

A penthouse
lair fit for
James Bond
M3



MANSION

*'The clearest way into the universe
is through a forest wilderness.'*

—John Muir

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WINDOWS ON THE WILD

A deck for frolicking dolphins, a look-out tower above bears and a hot tub near the moose:
For some homeowners, the ultimate creature comfort is watching other creatures.



LOOKOUT Kirk Davenport, a 55-year-old securities lawyer who lives in New York City, built a seven-bedroom, 6,200-square-foot vacation home near Jackson, Wyo., on 16 acres populated with moose, elk and bears. An elevated bridge links the main house and guest wing—from it, the family can see wildlife. “You feel like you are in the wilderness, and the animals feel that way, too,” said Mr. Davenport.

BY AMY GAMERMAN

GAIL MORRISON HAS GOTTEN USED TO the tour boats and kayakers who stop by her glass house on Sarasota Bay’s Siesta Key—known locally as the Dolphin House, for the bottlenose dolphins who leap from the water to catch pinfish and snook at the sea wall in front of her deck.

“It is like SeaWorld,” said Dr. Morrison, a senior vice dean at the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine, whose husband, Joel Morganroth bought the Florida home for \$2.5 million in 2012, according to county records. “You don’t expect dolphins to be right by your house, putting on this show.”

Designed by Carl Abbott, the 3,500-square-foot house, which has a sloped roof and floor-to-ceiling glass walls, overlooks a lagoon where dolphins, pelicans and herons have fed for decades. Four travertine terraces and an expansive deck take in views of Sarasota and the aquatic life below. At night, underwater lights transform the lagoon



WATER SHOW The great room of Dr. Joel Morganroth’s home on Sarasota Bay, Fla. It overlooks a lagoon where dolphins regularly leap from the water to catch fish.

into a giant aquarium, illuminating stingrays and big fish.

Eager to be where the wild things are, some armchair conservationists are designing homes that are literally in creatures’ backyard.

The Morrison-Morganroth’s dolphins are frequent guests at cocktail hour, sometimes leaping from the water to catch fish against the sea wall by their deck. Regulars include Ginger, Nellie and Speck, according to Randall Wells, director of the Sarasota Dolphin Research Program, who often boats past the house. Guests are warned not to feed them. “I’m protective of them—it’s like a parental instinct,” said Dr. Morganroth, founder and now chief cardiac consultant of eResearch Technology, which collects patient outcome data for biopharmaceutical and health-care organizations.

Lovable though they may be, dolphins aren’t moneymakers, according to Don Saba, a real-estate appraiser in Sarasota who specializes in high-end waterfront properties.

“Wildlife does not create value in real estate; the wildlife could be there today, and gone tomorrow,” said Mr. Saba,

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MANSION

HOMES WITH WINDOWS ON THE WILD

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who sees the house's design, city views and boatable waters as its strongest selling points.

Kirk Davenport, a 55-year-old securities lawyer who lives in New York City, built a seven-bedroom vacation home near Jackson, Wyo., on 16 acres populated with moose, elk and bears. "You feel like you are in the wilderness, and the animals feel that way, too," said Mr. Davenport, who didn't disclose what he spent on the 6,200-square-foot house, completed in 2013.

The Davenport family can see wildlife from an elevated bridge that connects the main house with its guest wing—or they can climb to the top of a 30-foot-high lookout tower that their architect, Andy Ankeny, modeled after an old fire tower—complete with a firepole. Built from Montana moss rock, the tower has a covered open-air seating area and built-in stereo speakers.

"It's a place where we'll go in the summer and have cocktails, and hope



Phelan M. Ebenhack for The Wall Street Journal (3)

BY THE SEA A dolphin and a blue heron at Joel Morganroth's Florida home. Dr. Morganroth and wife, Dr. Gail Morrison, above. 'It is like SeaWorld,' she says. 'You don't expect dolphins to be right by your house, putting on this show.'

a bear comes lumbering down," said Mr. Davenport. He is also looking forward to the day when a moose wanders by while he is soaking in his hot tub: "That's going to be the most magic moment."

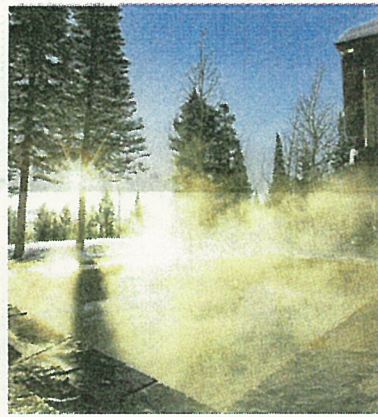
Homes comparable to Mr. Davenport's could be listed anywhere between \$4.5 and \$7.5 million, said Tom Evans, an associate broker at Jackson Hole Sotheby's International Realty. How much the tower adds to its resale value is debatable. "It's a little eccentric," said Mr. Evans. "A wine cellar or a media room is more traditional in a home in Jackson." But Julie Faupel, an owner of Jackson Hole Real Estate Associates, sees it as a selling point. "What people really want is a very sophisticated home, but they want to feel like they're outdoors," she said.

Animal lovers should remember that they're not living in a petting zoo, said Steve Kilpatrick, executive director of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation. Homeowners complain about moose blocking access to their hot tubs, sleeping on their heated driveways or eating their expensive landscaping. Moose have also been known to charge at people. "They're cute and lovable, but boy, they can cause some harm," said Mr. Kilpatrick. "And if you have a moose that's malnourished or not healthy, be ready for a mountain lion or a grizzly bear to take it down—and don't be alarmed that it might happen in your backyard—because that's where they're living."

Avid bird-watchers, Richard Farmer and his late wife, Sara, wanted to live as close as possible to the Steller's jays, great horned owls, thrushes, hawks, ravens and other birds in Washington state's King county, where they built a 4,340-square-foot house of steel, copper, concrete and cedar on 5 acres in 2001. A bronze wall sculpture of a swallow in flight hangs at the entrance to the Bird Watchers' House—so named by its architect, Jim Olson.

"We spent a year going back and forth designing it, figuring out what would be an appropriate way to view the birds," said Mr. Farmer, a 66-year-old retired Microsoft manager. The house is set on the edge of a forest next to a meadow: a prime con-





UP HIGH The Davenport home, above, includes a lookout tower. 'It's a place where we'll go in the summer and have cocktails, and hope a bear comes lumbering down,' says Kirk Davenport. Left to right: dining area, hot tub, living room.



EYE ON BIRDS This Washington home was built for birdwatchers Richard Farmer and his late wife, Sara. It offers several vantage points to see birds at different elevations. A rainwater pool has pedestals for birds to perch and bathe. Architect Jim Olson, below right.



vergence point for many species of birds, who hunt for food in the open, then fly back into the trees for cover. Mr. Farmer, who didn't disclose the cost of building the two-bedroom house, acquired the land for \$229,000, according to public records.

Since birds live at different elevations—some nest on the ground, others in the treetops—the house offers different vantage points. There are three terraces, and an elevated walkway functions as a viewing platform. A dead tree trunk—called a snag—was preserved because woodpeckers like it. A long pool of trickling rainwater has small, submerged pedestals for birds to perch and bathe.

"Birds are attracted to the house, because they feel like it belongs in the natural setting," said Mr. Olson. That's unfortunate for the ones who occasionally crash into its large windows, "most likely because they were being pursued by a hawk," said Mr. Farmer. Gail Gatton, executive director of Audubon Washington, recommends that homeowners hang screen netting a foot or two off the windows: "the birds bounce off it."

For Erika Zavaleta and Bernie Ter-shy, biologists and conservation scientists at the University of California in Santa Cruz, building a bird-friendly house meant using nontoxic building materials like reclaimed wood and straw-bale insulation. (Birds, which have fast metabolisms, are highly sensitive to toxins.) The family and their friends spent a day packing 200 bales into the walls of the 2,650-square-foot house—to the birds' delight. "While you're working, they're stealing little bits of straw to build their nests," said Anni Tilt, principal at Arkin-Tilt Architects, which specializes in ecologically sensitive design.

Mr. Ter-shy, whose research focuses on preventing plant and animal extinctions, said that he spent \$769,889 to build the house, which sits on a small suburban lot two blocks from the ocean, bordered by a park and a small creek.

"That creek, that's why we chose to live there—it's incredible bird-watching," said Mr. Ter-shy, 53. "Great blue herons and great egrets and snowy egrets and kingfishers—they come through in the fall, and because we're so close to the ocean, we can see brown pelicans and cormorants."

The house is oriented toward the backyard and the creek, not the street. Windows are set high near the ceiling in some rooms to let in light and to allow views of birds flying overhead. Although Mr. Ter-shy keeps binoculars throughout the house, he didn't need them to watch a Cooper's hawk hunting in the park recently.

"I could look at it eye-level when it was standing there eating a bird—right out of our bedroom window," Mr. Ter-shy said. "It's hard not to be really excited."