mornings, familiar yellow buses amble through Green Valley toward public schools built on acreage set aside in a 1971 land-sale agreement between ANC and Henderson, a blue-collar town just south of Vegas that was initially hostile to its new upscale neighbor but that now willingly participates in Green Valley's prosperity. Many parents prefer to drive their children to these schools before moving on to jobs, shopping, tennis, or aerobics classes. (Most Green Valley residents work in Las Vegas, commuting downtown in under twenty minutes.) The characteristic Green Valley family—a married couple with two children under twelve—has an average annual income of $55,000; about one in five are members of the Green Valley Athletic
Club, described by master planner
the focal point of the community.
(family initiation fee: $1,000). The
club’s lavish swimming pools and air-
conditioned tennis courts are, I was
told, especially popular in summer
when Green Valley temperatures can
reach 115 degrees and when white
caravans of Porsches and BMWs make
their way toward its shimmering
parking lots.

Inside is a state-of-the-art bud
sculpting palace with Gravitrone
Upper Body Systems in its weight
room. $3,999 protein drinks at its Health
Bar are served with complimentary
mouthwash in its locker
rooms (swilled liberally by well-
served tennis aficionados pruning
their thinning hair at mirrors being
headed upstairs to Café Briens Deux),
and employees trained to create
an experience that brings a smile
to every Member at every opportu-
nity.” I was given a tour by Jill
Johnson, a Membership Service Repre-
sentative, who showed me the Cyber
systems in the weight room, the Life
Circuit computerized resistance equip-
ment, the aerobics studio, and the
day-care center.

Upstairs, the bartender mixed
“Arnold Schwarzenegger” for an
adolescent boy with a crisp haircut and
tennis racket: yogurt, banana, and
weight-gain powder. Later, in the
weight room, I met a man I’ll call
Phil Anderson, an accountant, who
introduced me to his wife, Marie, and
to his children, Jason and Sarah. Phil
was ruddy, overweight, and sweat-soaked
and had a towel draped over his shoul-
ders. Marie was trim, dressed for tennis; the kids looked bored. Phil had
been playing racquetball that evening
while Marie took lessons to improve
her serve and the children watched television in the kids’ lounge. Like
most of the people I met in Green
Valley, the Andersons were reluctant
to have their real names used (“We
don’t want the reaction,” was how some residents explained it, including
Marie and Phil). I coaxed them by promise
to protect their true identities, and the
Andersons began to chat.

“We moved here because I was
getting on toward junior high and
Marie explained between sets of
machine designed to strengthen his
triceps. “And in San Diego, where..."
lived before, there were these ... forces, if you know what I mean. There were too many things we couldn't control. Drugs and stuff. It wasn't healthy for our kids."

"I had a job offer," Phil said. "We looked for a house. Green Valley was the obvious place—just sort of obvious, really. Our real estate agent sized us up and brought us out here right away."

"We found a house in Silver Springs," Marie said. "You can go ahead and put that in your notes. It's a big development. No one will figure it out."

"But just don't use our names, okay?" Phil pleaded. "I would really appreciate that."

"We don't need problems," Marie added.

Master planners have a penchant not just for slogans but for predictable advertising strategies. Their pamphlets, packets, and brochures wax reverent about venerable founding fathers of passionate vision, men of foresight who long ago—usually in the Fifties—dreamed of building cities in their own image. Next comes a text promising an upscale pastoral: golf courses, blissful shoppers, kindly security guards, pleasant walkways, godly physicians, yeomanly fire fighters, proficient teachers. Finally—invariably—there is culture in paradise: an annual arts and crafts festival, a sculpture, a gallery, Shakespeare in the park. In Las Colinas's Williams Square, for example, a herd of bronze mustangs run pell-mell across a plaza, symbolizing, a brochure explains, a "heritage of freedom in a free land." Perhaps in the interstices of some sophisticated market analysis, these unfettered mustangs make perfectly good sense; in the context of a community whose dominant feature is walls, however, they make no sense whatsoever.

Walls are everywhere in Green Valley too; they're the first thing a visitor notices. Their message is subliminal and at the same time explicit; controlled access is as much metaphor as reality. Controlled access is also a two-way affair—both "ingress" and "egress" are influenced by it; both coming and going are made difficult. The gates at the thresholds of Green Valley's post-

Harper's Magazine
1993 Penfield Wall Calendar

Edward Penfield's full-color advertising posters are featured in the Harper's Magazine 1993 Wall Calendar. Designed to promote individual issues of Harper's in the late 1890s, these posters are delightful examples of the work of America's first poster artist. Accompanying each poster is an excerpt from work by Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, Woodrow Wilson, William Dean Howells, Frederic Remington, and seven other writers who published in the issue the poster promoted.

All twelve posters are featured on the back of the calendar for easy reference. Important holidays are noted on the spacious monthly grid. A beautiful, useful Wall Calendar, with special meaning for anyone with an interest in American literary history.

To order the Harper's Magazine 1993 Wall Calendar, simply indicate the number of calendars you wish to receive and mail this coupon with a check or money order (U.S. funds only, please) payable to Harper's Magazine. Send orders to: Harper's Magazine, Department HM8, 666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

ORDER FORM

Please send me____1993 Wall Calendar(s).

Number of calendars  Price

1  $10.95

2  $20.00

3 or more  $9.00 (each) $ __________

Add applicable state tax for delivery in New York. __________

Add $2.00 per item ($3.00 for international orders) for shipping and handling. Includes additional mailing envelope for gift giving. __________

Total enclosed $ __________

Name ____________________________

Address ____________________________

City __________________ State ______ Zip ______ November 92

Copyright (c) 2005 ProQuest Information and Learning Company
Copyright (c) Harpers Magazine
er neighborhoods open with a macabre, mechanical slowness; their guards speak firmly and authoritatively to strangers and never smile in the manner of official greeters. One of them told me to take no pictures and to go directly to my destination “without stopping to look at anything.” Another said that in an eight-hour shift he felt constantly nervous about going to the bathroom and feared that in abandoning his post to relieve himself he risked losing his job. A girl at the Taco Bell on nearby Sunset Road complained about Clark County’s ten o’clock teen curfew—and about the guard at her neighborhood’s gate who felt it was his duty to remind her of it. A ten-year-old pointed out that his friends beyond the wall couldn’t join him inside without a telephone call to “security,” which meant “the policeman in the guardhouse.” Security, of course, can be achieved in many ways, but one implication of it, every time, is that security has insidious psychological consequences for those who contrive to feel secure.

Before I built a wall,” wrote Robert Frost, “I’d ask to know what I was walling in or walling out, and to whom I was like to give offense.” The master planners have answers that are unassailably prosaic: “lot owners shall not change said walls in any manner”; “perimeter walls are required around all single family residential projects”; “side yard walls shall conform to the Guidelines for intersecting rear property walls.” Their master plan weighs in with ponderous wall specifics, none of them in any way actionable: location, size, material, color, piers, pillars, openings. “Perimeter Project Walls,” for example, “shall be made of gray colored, split face concrete masonry units, 8’ by 16” by 6’ in size, with a 4” high gray, split face, concrete block. The block will be laid in a running bond pattern. No openings are allowed from individual back yard lots into adjoining areas.”

All of Green Valley is defined in this manner, by CC&Rs, as the planners call them—covenants, conditions, and restrictions embedded in deeds. Every community has some restrictions on matters such as the proper placement of septic tanks and the minimum distance allowed between homes, but in Green Valley the restrictions are detailed and pervasive, insuring the absence of individuality and suppressing the natural mess of humanity. Clotheslines and Winnebagos are not permitted, for example; no fowl, reptile, fish, or insect may be raised; there are to be no exterior speakers, horns, whistles, or bells. No debris of any kind, no open fires, no noise. Entries, signs, lights, mailboxes, sidewalks, driveways, rear yards, side yards, carports, sheds—the planners have had their say about each. All CC&Rs are inscribed into books that vary only slightly from development to development: the number of dogs and cats you can own (until recently, one master-planned community in Newport Beach, California, limited the weight of dogs) as well as the placement of garbage cans, barbeque pits, satellite dishes, and utility boxes. The color of your home, the number of stories, the materials used, its access and trim. The interior of your garage: the way to park your truck, the plan in your yard, the angle of your flagpole, the size of your address numbers, the placement of mirrored glass balls and bird baths, the grade of your lawn’s slope and the size of your IRA sale sign should you decide you want to leave.

“These things,” explained Brad Nelson, an ANC vice president, “are set up to protect property values.” ANC owner Greenspun put it another way: “The public interest and ANC’s interest are one.”

If the traditional American town of the past existed to produce a commodity—shoes, bath towels, sheet metal, whatever—then in Green Valley and other master-planned towns today the community is a commodity. Greenspun and I sat one afternoon in ANC’s corporate boardroom, surrounded by aerial maps, land-use concept plans, demographic study charts, and satellite photos of the Las Vegas Valley. In his palm he clutched a portable phone about the size of a Sesame Street transmitter. In a sense we were creating a new kind of city,” he insisted, “as if I would not believe him. But did I not doubt him for a moment. Still, his new city rests on old foundations: Green Valley is as intricately hierarchical as feudal England, an 8½ acre kingdom governed by investee and vassalage and marked by class...
It is composed on paper of five contiguous "villages," with names like "Silver Springs" and "Valle Verde," each designed to have a "village center"—a park, a school, a recreation center. ANC often advertises its generosity in dredging tracts of desert for these public facilities. Less well advertised is its legal obligation to do so as part of its 1971 agreement with Henderson. Each "village" contains six to ten developments. The position of each in the pecking order of wealth is best symbolized by the relative ostentation of its entryway—the flamboyance of the sign announcing its name, the demeanor of its guards, the height of its gates, the splendor of the lawns or fountains visible through the portal between its walls.

Development names either strive for the ambience of European luxury—Renaissance, Steeplechase, La Mancha II, Champions Green—or seek to deny the desert's reality—The Fountains, Creekside, Crystal Creek, Bay Breeze. Each is the domain of a large-scale builder who has presented plans to ANC and seen them approved by a triumvirate of master planners known as the Architectural Control Committee (ACC). The ACC, it turns out, is a shadow government of unelected ANC officials whose mandates are legally enforceable and who insinuate their way into the lives of residents—for example, moving residents' lawns when necessary and then charging them by placing liens against their homes.

For the corporate lords of the community, however, such pesky headaches are tiresome, so the master plan calls for the formation of homeowner's associations to attend to the enforcement of the rules. There are more than 130,000 such associations in America, administering the lives of more than 30 million people; they constitute a new and insidious form of government and are the fastest-growing political associations in the country. (At one association meeting I attended at Green Valley's library, I was asked, uncoldly, to "sign in and explain myself.") Then a board member asserted grimly that he intended to check the Harper's masthead in order to "see if 1 was lying." Directors of these associations—residents concerned about property values—busy

SECOND FRONT: CENSORSHIP AND PROPAGANDA IN THE GULF WAR. Harper's Magazine publisher John R. MacArthur's detailed account of how the news was reported and public opinion was shaped during the conflict in the Persian Gulf. Featured on 60 Minutes. Cloth. Original price, $20.00. Your price, $19.00.


HARPER'S MAGAZINE CRYPTIC PUZZLE BOOK. New! Puzzle creators E. R. Galli and Richard Maltby Jr., have selected fifty puzzles with a detailed introduction on how to solve their brain teasers. Paper. Special price, $9.00.


MONEY AND CLASSES IN AMERICA. Harper's editor Lewis H. Lapham's stinging, witty analysis of America's misplaced infatuation with wealth. Cloth. Original price, $18.95. Reduced price, $12.00.

IN A WORD. Edited by Jack Hitt. A dictionary of lively words that don't exist but ought to. Contributed by artists, writers, and celebrities including Margaret Atwood, Norman Mailer, William Buckley Jr., and Lou Reed. Paper. Original price, $10.00. Your price, $9.00.


To order books from Harper's Magazine Bookshelf, simply indicate the books of your choice and mail this coupon with a check or money order (U.S. funds only) payable to Harper's Magazine for the total amount of your order. Send to: Harper's Magazine Bookshelf, 666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. Please allow two to three weeks for delivery. All shipping and handling costs included. International orders (excluding Canada) add $1.50 per order.
themselves by writing polite letters to their neighbors asking them to finish their landscaping; they publish lists of people on adjacent streets who have failed to pay association dues. They are also legally empowered, by notarized articles of incorporation on file in the office of Nevada’s secretary of state and by related documents, to enforce the CC&Rs articulated by the master plan.

ANC is not only your neighbor but also a munificent builder of public places—library, recreation center, tennis courts, trails (“the cost of doing business,” a master planner explained)—and a medieval-style government that makes vassals out of developers and ministers out of zealous homeowners. Mostly it is quaint about its august powers: in numerous developments and in the only villages that have them, ANC is the homeowners’ association; the corporation’s owners—the Greenspun family—also own Green Valley’s only bookstore, cable-television company, and newspaper (the last jointly with Mike O’Callaghan, a former governor of Nevada). Like other master planners elsewhere in the country, ANC shrewdly established a nonprofit community association designed on paper to represent residents’ interests but without any political or decision-making power; instead, it offers recommendations and suggestions to city and county officials. ANC patronizes the community association and assists its board members in formulating positions on such matters as the placement of a proposed beltway—about which, incidentally, the corporation and the association concur. They also concur on the need for political redistricting so that at least half the members of the Henderson City Council (Green Valley falls within the boundaries of Henderson) can be drawn from Green Valley neighborhoods.

The irony is that few residents give a damn about corporations or politics. Of the 34,000 people living in Green Valley only some 370 are paid members of the community association that is pitched to them as representing their interests to officialdom; 125 voted in the last board election. The numbers don’t represent a boycott, either, of a corporately concocted grass-roots group of well-intended pawns. As I wandered an ongoing straw poll that broke this truth: 99 percent of Green Valley citizens are glad to live in a planned community.

As a journalist, I may have preferred a telling answer to my most frequent question—Why do you live here?—but the people of Green Valley, with disconcerting uniformity were almost entirely forthright. (“I moved here because of the job,” they would say, or “I moved here because we found a nice house in Heartland.”) Many had never heard of the American Nevada Corporation. One man took me for a representative of it and asked me what I was selling. Most had only a vague awareness of the existence of a corporate master plan for every detail of their community. The covenants, conditions, and restrictions of their lives were background matters of which they were cognizant but about which they were yawningly unconcerned. It did not seem strange to anyone I spoke to that a corporation should have the right to say about their mailboxes. When I explained that there were CC&Rs nearly everywhere, most people merely shrugged and pointed out in retort that it seemed a great way to prop up property values. A woman in a grocery store checkout lane explained that she’d come from southern California because “even the good neighborhoods there aren’t good anymore. You don’t feel safe in L.A.”

What the people of Green Valley want, explained a planner, is privacy, from threats both real and imagined, and control over who moves in beside them. In this they are no different from the generation that preceded them in search of the suburban dream. The difference this time is that nothing has been left to chance and that everything has been left to the American Nevada Corporation, which produces Green Valley its contemporary toposis to achieve at least the illusion of such. Residents must buy in to an extreme measure of corporate domination: suburbia in the Nineties has a god.

But even Eden—planned by God—had serpents, and so, apparently, does Green Valley. Last year a few residents loosed in its neighborhoods; police...
pected the man was a resident and responsible for three rapes and five robberies. George Hennard, killer of twenty-three people in a Killeen, Texas, cafeteria in October 1991, was a resident of Green Valley only months before his rampage and bought two of his murder weapons here in a private transaction. Joseph Weldon Smith, featured on the television series Unsolved Mysteries, strangled to death his wife and two stepdaughters in a posh Green Valley development called The Fountains.

The list of utopia’s outrages also includes a November 1991 heist in which two armed robbers took a handcuffed hostage and more than $100,000 from a Green Valley bank, then fled and fired military-assault-rifle rounds at officers in hot pursuit. The same week police arrested a suspected child molester who had been playing football with Green Valley children and allegedly touching their genitals.

“You can run but you can’t hide,” one Green Valley resident told me when I mentioned a few of these incidents. “People are coming here from all over the place and bringing their problems with them.” Perhaps she was referring to the gangs frequenting a Sunset Road fast-food restaurant—Sunset Road forms one fringe of Green Valley—where in the summer of 1991, according to the restaurant’s manager, “the dining room was set on fire and there were fights every weekend.” Perhaps she had talked to the teenagers who told me that LSD and crystal meth are the narcotics of choice at Green Valley High School, or to the doctor who simply rolled his eyes when I asked if he thought AIDS had arrived here.

Walls might separate paradise from heavy industry, but the protection they provide is an illusion. In May 1991 a leak at the nearby Pioneer Chlor Alkali plant spread a blanket of chlorine gas over Green Valley; nearly a hundred area residents were treated at hospitals for respiratory problems. The leak came three years after another nearby plant—this one producing rocket-fuel oxidizer for the space shuttle and nuclear missiles—exploded powerfully enough to register on earthquake seismographs 200 miles away. Two people were killed, 210 injured. Schools were closed and extra police officers called in to discourage

**Warsaw Pact Military Binocular**

EDF 7x40 - manufactured by Carl Zeiss-Jena

Used by East German border guards along the Berlin Wall, these are thought to be the finest roof prism binoculars ever made. Current issue throughout Eastern Bloc; never before offered to civilian market. Astounding optical clarity and brightness. Includes rangefinder reticle with trinitium illuminator, infrared night vision filter, rubber armor; complete weatherproofing. Built to extremely rigorous military specs. Each piece new in the box with English instructions and individual serial number. Money back guarantee if not satisfied.

Exceptional price of $499 includes a lifetime warranty. CA residents add 7.75% sales tax. Quantities are extremely limited, so order now to ensure delivery. Sorry no more than two pieces per customer.

SCM Corporation
1-800-225-9407

---

**Give a Language—The Gift for a Lifetime!**

Make it a meaningful holiday and put some real excitement into someone’s life with one of Audio-Forum’s remarkable self-instructional language courses. They really work!

Call or write today for your free catalog of language courses, games and gifts for the language buff. Call 1-800-551-6300 or write:

Audio-Forum
The Language Source
Room 2615,96 Broad St.
Guilford, CT 06437
(203) 453-9794

---

For more ideas of what we can do, ‘woolly mamot’ size or our combinations - for photos or a sample of vine, contact us soon.

+ 1-800-968-1967

P.O. box 68172 Grand Rapids Michigan 49516

---

A Simply de Vine Wreaths Co. straight forward & direct makers of wreaths like no one else has.

(Call or send for more information) 1-800-968-1967

Our Christmas wreaths are big, and fat. With over one hundred feet of vine in each, from the woods of Michigan; (they’re keepers). Designed for outdoor exposure and literally custom made for the orderer, each one is tagged for weight, origin, and year.

We have a 4 ft. vine wreath weighing in at about 25 lbs. with a very peaceful looking peace-sign entwined in the middle for $185 dollars and a 3 ft. for $130 (add $10 and $5 respectively, for shipping).

We don’t charge for handling. 
MI res. add 4% tax

---

Copyright (c) 2005 ProQuest Information and Learning Company
Copyright (c) Harper's Magazine
In connection with the publication of *Voices in Black and White: Writings on Race in America* from Harper’s Magazine, the Ford Hall Forum and Harper’s Magazine will present a public program on where America is today in terms of relations between the races.

Moderated by Lewis H. Lapham, editor of Harper’s Magazine, speakers will include Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and other writers whose work is featured in *Voices in Black and White*. This collection spans nearly a century of racial issues in America, and includes Mark Twain on slavery, Ralph Ellison on Harlem, and James Baldwin on Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Ford Hall Forum is the oldest public lecture series in the nation, and throughout its history, the Forum has often stood on the cutting edge of issues that proved vital to America and the world. Past speakers have included Eleanor Roosevelt, Barbara Tuchman, I. F. Stone, Ross Parks, and Louis Brandeis.

The Forum is free and open to the public.

For more information, call the Ford Hall Forum at 617/437-5800.

---

the looting of area homes with doors and windows blown out.

And, finally, there is black comedy in utopia: a few days after Christmas last year, police arrested the Green Valley Community Association president for allegedly burglarizing a model home. Stolen items included pictures, cushions, bedspreads, and a gaudy brass figurine—a collection with no internal logic. A local newspaper described the civic leader running from the scene, dropping his loot piece by piece in his wake as he was chased by police to his residence. At home he hid temporarily in his attic but ultimately to no avail. The plaster cracked and he fell through a panel into the midst of the arresting officers.

Is it a coincidence that the one truly anomalous soul I met roams futilely the last unpaved place in Green Valley, a short stretch of desert called Pittman Wash?

Pittman Wash winds through quiet subdivisions, undeveloped chiefly because it is useful for drainage and unbuildable anyway. Lesser washes have been filled in, built on, and forgotten, but Pittman remains full of sand and desert hollyhock, a few tamarisks, some clumps of creosote bush. Children prefer it to the manicured squares of park grass provided for them by the master planners; teenagers drink beer here and write graffiti on the storm drain access pillars buried in the wash's channel: FUCK HENDERSON PK. DIST., and the like. Used condoms, rusting oil filters, a wind-whipped old sleeping bag, a rock, wren, a yellow swallowtail butterfly.

Here I met nine-year-old Jim Collins, whose name has been changed—at his fervent request—on the off chance his mother reads these words and punishes him for playing in Pittman Wash again. Jim stuck me as a lonesome, Huck Finn sort, brown-skinned and soft-spoken, with grit beneath his nails and sun-bleached hair. I found him down on his dirty knees, lazing poking a stick into a hole.

"Lizards," he explained. "I'm looking for lizards. There's rattlers, chipmunks, coyote, mountain lion, black widows, and scorpions too." He regaled me with stories of parents in high dudgeon over creatures of the wash brought home. Then, unprompted, he suddenly declared that "most of the time I'm bored out of my pants...the desert's all covered up with houses—that sucks."

He insisted, inexplicably, on showing me his backyard, which he described as "just like the desert." So we trudged out of the wash and walked the concrete trail the master planners have placed there. Jim climbed the border wall and ran along its four-inch top with the unconscious facility of a mountain goat. We looked at his yard, which had not yet been landscaped, a rectangle of cracked desert caliche. Next door three children dressed fashionably in sporty attire shot baskets on a Michael Jordan Air Attack hop. "We don't get along," Jim said. He didn't want me to go away in the end and as I left he was still chatting hopefully. "My favorite store is Wild Kingdom of Pets," he called. "If you go there you can see Tasmanian wildcat."

Some might call Green Valley a simulacrum of a real place, Disneyland's Main Street done in Mediterranean hues, a city of haciendas with cardboard souls, a valley of the polished, packaged, and perfected, an empyrean of emptiness, a sanitized wasteland. They will note the Southwest's pastel palette coloring a community devoid of improvisation, of caprice, spontaneity, effusiveness, or the charm of error—a place where the process of commodification has at last leached life of the accidental and ecstatic, the divine, reckless, and engendered.

Still, many now reside in this corporate domain, driven here by insatiable fears. No class warfare here, no burning city. Green Valley beckons the American middle class like a fabulous and eternal dream. In the wake of our contemporary treble and discontent, its pilgrims have sought out a corporate castle where they exchange for false security they pay with personal freedoms; where the corporation that does the job of walling others out also walls residents in. The principle, once political, is now economic. Just call your real estate agent.