

Under *the* Radar

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLORADO



VISITING STEAMBOAT

Steamboat Grand (800-922-2722, www.steamboatgrand.com) is the best hotel bet in the village. A better idea is **Moving Mountains Chalets**, which offers the classic European-style catered chalet experience at a handful of private luxury ski homes. Most meals (chef-prepared) are included, as is transportation to and from the slopes. A week in January at the three-bedroom Mountain High Chalet runs \$1,415 per night (877-624-2538, www.movingmountains.com).

For a long time, Steamboat Springs was held together with duct tape and paint," confesses Mike Lane, who has worked in public relations at the resort for more than a decade.

But change is afoot. In March 2007, Intrawest, the behemoth that made Whistler a ski-mountain star and transformed Mont Tremblant, acquired the Steamboat Ski & Resort Corporation for \$265 million. You could almost hear the developers stampeding like the cattle that used to be driven through Steamboat's downtown. Next, Intrawest wooed away Vail's COO, Bill Jensen, to run things. As much as \$1 billion may be invested here in the next five years. Perhaps they'll change the name to Showboat?

What they got is a place with great bones. Steamboat Springs isn't Aspen—if you see animal skins on Lincoln Avenue, they most likely belong to the horses wearing them. This is a classic Western main street, with low-rise buildings and still enough mom-and-pop places to balance out the galleries, sushi bars, and boutiques now setting up camp. It's a town where they dump extra snow on the main street during February's Winter Carnival and hold "skijoring" races, with cowboys on skis pulled by galloping horses.

They call this place Ski Town, U.S.A. for a reason. Steamboat, the mountain, is a great, if vastly underappreciated, delight, with some of the best tree skiing in the West. The phrase "Champagne powder snow" was coined here, and this past winter was a "four-wire" one, referring to the height of snow on the barbed-wire fences surrounding local ranch land. And you can't throw a snowball without hitting an Olympian. The town has produced 69 winter Olympians, more than anywhere else in the U.S.

But until recently, visitors in search of the luxe life à la Beaver Creek found it simply wasn't available. Now it's on the way. There are presently cranes looming over the base of the ski mountain, and developments near the slopes like Edgemont (124 homes, from the \$800,000s to more than \$2.5 million) and One Steamboat Place (residences up to \$4.75 million). Right now, Marabou Ranch, a posh real estate development five minutes outside town, is setting the tone.

Situated on 1,700 acres near the mountain known as Sleeping Giant, which seems too apt for words, Marabou offers 62 homesites, starting at \$2.75 million for five acres. Marabou already has a members' lodge and an elegant club 15 minutes away on the slopes. It also has deep Steamboat roots thanks to managing partner Jeff Temple. Temple's dad, James, founded Steamboat ski mountain, while Jeff created Spyder Skiwear with his friend David Jacobs. As an owner at Marabou, you can ride with cowboys, brand cattle, fix fences, and then retire to your home (10,000 square feet max) to spruce up in your marble bath.

Marabou has tapped Steamboat's mother lode of world-class athletes as master guides. They include four-time Olympian Todd Lodwick; Nelson Carmichael, who medaled in mogul freestyle skiing at Albertville; and Erin Simmons, a 32-year-old with pink-streaked blond hair who will compete on the Canadian Olympic Boardercross team in Vancouver.

This winter, expect to see foundation holes everywhere around the base of the mountain. While some locals are nervous that Steamboat will lose its considerable charm, its new owners are sanguine.

"This horse," says Andy Wirth, chief marketing officer of Intrawest, "has got a brand-new saddle." —EVERETT POTTER
Marabou: 877-879-7919, www.marabou.com. **Edgemont:** 877-871-4665, www.edgemontliving.com. **One Steamboat Place:** 866-599-4626, www.onesteamboatplace.com.

On horseback in the powder at Marabou Ranch (left); marching band on Lincoln Avenue (below) during February's Winter Carnival

