

Elgin and Grabouw is a Nice Country Retreat

A combination of factors is now helping to make the Elgin/Grabouw area a good choice for those looking to move away from Cape Town in the search of a country retreat.

The first factor, says Janis Viljoen, Anne Porter Knight Frank's senior agent in the area, is the new lease of life injected into the area by the slow but steady revival of apple farming (which for almost a decade was seen by many to be on the way out) and the development of many new wine estates not seen in this area prior to 1990.

"Grabouw's cooler upland climate and fairly dry soils lend themselves to developing attractive flavours in wine grapes and local winemakers are now regularly winning awards for their exceptional wines."

Viljoen says The Elgin Valley Wine Guild is creating a wine route through the valley and more wine cellars are opening their doors over weekends.

"Any area known for its wine automatically gains a certain panache and prestige," says Viljoen.

A second factor boosting the area's popularity is its growing importance as an outdoor hiking, mountain biking, rowing, kloof jumping and adventure venue. For many outdoor lovers, says Viljoen, this is now their first choice as a weekend getaway. These attractions will remain available in perpetuity because the valley is encircled by the Koegelberg Biosphere and the Groenland Conservancy.

The influx of regular visitors to the area has led to a proliferation of B&Bs and guesthouses and has helped make the local country club on Eikenhof Dam a very popular social and sporting venue. It also now serves as a base for adventure races, rowing and other sporting events.

A third drawcard to the area is the excellent schools now found there: Applewood Preparatory School and Kingsway College have earned themselves good reputations.

Also drawing people to Grabouw, says Viljoen, is that the 60km to 70km commute into the city increasingly seems "manageable", particularly for those who do it only two or three times a week.

"If you time your trips to avoid the rush hour, you can complete the run into the city in 45 minutes," says Viljoen.

Many of the buyers, says Viljoen, are looking for smallholdings of approximately 5 to 10 hectares, but these are few and far between and recent legislation preventing the sub-division of farms will mean that only those already sub-divided under previous rulings will be available.

However, in Grabouw's upmarket Klipkop "suburb" it is possible to buy 0,5 hectares in a rural, semi-forested setting. Here plots of this size can be had for R1m and Klipkop houses currently on APKF's books are priced from R1,5m to R3,3m.

Viljoen predicts that very few Overberg or Boland precincts will see such steady price appreciation as Klipkop. For those who do not yearn for a security estate lifestyle, it is possible to buy homes in the residential areas surrounding Grabouw at anything from R1m to R2m and almost all these homes have large fertile and well-established gardens.

For those who want land, farms on 30 hectares or more are on offer, in many cases with already established orchards of apples, pears, plums, quince, kiwi fruit or even olives – but they are still also large areas covered by fynbos which are therefore ideally suited to conservationists and nature lovers (with small incomes being possible from annual protea and wild flower harvests). There also are a few 8 or 9 hectare "gentlemen's estates" for sale.