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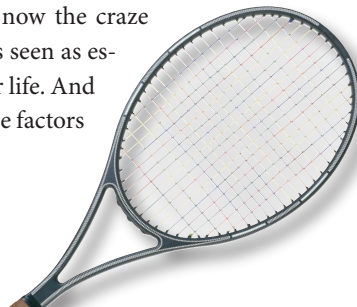
IN THESE HEDONISTIC TIMES, people demand much from life. They are happy to work hard - and in Hong Kong and newly affluent Mainland China that usually means long hours - but play hard too. They want a lifestyle rather than just a life and they want their home to reflect that.

Exercise and healthy living are an important part of that lifestyle. Since the days of jogging and aerobics in the late seventies and early eighties, followed by the rising popularity of the gym in the nineties, and now the craze for pilates and yoga, keeping fit is seen as essential to living a longer, healthier life. And this fashion for fitness is one of the factors

behind the rise - and rise - of the residential clubhouse.

Today, excellent leisure and clubhouse facilities are high on most home-buyers' list of priorities and for property developers have become an essential factor in any residential development. A swimming pool is no longer enough, the name of the game is added value and when home-buyers are making their decisions a good clubhouse can make or break the deal.

"I'd go so far as to say that in both Hong Kong and China now, if you build a major residential development without clubhouse facilities, you will lack the added value that makes it attractive to the buyer," said Johnnie Chan, Chief Estate Manager at South Horizons and Rambler Crest. "People





CLUB

Excellent leisure facilities are high on the list of priorities for today's home-buyers

By Teri Fittell



expect a high standard of living and their lifestyle choices include at the very least having a gym, heated pools and tennis courts where they live. They also like to have space, gardens to stroll through and perhaps do tai chi in."

Having a club "in-house" is as much a financial consideration as a lifestyle choice for many, according to Anne-Marie Sage, National Director, Residential Investor Services, at Jones Lang LaSalle. "Clubs in Hong Kong can be hard to get into – waiting lists are long, debentures can be very expensive – and nowadays not so many debentures are held by companies as, say, 10 years ago," she said.

Clients come to her specifically looking for certain club facilities within their residential complex. "Having put in long and often stressful hours at the office, they want a gym, swimming pool and spa on their doorstep so they can use them whenever and however often it suits them," she explained.

It is not only in Hong Kong where the clubhouse is becoming the deciding factor in the home-buying deal. Shirley Chan, Assistant Manager at the clubhouse at Guangzhou Cape Coral

in Dashi town, Panyu, stressed that this sort of residence-plus was particularly desirable in newly affluent China. "China has seen rapid economic growth over the past decade and the more prosperous a country or city becomes, the better quality of life its people demand," she said.

Cape Coral is modeled on Australia's distinctive leisure lifestyle and includes two luxury clubhouses offering a vast array of activities to its privileged residents. "Good clubhouse facilities offer an option exclusively for a certain group of people to have leisure and social activities which enhance their physical and psychological wellness," said Ms Chan. "When choosing accommodation, Chinese people tend to prefer properties with good clubhouse facilities if budget allows, and for increasingly more people there, budget does allow."

Mainland China latched on to the concept in the last 10 years and clubhouse facilities there are rapidly becoming more sophisticated and elaborate. Said Richard Ivens, Club Manager at the Harbour Plaza Golf Club Dongguan: "To build extensive facilities you need space and it is here that residential developments in Mainland China can score over their Hong Kong counterparts." While space is limited in Hong Kong, where more than seven million people jostle for position in a relatively small area, in the Mainland space is limitless.

Above: Luxury you can afford. Facing page: People demand a high quality of life and their expectations include a gym, heated pools, tennis courts and other facilities for the family.



In some developments in Mainland China, residential facilities can include golf courses, such as Laguna Verona in Dongguan, and even schools such as the Yew Chung International School within the Seasons Villas compound in Shanghai. Grounds also tend to be extensive and developments are often grouped around lakes or rivers.

Clubhouses themselves have also developed into very elaborate creations, with extravagant designs that add prestige as well as luxury to the lifestyle. In developments such as Dynasty Garden in Shenzhen Baoan, on top of the expected gym, spa and swimming pool, clubhouse facilities include a cigar lounge, wine club, snooker and chess rooms, a bowling alley, private theatre, banqueting rooms and kindergarten.

Mr Ivens believes that clubhouses don't just benefit the residents; they are advantageous to the property manager too. "Having a clubhouse helps attract more people to the property on an on-going basis," he said. "It encourages members to return and to bring more guests, which in turn generates new members and new potential home buyers. A good clubhouse also attracts more rental market, which increases sales for investment purposes."

There are other added benefits to both property manager and residents. Mr Chan thinks that clubhouse facilities help bring the community together. "Living in a big

Clockwise from above:
Some developments in Mainland China include golf courses, while playrooms and swimming pools are now standard in Hong Kong.

development can be quite impersonal if people only ever see their neighbours in a lift, or in their car as they drive to or from work," he explained. "A clubhouse enables residents to meet informally in a social situation. In this way, they build up relationships with their neighbours, the children play together. A proper community is formed, and that encourages neighbourliness, which in turn enhances residents' quality of life and sense of well-being.

That the clubhouse provides a platform for community spirit is advantageous from a property management point of view. "It means we can disseminate information and messages to residents in an informal way," said Mr Chan. These might concern management policy or maintenance of the property, or even what kind of decorations should be put up for Chinese New Year. "By doing it informally, we can get feedback from residents and have a good idea of their views before making any big decisions or introducing proposals on a more official basis."

In Mainland China it tends to be yuppie couples and newly-rich families who seek out

The clubhouse enables the residents to enjoy a better standard of living





THE RISE OF THE CLUBHOUSE

NOT SO LONG AGO the word clubhouse used to conjure up visions of businessmen adjourning to “the 19th hole” for a few drinks after a round of golf. How times change. While the golfers are still knocking back gin and tonics in the bar, the clubhouse has moved on to become an established part of the residential housing scene.

The demand for clubhouse facilities in housing developments started in the 1980s in Hong Kong. First came basic swimming pools but soon housebuyers were demanding more and Hutchison has led the way in the creation of residential properties with the added-value of lifestyle facilities.

Developments such as South Horizons at the western tip of Ap Lei Chau commands fabulous sea views and offers home-buyers use of the acclaimed and exclusive South Horizons Residents Club, which includes a gymnasium, temperature-controlled indoor and outdoor pools, tennis courts, golf simulator and children’s playgrounds.

The new generation of clubhouse is represented by Rambler Crest at Tsing Yi. Innovative facilities include a 200 metre outdoor landscape swimming pool, the longest of its kind in Hong Kong, exclusive car rental service, chefs for private dining functions and secured storage for extra belongings. Members can also enjoy the use of three clubhouses – the Rambler Club, Horizon Cove in Zhuhai and Laguna Verona in Dongguan.

Laguna City in Kowloon and Belvedere Garden, close to Tsuen Wan town centre, also offer extensive recreational activities. With the added benefit of large shopping malls on the doorstep, residents barely need to leave home to enjoy all that life offers.

In Mainland China, the growth of the luxury residence has been rapid, and Hutchison has been at the forefront of that growth, developing properties in most major cities including Beijing, Tianjin, Changchun, Shanghai, Qingdao, Xian, Chongqing, Chengdu, Wuhan, Changsha, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan and Zhuhai. As China’s rapid economic growth shows no sign of abating the demand for luxury properties with superior clubhouse facilities will continue to rise too.

residences with clubhouses, while in Hong Kong buyers are usually families and slightly older couples.

“Young professional couples in Hong Kong like to belong to clubs and gyms where they can be seen,” he explained. “Families are looking for a living environment where their children can enjoy swimming and sports facilities in a safe environment that is right on their doorstep. Busy parents don’t want to have to ferry children back and forth to outside facilities.” Indeed, many parents in the developments that Mr Chan manages have expressed the hope that having sporting and health facilities available at home would encourage their children to develop good fitness habits for life.

The rise of the clubhouse enables residents to enjoy a better standard of living and facilitates maintaining a happy, healthy lifestyle by putting all the facilities they could possibly need right on their doorstep. More and more people realise that joining the club makes sense.

