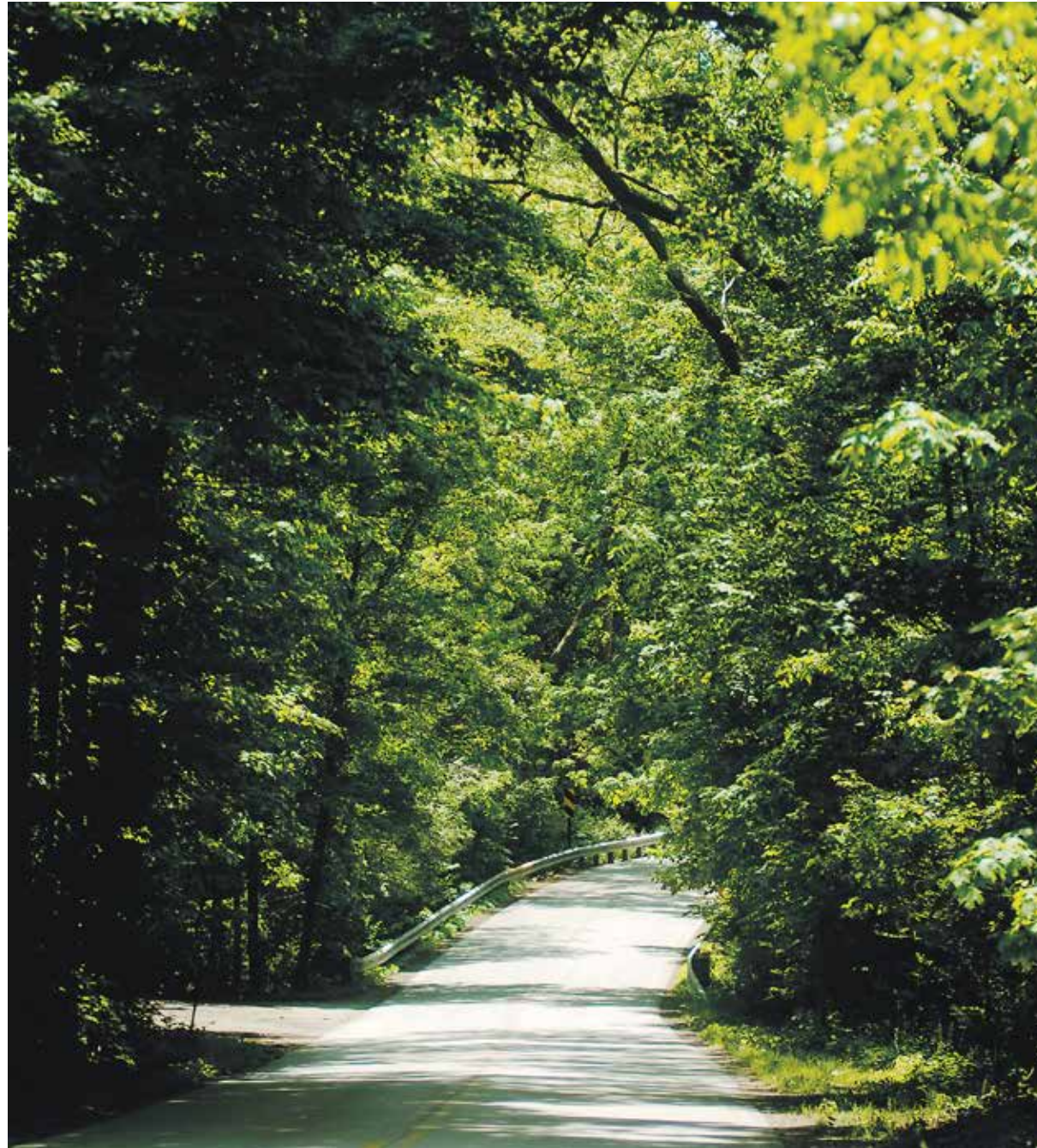


Inside The ENCLAVES



In case you're not familiar, "enclave" is derived from the French. And if you have to ask, then you probably don't belong—which is the point. So put on your designer wear, grab your credit card and come along as we look behind the gates (surprisingly, there weren't too many) at Northeast Ohio's most prestigious addresses. (Normally, we'd just say "most exclusive," but that would be so unrefined.)

I'm sitting inside a house in one of the most prestigious communities on the East Side. The owner, a middle-aged woman with grown children, has invited me here for a chat about life inside Cleveland's most exclusive neighborhoods. But right now, we are talking about her couch. It's floral. And it's faded from the sun and threadbare in spots. Considering that this house is worth millions, she could definitely do better. It's mid-day, but she's opened a bottle of red wine. She's working backward in her collection, she tells me, and the year on this particular vintage is 1995.

"Is it all right?" she asks.

Maybe it's the wine, but I say something no guest—reporter or not—should ever say. "If you were new money, you'd have much nicer furniture in here."

She is completely nonplussed. Still leaning back in her chair, sipping her wine, she sets me straight. "Who am I trying to impress?" she asks, laughing.

She has a point. She lives surrounded by corporate leaders and socialites, every house worth at least a half million. There would be no end if everybody tried to out-couch one another. And those aren't the values of old money, anyway. Old money will spend millions on their house and then not redo the kitchen—ever. Old money doesn't have to impress you with their furniture, because everybody knows who they are. In a way, trying not to impress people actually makes them more impressive. That's why my subject doesn't want her name used. Because of what her old money neighbors might think of her.

Nowhere, in fact, were people more suspicious, more reluctant to talk than in Northeast Ohio's three bastions of old money—Gates Mills, Daisy Hill and Waite Hill. In one case, it took a week and a half dozen calls to get the phone number of a resident I was told was friendly and wanted to chat. When I got her on the line, she asked me to call back in an hour. She never answered the phone again. And, she never returned my messages.

So, maybe name dropping is gauche in these exclusive neighborhoods—but that doesn't mean we can't do it. Indians Hall of Famer Bob Feller lives in Gates Mills in a 3,900-square-foot Cape Cod. (How many guys who have thrown a no-hitter, three actually, live in your neck of the woods?) And silent-film actress May Allison, one of Hollywood's first true stars, is buried in the Gates Mills South Cemetery. (She had lived for years in another enclave—Bratenahl.) The "regular" folks include CEOs, investment bankers and lots of old money families.

It's rude to talk about money, too. But we're like that. The median household income in Gates Mills (\$133,605) is almost three times that of Parma (\$47,843). The most expensive home currently for sale in Parma is going for \$419,000. In Gates Mills, it's \$4.95 million. Both are four-bedroom colonials.

There's got to be more to these enclaves than money and whom you know, though, right? As the prettiest of all the enclaves, Gates Mills is particularly intriguing. An old stagecoach inn at the center of the village became the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club. Western Reserve-style homes with picket fences back up to the Chagrin River. It's so idyllic, so charming, so perfect that it almost feels unreal.

My first stop is Sara's Place, the new (and only) restaurant in town. One thing that all of these places have in

"It's one thing to be a guest, and it's another thing to live there," . . .



Sara's Place



Gate Mills Church

“Who am I trying to impress?”

she asks, laughing.



common (except for Chagrin Falls) is a lack of commercial districts. A big-box retailer would be unthinkable horrid. A chain restaurant would be terrible. Some even questioned Sara's Place. Restaurants and stores draw people. Some of those people—like me—will be outsiders; outsiders up to no good (the spotlight is never good, I am told at every turn).

My first mistake was calling the restaurant Sara's Place—more than once. Each time, I was corrected. It's pronounced Saaahra's Place.

A lot of care went into making this restaurant Gates Mills worthy. The floors are made of 100-year-old reclaimed barn wood. The exterior is covered with the ubiquitous white clapboard. (Take a look around your 'burb and see if you can find a single new commercial building covered in wood, not vinyl.)

Although the restaurant is casual, on this day at least, no one is wearing jeans. Louis Vuitton, designer sunglasses and a fine-gauge cardigan will do nicely for a brunch featuring a smoked-salmon plate and a smoked-salmon pizza,

as well as comfort food such as stuffed cabbage and chicken potpie. What sells best, though, is the California Benedict, with its avocado and artichokes.

I'm the only person wearing flip-flops, but nobody shoots me any looks. The place actually feels pretty comfortable. I'm starting to think that, as one real estate agent told me, "old money isn't what it used to be." Younger generations don't feel the same need to "belong." Thus, there is not the same sense that others are excluded. What's more, technology is generating money today—a

business landscape where breaking the rules is more important than following them. Entrepreneurs in Northeast Ohio don't need the Hunt Club to get ahead.

I run this theory by a resident, but she assures me that old money—at least in some circles—is going strong. And it's still tough to become a part of it.

"Sometimes you can. Sometimes you can't," she says. "It all depends." She is terrified that her name will appear in print, so I agree to identify her only by her ties to Gates Mills. Still, she can't say exactly what it is that enables some

people to happily mingle over drinks at the Hunt Club, while others remain outsiders. She can only say what not to do. "The showier you are, the less chance you have," she says. "Cars, houses, jewelry—they are all ways of letting people know what you have."

I cross the Chagrin River on a footbridge. A path leads along the side of the white-steepled Episcopalian church, where the carillon bells (one of only 200 sets in North America) ring after services on Sunday. Across the street is the legendary Hunt Club, which was launched

in 1908 with the purchase of several hounds in England whose bloodlines are still carried on today.

I continue on down Old Mill Road, every house is achingly charming with its white clapboard and "Gates Mills green" shutters.

"You're just in time to help me weed my yard," a man calls out from underneath his sun hat.

I get the sense that he wonders what I'm doing here and has struck up this conversation as bait. I should probably stay to chat. After all, that's what I'm

here for. But I feel like I've been pegged for what I am—an outsider.

"I haven't weeded my own garden yet," I shout back, never breaking stride.

Councilwoman Mary Reynolds raves about the village's community spirit and lack of pretension, comparing the village to Fairview Park, where she grew up. "I felt the same level of community in both," she says. "There's more open space in Gates Mills, but I don't feel the people are any different. The misperception that people can be snobby in these parts," she says, "comes from the fact that many people have never been to Gates Mills or Hunting Valley. With almost no stores or restaurants in either place, there's really no reason to go. So the mystique—and misperceptions—linger."

Local real estate agent Georgia Murray of Howard Hanna Smythe Cramer and I are wearing the same dress (a knit from Ann Taylor Loft). Is this a good sign? Am I one of them? She tells me about the Halloween parties, Fourth of July parades and all kinds of festivals. Everybody brings a dish to the annual art show—a good old-fashioned potluck.

"What kind of dish?"
"Maybe cold-poached salmon with dill."

Dress or no dress, this is final proof of the divide. Poached salmon is not typical potluck. I mention this to Reynolds, as evidence that this place is not as pedestrian as everybody seems intent on proving. She quickly counters that there is an annual chili cook-off.

"I can't imagine anything more grassroots," she says.

Finally, I find a non-native to speak with. A mother of two whose children attend private schools and take riding lessons at the Hunt Club, she spends a fair amount of time here, but lives in a town down the road.

"It's one thing to be a guest, and it's another thing to live there," she says. "They're friendly to guests and welcoming to guests, but they know whether you're one of them."

How do they know? If your children don't wear Lilly Pulitzer or Lacoste, "it's an obvious yet subtle indicator of income," she says. The appropriate look for women is a mix of sporty and preppy, with \$500 Burberry jackets being

especially common. The trick—whether with cars, homes or clothes—is to make classic choices that indicate good taste, without being showy. Even more important is education. "There's a lot of subtle questions about where your children go to school and what they do during the summer," she says. She doesn't mean any of this in a bitter way, I can tell. It's just the way it is.

The West Side, of course, has a reputation for being much more open. And then, there's the cluster of 117 homes in the northwest corner of Lakewood known as Clifton Park. The residents pay a yearly fee (no one would say how much, but they all described it as modest) and have joint access to Clifton Beach. There are almost nightly gatherings there, I am told.

But when I try to check one out, I am once again met with resistance. A homeowner I'd previously spoken with could easily offer to vouch for me to get past the guard station. Instead, she e-mails: "You can explain to the guard what you are doing and ... I'm sure he will let you in. You're on your own from there." Nobody, it seems, wants to be the person who let a reporter into her enclave.

Nonetheless, I do head down to the beach on a balmy Friday night and, after a few questions, the guard let me in. The sandy beach, 50 or so feet deep, stretches about the length of two football fields. A boardwalk runs parallel to the water, lined by a row of trees. Dozens of picnic tables sit side by side in the shade.

Nearly every table is covered by a bright plaid or striped tablecloth and

has a wicker picnic basket on it. Most people brought meat to grill, but some order pizza. Everybody has wine and fresh fruit.

While the adults, quite a few holding babies, chat by the tables, the small children dart back and forth across the beach, hauling buckets of water to their sand castles and splashing in the waves.

The area used to be a bit more staid, one man says, but the recent influx of young families has livened things up. Many of the people at the beach today used to live elsewhere in Lakewood but moved, in some cases, just a few blocks, because they were drawn to the Clifton Park lifestyle. From Memorial Day on, every weekend is spent at the beach.

"This is what it's all about," one woman tells me, as her son comes up to the picnic table, thirsty from running around.

"Do you feel like there are a lot of social rules?" I ask.

She doesn't start talking about how welcoming everybody is or how down-to-earth her neighbors are. Instead, she gestures to her T-shirt, khaki shorts and bare feet and laughs. "Uh, noooo."

To me, this is the enclaves at their best. You're close to downtown, all the homes are old and beautiful, there are packs of small children. It's so social, so fun.

I think back to the woman whose couch I critiqued. She couldn't have loved her community any more.

"When I moved here," she told me, "my soul felt suddenly free and nurtured."

Yes, all of her neighbors are well off, but money won't get you in their crowd. What will get you in, she continued, is the same as it is in any community: "They have to be impressed by you as a person."

I feel like I could head down to Clifton Beach with my two little kids and a bottle of wine and have a great night. I have more trouble imagining any kind of social success over drinks at the Hunt Club. That's just me, though. As my "couch" friend said: "It all depends on who you are as a person."

	Median appraised home value	Typical cookout food	Do men wear jackets to Christmas parties?	Typical teen's first car	When residents say they're going to "the club," they mean . . .	Most popular high school sports	Corporate or entrepreneur?	Perfect lawns or are dandelions okay?	Diamonds or pearls?
Avalon Drive	\$632,750	grilled chicken, great salads	yes	Jeep, Volkswagen or Toyota	Cleveland Yachting Club	football and lacrosse	corporate	green and perfect	both, but are more likely to wear handcrafted pieces
Bratenahl	\$318,900	steak, lamb chops	yes	Jeep	Shoreby Club	baseball and tennis	entrepreneurs	lawns are perfect with English gardens	pearls
Chagrin Falls	\$252,100	chicken, ribs, scampi or salmon	sometimes	Jeep, small SUV or mom's old car	Chagrin Valley Country Club or Chagrin Valley Athletic Club	soccer, football and basketball	both, including lots of Merrill Lynch, Wachovia and Smith arney stockbrokers	nice and green	pearls for young mothers, diamonds as they age
Clifton Park	\$538,400	chicken and cold broccoli and cheese salad	no	usually a used car	The Clifton Club	baseball and swimming	both	nice and green	neither, gold
Daisy Hill	\$1.16M	steaks, hamburgers, hot dogs and ice cream	yes	Jeep or mom's old BMW	Chagrin Valley Hunt Club or The Country Club in Pepper Pike	lacrosse	both	dandelions are becoming considered environmentally sensitive lawn care	pearls
Gates Mills	\$467,400	steaks, burgers, hot dogs	yes, usually with ties	Jeep	Chagrin Valley Hunt Club	field hockey, tennis and football	corporate	dandelions are okay	definitely pearls
Norh Park and South Park Boulevards	\$741,500	catered	yes	mom's old car	Cleveland Skating Club or Shaker Heights Country Club	lacrosse, tennis and swimming	corporate	green	lots of diamonds
Top-O-Hill Drive	\$1.14M	filet mignon	no	a new Honda or Audi A4	Portage Country Club	soccer, lacrosse, football and baseball	both	no dandelions	diamonds
Waite Hill	\$555,270	chicken or hamburgers	yes	mom's old car	Kirtland Country Club	soccer and tennis	corporate	acceptable, as part of rural look	neither, most don't wear much jewelry
Large lots in Westlake	\$367,600	steak	no	small SUV or Honda	Lakewood Country Club	baseball and soccer	both	perfect and green	definitely diamonds



a mix of sporty and preppy



riding lessons at Hunt Club



not a typical potluck

Avalon Drive



inRocky River

88 single-family homes
Median appraised home value: \$632,750

IT'S LIKE A REGULAR NEIGHBORHOOD with sidewalks and homes fairly close together—only the most perfect one you could imagine. Most of the homes were built before 1950 and, while they are largely traditional, they each have their charms, from French Normandy-style homes to classic English Tudors, Cape Cods and brick Georgians. This is the most prestigious street in the most prestigious neighborhood in the most prestigious city on the West Side.

Of course, it's also nice to have the lake in your backyard—and to be able to walk to Rocky River Park or up to the stores and restaurants on Lake Road. Take a stroll down Avalon and you'll see children playing, dogs, joggers and lots of landscaping trucks. The grass could not get any greener.

The Original

Standing in Donna Price's Rocky River home, it's hard to tell if it's old or new. The truth is, it's both. The renovation of their Avalon Drive property began with the demolition of all but two walls. The rest of the 6,800-square-foot house came up around those walls over the next nine months. The result is a house that has the best of both worlds—the charm of an older home, but the closets, garage space and modern capabilities of a new home.

Donna, who grew up in Cincinnati, came to River after a two-year stint in Florida for her husband's work. There, they lived on a small street on the Intercoastal Waterway within walking distance of restaurants and stores. When looking for a house up here, she wanted three things: to be on the water; to be able to walk places and to be in a top school district (of her three children, one was still at home).

She stops in her tracks, turns around and laughs when asked if she found waterfront property here to be affordable. "Compared to South Florida? Yeeahhh."

About the House

It has five bedrooms, five full baths and two half baths. Common rooms include a study, living room, great room, sunroom and a lower-level recreation room complete with custom knotty-pine walls, a full-service bar, pool table and stone fireplace. There is also a small room for the dogs and a computer room upstairs.

The one room never used is the kitchen. It is huge, with painted white cabinets, a mammoth island and lots of light. It is, notes Donna, rarely used for the function of



cooking. Even during her annual Christmas bash, the caterers set up in the garage because so many people hang out in the kitchen.

Regarding the tear-downs, Donna says, "I think you have a moral responsibility to stay true to the character of the neighborhood."

Details

The entire house is full of special touches and surprising elements—all of which were planned by Donna. An example: One of the walls in the great room was made from rolled field stone, the same material used on the fireplace. Another wall is covered in beadboard. The antler chandelier was handmade in Leelanau County, Michigan, where Donna has a vacation home. There is an old telephone hanging on one wall, a wood fish sign on another.

The View

Sitting in the sunroom, you are only about 20 feet from the drop-off to the lake. Steps descend to a private beach.



Avalon Drive (North)

APPRAISED VALUE	SQUARE FEET	# OF BEDROOMS	# OF BATHS	YEAR BUILT
\$1.98M	5,386	6	6	1940
\$1.85M	5,787	4	9	1989
\$1.76M	4,478	6	6	1933
\$1.73M	7,708	4	7	1998
\$1.72M	5,203	4	5	1951
\$1.7M	6,548	6	5	1929
\$1.59M	5,093	6	4	1924
\$1.54M	6,842	4	5	1997
\$1.53M	3,776	5	5	1930
\$1.51M	3,784	5	4	1953