

SAUNDERS ARCHITECTURE

Text by: Jonathan Bell

Carraig Ridge: Landscape, history and design

Carraig Ridge is a unique opportunity. Over the next ten years, 650 acres of secluded and pristine Canadian landscape will become a new centre of innovative contemporary residential design. Scattered across these south and west-facing slopes, ridges, lakes and woodlands will be 44 unique houses, each occupying a generous lot of between one and five acres. The new houses will occupy just a small proportion of the site to preserve a great swathe of this beautiful wilderness.

As well as re-zoning the land to avoid over-development, landscape designers and contemporary architects have worked to ensure the new houses have minimal impact on their surroundings. 'I want this project to be based on preservation,' explains Carraig Ridge's driving force, Ian MacGregor. With decades of direct family connection to these lands, MacGregor believes in a carefully managed long-term vision. 'What we're creating here at Carraig Ridge is a healthy future for generations to come.'

Carraig Ridge is set in open countryside between the revitalised city of Calgary and the open expanses of the Banff National Park. Alberta's famous Ghost Lake is nearby and on the far horizon the land rises up to form the spectacular peaks of the Rocky Mountains. The land is shared with wolves, elk, bison and eagles, as well as many other species, while each lot has been divided to conform to the natural contours and boundaries of the terrain.

The Carraig Ridge plot was originally part of the Morleyville Settlement, the cradle of southern Alberta cattle ranching in the late 19th century. Today, the site offers an opportunity to combine conservation with innovation. The first collection of new houses are being overseen by the Norwegian-based studio Saunders Architecture, founded by the Canadian-born architect Todd Saunders.

Saunders' acclaimed portfolio includes the Fogo Island Inn and Artists' Studios in Newfoundland, a series of bold modern buildings that combine traditional materials with modern forms, attracting awards and attention from around the world. His studio is currently working on projects across Norway as well as in Denmark, Sweden, the USA and Canada.

Saunders and MacGregor will transform Carraig Ridge with a series of unique modern retreats. Every new house at Carraig Ridge will have a minimal environmental footprint, with design and construction working in harmony with the landscape to offer residents unspoilt and expansive views of one of the world's great wildernesses. Residents will become part of the historic and environmental legacy of the land, and there is an exciting opportunity to bring personal design sensibilities and taste to each new house. Above all, craft, materials, design and technology will be brought to the fore to ensure the landscape is given prominence over architectural scale and ostentation.

Carraig Ridge will provide a retreat for generations to come. The vast majority of this spectacular terrain will be preserved forever by a conservation easement. A Home Owners' Association will provide maintenance and permanent peace of mind. Most importantly of all, the site provides an opportunity to combine architecture, landscape and lifestyle with a strong sense of permanence and connection to the land.