



HERE'S THE DEAL: Permits for BackRiver Townhomes were contingent on \$3 million worth of public land improvements in an adjacent park and the designation of five townhomes as affordable units (cost to builder: about \$2 million).

BIG PICTURE

Townhomes disguised as coastal estates strike the right balance.

WHEN DEVELOPER TOM HASTINGS broke ground on BackRiver Townhomes, a collection of 45 upscale attached residences in the Boston suburb of Hingham, Mass., his competition wasn't the other builder across town. It was the comfy single-family homes his target buyers, aged 55 to 65, were nicely settled into and reluctant to leave. Resale gridlock wasn't holding them back (property demand in Hingham and nearby Wellesley had been unfazed by the downturn), and neither were the \$1 million-plus price tags on some of the townhomes (after all, these folks were plenty wealthy). Rather, it was a simple matter of convincing discerning empty-nesters that a low-maintenance

community of shared walls could feel even better than what they already had.

At six units to the acre, the townhomes are a close lot, but they breathe well and actually feel rather grand. With their crisp blend of Newport- and Nantucket-style architecture, residences arranged in clusters of three look like big old houses on the outside, not unlike the shingle-style beachfront retreats that dot the New England coastline. Cupolas with flared light wells flood interiors with natural light, and each home enjoys either a walk-out garden or river view.

Giving the property an air of permanence was essential. (The town of Hingham was founded in 1633, not long after the first

pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, so many surrounding properties are historic.) Hastings says a \$25,000 investment in landscaping, including hand-hewn stone walls and mature tree plantings, was well worth it. "We always try to create an environment that looks like it's been there a long time," he says, noting that trees provide the added benefits of erosion control, shading, and coastal wind buffering.

Ten units were presold before construction began, and half of the entire project was sold—all to empty-nesters—before the model opened.—*J. Sullivan*

PROJECT

Location: Hingham, Mass.
Community: BackRiver Townhomes
Total acreage: 7.4
Date opened for sale: Spring 2007
Product: Townhomes from 2,200 to 3,800 square feet
Price range: \$875,000 to \$1 million* (five affordable units reserved for low-income buyers are priced at \$198,000)
Sales to date: 22 (of 29 released)
Total number of units at build-out: 45
Builder/Developer: The Hastings Cos., Hingham
Architect: Steffian Bradley Architects, Boston

PHOTOS: MICHAEL ALIXON