

# LINKS

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2023 Premier  
Properties Guide  
The World's Best  
Golf Communities

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF PALMETTO BLUFF REAL ESTATE





# THE BLUFF UNBOUND

ALREADY A PREMIER LOWCOUNTRY COMMUNITY,  
PALMETTO BLUFF IS LOOKING FORWARD TO AN EXCITING FUTURE

BY JAMES A. FRANK

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**T**urn off the audiobook, hush the kids in the back, open the car windows—and your eyes. You want to be alert when driving into Palmetto Bluff.

The four-mile trip from the gatehouse to the first signs of development starts with quintessential Lowcountry views across expansive marshland, then maritime forest, and finally an enveloping canopy of moss-hung oaks. This well calculated progression lowers the blood pressure while raising levels of anticipation for what awaits at this very special property.

Calming as it is, the ride is a little deceiving, because Palmetto Bluff is pulsing with energy as it plans a bold and exciting future. Furthermore, the word “property” doesn’t do it justice. To insiders, it’s a “place,” and even that only begins to capture its size and scope. And what’s coming.





## IN ITS ENTIRETY,

Palmetto Bluff encompasses 20,000 acres, one-and-a-half times the size of Manhattan Island. Or, more to the point, two-thirds the size of nearby Hilton Head Island, but at its maximum build-out (about 3,800 houses, which, if ever reached, won't come for at least 10–15 years), with only 10 percent of the homes.

The Bluff has a rich history, from Native American encampment to pirate lair, plantation to lumber camp. Starting in the late 1930s, the Union Camp paper company brought clients here for hunting trips, adding guest quarters and a freshwater pond steps from the salty May River that traces the Bluff's eastern shore.

Development didn't begin until 2000, with the first homes,

a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, and a luxury inn opening during the next few years. The original plan was ahead of its time: a mix of large “country” plots hidden away in the forest, and a “village” of homes on smaller lots. Wilson Village (named after an early owner) featured front porches, gas lamps, and sidewalks, and was sited near the riverfront close to the original inn, some shops, and restaurants. Residents loved the walkability, the sense of neighborhood, and the measured pace of expansion, which also turned the pond into an inland waterway that was extended to new homes and villages as they went up.

The latest chapter in Palmetto Bluff's evolution began in the summer of 2021, when it was acquired by South Street Partners. Owner and operator of big-name club communities such as Kiawah Island and The Cliffs, South Street is draw-





ing from both the past and the future, looking to grow the “place” while preserving its heritage.

Only about a third of the Bluff will ever be developed. Responsibility for the rest falls on the very broad shoulders of Jay Walea, director of The Palmetto Bluff Conservancy, who fell in love with this place more than 30 years ago when he came as a boy with his father to assist hunting parties. Now armed with numerous degrees and certifications in land and forest management, his job is teaching and preaching the sanctity of the property’s 20 different habitats to its residents. His staff of seven includes educators, researchers, even two full-time archaeologists, and each year they conduct nearly 300 classes, lectures, and programs both at the Bluff and throughout the region.

A self-proclaimed “tree geek” (while one of his staffers is

the “bird nerd”), Walea puts his mission this way: “I look out for the creatures—and the ghosts—that don’t have a voice.” On cue, a bald eagle swoops in over the small lake just outside the Conservancy classroom, which is located in Moreland Village, the Bluff’s second planned neighborhood.

Bouncing in his pickup through forests and along marshes, Walea stops to check on barn owl boxes, feed stations, and other set-ups that study and maintain the animal populations—white-tailed deer, feral hogs, wild turkeys, and more. He also participates in the design-review process for every new home and assesses its landscaping, keeps the inland waterway stocked (benefiting both anglers and the ecosystem), makes sure residents don’t feed the alligators, and worries like a good parent about any and everything else related to the Bluff’s non-human residents.



RESIDENTS CAN KEEP THEIR CRAFT AT  
WILSON LANDING OR TAKE A  
BOAT MEMBERSHIP, WHICH OFFERS THE  
ADVANTAGES OF OWNERSHIP WITHOUT  
THE HASSLES OF MAINTENANCE.











The human residents have it just as good. There's a 175-acre equestrian center and a shooting club with 14 stands for shooting clays, a trap and skeet field, a simulated quail walk, plus an archery course and air rifle and ax-throwing stations. Eight Har-Tru tennis courts, six pickleball courts, two bocce courts, and two croquet lawns are in Wilson Village.

**T**he Nicklaus-signature May River Golf Course winds through woodlands and along the eponymous river. Framed by ancient oaks, native plants, and sandy waste areas, the course sits lightly on the land, earning it Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary status. But it can be a stiff challenge, featuring forced carries and plenty of angles into smallish greens guarded by large bunkers. Members make good use of the vast practice range and four-acre short-game area, as well as the comfortable clubhouse with pro shop and casual restaurant.


The water offers its own amusements. May River is ideal for kayaking, canoeing, and paddleboarding, and can yield

tarpon, sea trout, cobia, and other species. Residents can keep their craft at Wilson Landing or take a boat membership, which offers the advantages of ownership without the hassles of maintenance.

Wilson Landing Marina also marks the northern end of the inland waterway, and boat membership includes use of electric boats (no gas engines allowed) to cruise this community-long artery. Some homes have docks, and residents use the waterway like a highway, visiting neighbors and enjoying sunset cruises.

Separate memberships cover golf, boating, and shooting, while almost everyone joins the Palmetto Bluff Club, which includes use of five pools, four fitness centers, and three movement studios. A Director of Children's and Family Programs recently came on board, and there are numerous clubs and other groups to join, plus concerts, speaker series, and countless special events. The community also recently launched The Arts Initiative at Palmetto Bluff, year-round programming created to foster artistic innovation by artists, craftsmen, musicians, chefs, and others.



A young girl with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a pink floral short-sleeved top, a denim skirt, and blue sneakers, stands in a stable aisle. She is reaching out with her right hand to touch the nose of a brown horse with a white blaze that is leaning out from its stall. The stable has wooden walls, metal railings, and a blue and white patterned lead rope hanging from a stall. The background shows a long, well-lit stable aisle with wooden beams and hanging lanterns.

THERE'S A 175-ACRE  
EQUESTRIAN CENTER AND  
A SHOOTING CLUB WITH  
A TRAP AND SKEET FIELD,  
SIMULATED QUAIL WALK,  
ARCHERY COURSE,  
AND AIR RIFLE AND  
AX-THROWING STATIONS.









Club membership also gives exclusive access to four of the Bluff's 10 restaurants. The others, including the excellent River House, are open to the public and managed by the Inn, a Montage Resort. Residents enjoy the Inn like another amenity—besides dining, there's a spa and luxury accommodations for guests—while South Street manages most everything else in an effort to make the Club more member-centric and family-oriented.

**F**or all that Palmetto Bluff is today, it is building a thrilling future, starting with a new golf course slated to open in late 2023 next to Moreland Village. Designed by King-Collins—responsible for Sweetens Cove in Tennessee and Landmand Golf Club in Nebraska—the 9-holer will be reversible, allowing for play from 1,000 to 3,000 yards. The inland waterway is already being routed to reach the new course, with what's dug out repurposed to create dramatic dunes and elevation changes seen nowhere else in at-sea-level Lowcountry.

At this moment, development ends at Moreland Village. But that will change with the opening of Anson Village at the southern end of the Bluff. Plans are still coming together and the timetable isn't set, but work on a new marina is already underway, and Coore & Crenshaw are evaluating a site for a golf course that will run from forest to wetlands and feature views all the way to Savannah, 20 miles away. Anson also will include a sizable residential component.

In the last two years, Palmetto Bluff has experienced a surge in home sales, prices now beginning above \$1.5 million.


There are presently 875 completed homes—showcasing the understated elegance of Lowcountry design—from as small as 1,400 square feet to more than 12,000, on plots from .2 to 39 acres, from village to country. Another 450 homes are either under construction or in design review.

There is almost no resale market yet and, according to the sales office, only about 40 lots currently available. But, according to Chris Randolph, one of the South Street Partners, sales in Anson Village could start in as soon as 18 months. And before that, another neighborhood, called Theus, will begin construction on what Randolph calls “some of the best real estate at the Bluff.

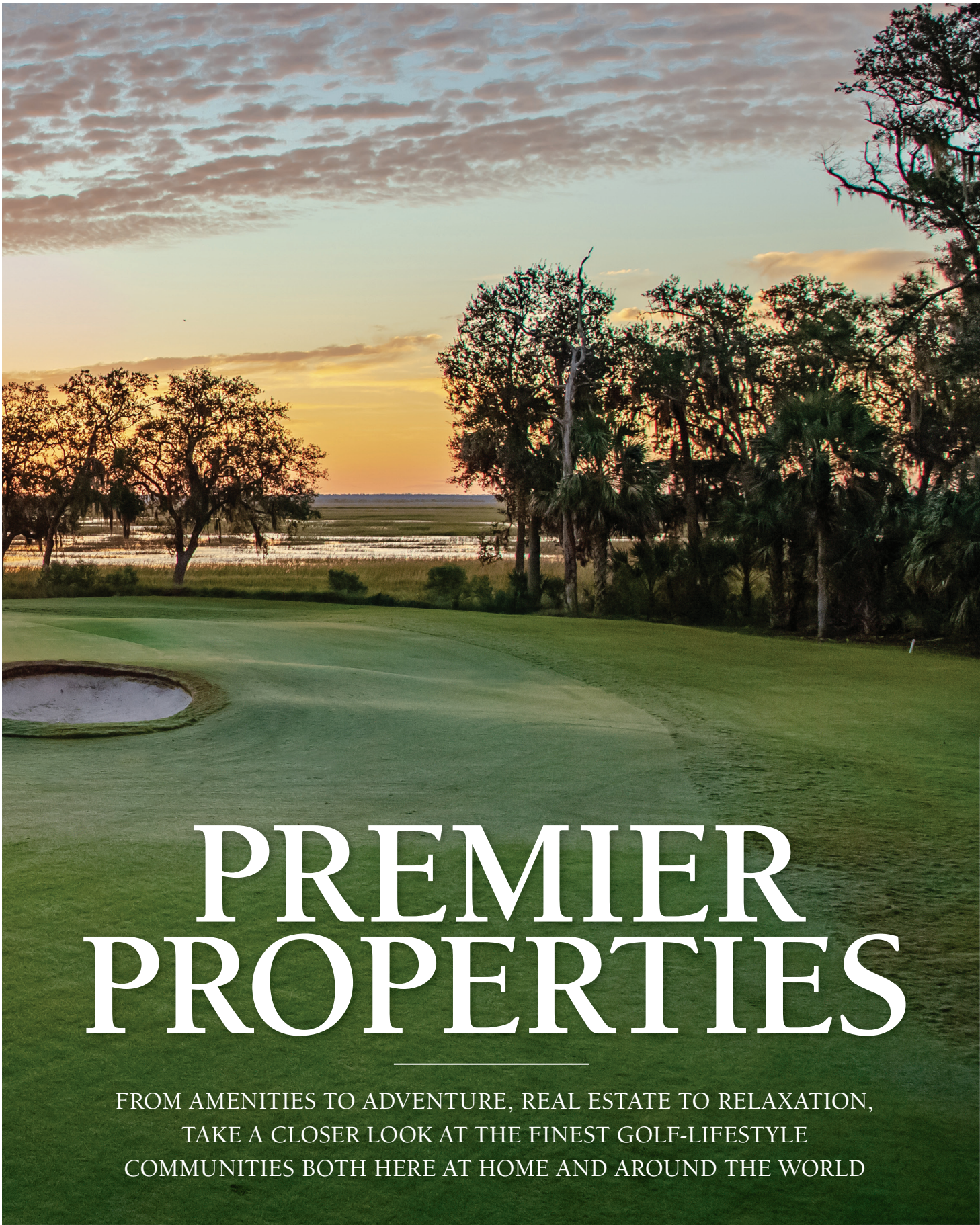
“With Theus and Anson, that's another 2,400 lots to develop,” he explains. “We have a long runway ahead of us.”

Recent buyers are trending in their mid-50s, many with families: The kids attend private schools from Hilton Head to Savannah, or the well regarded public schools in nearby Bluffton, a regular “best small town in America” honoree. Long popular with artists and foodies, the town of 32,000 has boomed with restaurants, galleries, and boutiques, some owned by residents of the Bluff, who've also gotten involved in local charities and boards.

The very civil Savannah airport is just a half-hour away, Hilton Head a half-hour in the other direction, supermarkets and other services available past the gate. But there are stores in the villages to handle most needs, even a gas station—although bicycles and golf carts are the preferred modes of transportation. Expanded food services are in the plans, maybe even a car-detailing service and pet care.

All of which begs the question: Having driven the four magical miles in, why would anyone want to leave? 





# PREMIER PROPERTIES

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FROM AMENITIES TO ADVENTURE, REAL ESTATE TO RELAXATION,  
TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FINEST GOLF-LIFESTYLE  
COMMUNITIES BOTH HERE AT HOME AND AROUND THE WORLD



# PALMETTO BLUFF

*Bluffton, S.C*

It's easy to understand the appeal of Lowcountry living, from stunning scenery to year-round good weather, local cuisine to an active, outdoor lifestyle. For all that and more—much more—there is no place like Palmetto Bluff.

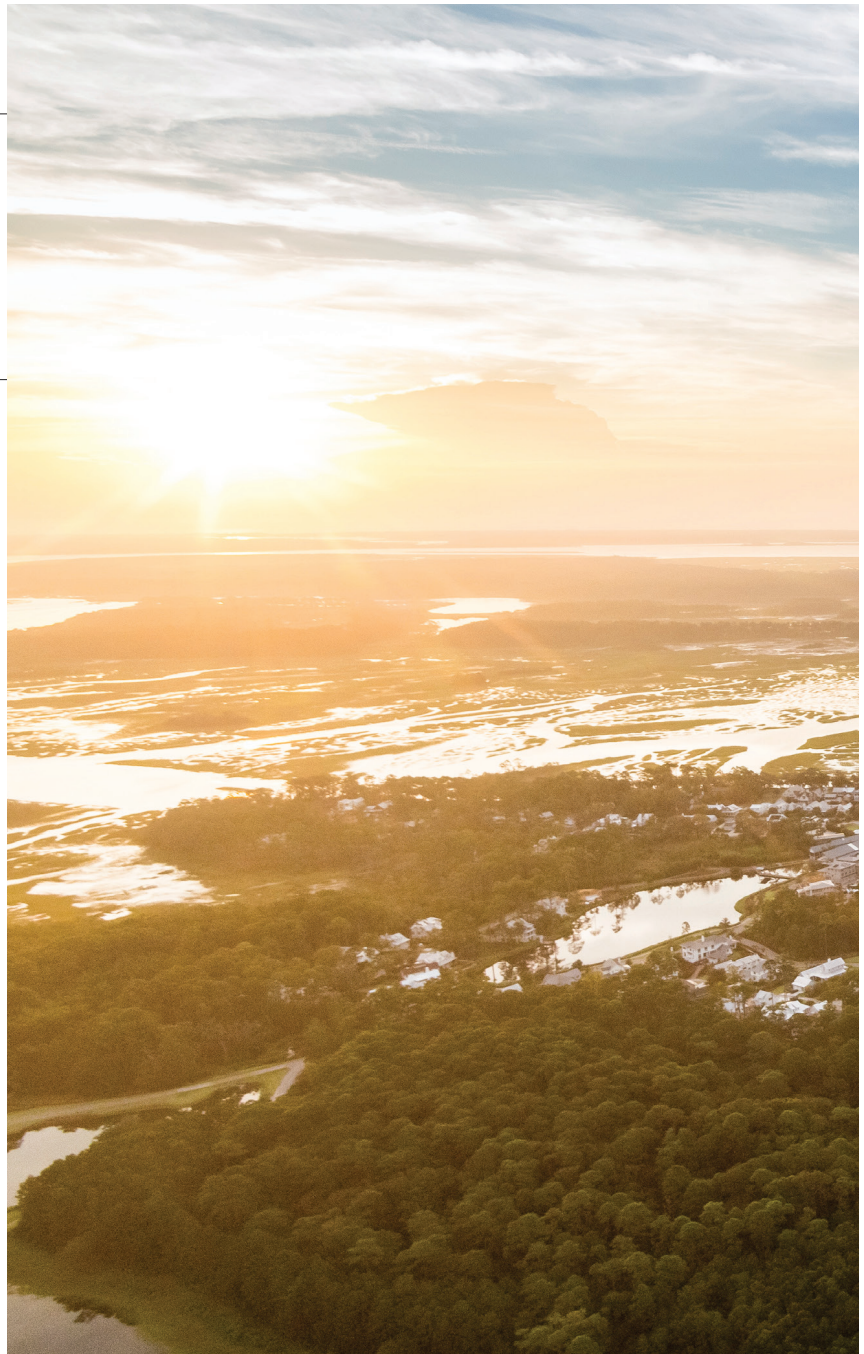
A 20,000-acre community located between Savannah Airport and Hilton Head Island, Palmetto Bluff was developed with a unique mixture of large “country” lots and “village” homes near shops and many amenities. After being purchased in 2021 by South Street Partners—whose other communities include Kiawah Island and The Cliffs—the Bluff is building on its traditions with plans for a bold and exciting future.

Palmetto Bluff already boasts the highly regarded May River Golf Club, a Jack Nicklaus Signature design that plays through maritime forest and the marshy edges of its namesake. There's also an equestrian center, shooting center, tennis and pickleball courts, plus fishing and boating in both salt and freshwater varieties. Some two-thirds of the property remains untouched and is lovingly cared for by a non-profit conservancy.

There are also 10 restaurants to enjoy, some exclusive to members, the others managed by the luxurious Montage Palmetto Bluff Inn, which offers its own menu of amenities—including a world-class spa—for guests and residents. A few boutiques, galleries, and shops (even its own gas station) make it easy to maximize one's time inside the gates, although bigger markets, more restaurants, and the booming small town of Bluffton are close by.

Construction has begun on a major expansion of neighborhoods and amusements, including a new marina and two golf courses: A reversible 9-holer designed by King-Collins should debut by late 2023, with an 18-hole Coore & Crenshaw layout a few years down the road.

Opportunities for living on the Bluff are equally enticing. With permits for up to 3,800 homes, there are currently 875 inhabited and 450 in the works. The understated elegance of Lowcountry style predominates, with broad porches, large windows, lush landscaping, and the most modern engineering. Home prices currently begin around \$1.5 million, with lots from under an acre to 35 acres and more.







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Palmetto Bluff