

# AVENUE

AUGUST | SEPTEMBER 2017

## *Uncommon Sense*

Patricia Duff  
Wants to Bridge  
America's Great  
Divide

PLUS: THE NEW NORTHERN HAMPTONS,  
INVESTMENTS IN VESTMENTS, AND WHO'S NEXT IN NEWPORT

# ON THE BEACH



# Gilded Gardens of Eden

REINVENTING MILLBROOK  
AND TUXEDO PARK:  
THEY'RE NOT THE NORTHERN  
HAMPTONS—YET.

*by Patricia Beard*

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ated communities are not just an anomaly in the New York region; some consider them anathema. But ultrahigh-profile developments are gaining ground just outside two of the metropolitan area's poshest, most historic rural-lite playgrounds, Millbrook and Tuxedo Park. Nothing like the ultra-everything private residential Silo Ridge Field Club has ever been seen in Dutchess County. Ninety miles north of New York City, the 800-acre residential club—named for two red landmark silos left over from a long-gone farm—is set among farmland and large estates in the open foxhunting country east of Millbrook.

And after decades-long somnolence, Tuxedo Park, the most exclusive enclave of the Gilded Age, established in the late 19th century by Pierre Lorillard (of the tobacco fortune) across the Hudson River from Millbrook, is coming back. Big money wants big houses there again. Set in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains, Tuxedo Park boasts three lakes and a private club with one of the only four "real" court tennis courts in the United States.

In a curiously odd coincidence, men named Michael are behind both of these burgeoning un-Hamptons.

The countryside around the hamlet of Amenia is so lovely that in 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt drove Winston Churchill to see what he called "The Best View in America." FDR would still recognize the long, open, rolling landscape, where Michael Meldman, the founder and CEO of the Discovery Land Company, is building his first East Coast venture.

Silo Ridge is Meldman's 20th Discovery club, part of an enterprise said to earn \$1 billion a year. Each club is in a prime setting, from the ranching West to Hawaii and the Bahamas. Meldman estimates that he spends 200 days a year flying between them in his Falcon 2000 jet, making sure

each is up to his standards. If he lands at the El Dorado Golf & Beach Club in Los Cabos, Mexico, he'll check in with his pals George Clooney and Rande Gerber, who, together with Meldman, created Casamigos Tequila. (Clooney didn't like any of the commercial brands. He must have been right—in June, the company was sold for a staggering \$1 billion.) A couple of days later, Meldman might set down at the 13,600-acre Yellowstone



**Preceding pages:** The barn in Silo Ridge's garden. **Above:** Michael Meldman, developer of Silo Ridge, where the golf course features snack-filled "comfort stations" just off several greens. **Opposite:** Another comfort station and a Discovery Company sign post.



Club in Big Sky, Montana, where Bill Gates owns a place.

When Meldman looked East, he decided that Manhattan dwellers would be willing to give up beach for bucolic if he built a family-oriented enclave a couple of hours from the city. Silo Ridge, he promised, would provide "a luxurious service-driven destination that is casual, and a casual destination that is luxurious."

How is this for luxury? For a fee, on-site staff will stock the kitchen, clean the house and do the laundry, and a chef can be booked to cook the meals. There will eventually be three restaurants overseen by Culinary Director and Chef Jonathan White, using ingredients from Silo Ridge's extensive organic garden, and from nearby farms. A minifarm in the planning stage will give city children the chance to gather still-warm eggs from the laying hens.

In May 2015, after two years of negotiation with the Amenia town planning board, Silo Ridge received permission to start building its 30,000-foot clubhouse with 21 guest rooms and the Winery Restaurant; the Field House; 266 homes; and a Tom Fazio-designed golf course.

Meldman immediately began construction, and now the family-oriented all-season club is taking shape. Inside the Field House will be a basketball court, tennis, squash and paddle tennis courts, baseball and lacrosse fields, a lap pool, and a state-of-the-art spa. Silo Ridge's nearby private equestrian center with indoor and outdoor arenas will offer horses and instructors in Western, English and dressage, as well as trail riding.

Spokesman Dan O'Callaghan estimates members' average net worth to be about \$50

million. When the club facilities and houses are completed, he expects that the combined net worth of the members is likely to hit \$2 billion. At \$5 million (not including land) a 5,000-square-foot house costs considerably less than an eight-room apartment on Park Avenue. The most beautiful views are on wooded land priced around \$4 million, even though lots are small—between three-quarters and 2.5 acres. Architectural oversight is strict: buildings will be clad in local stone, shingles and clapboard. No McMansions. The company is currently building a house for Tom Brady and Giselle Bündchen; both her bathroom and exercise room have an entire wall of one-way paned glass, but the house is far from showy. At the other end of the price spectrum, a typical three-bedroom duplex in a townhouse condo runs about \$3 million.



IN SILO RIDGE,  
ARCHITECTURAL OVERSIGHT IS  
STRICT. NO MCMANSIONS.

Amenia residents and owners of nearby estates are watching with interest. One cautious observer described Silo Ridge as “rural lite,” and she’s not far off the mark; but the trade-off is a modern, frictionless way to enjoy the country for financial stars from New York City, Connecticut and Boston. The only requirement is to show up. As for “showing up,” Meldman is close to an agreement with Metro North for permission to attach Silo Ridge’s own private car to the train that stops ten minutes from the gate.

Tuxedo Park has always been what the “un-Hampton” Silo Ridge hopes to become. Most of the original homeowners knew each other; many were listed in the first *Social*

*Register*, published in 1887. Railroad barons and financiers built houses with as many as 17 bedrooms and accommodations for 11 servants—because there were servants. (Think below-stairs on *Downton Abbey*.)

By the 1960s, only a few of the old families were left—and they were old. Their heirs didn’t want Tuxedo-scale houses; even the electricity bills were horrifying. Enter our other Michael, this one surnamed Bruno, a youthful, ebullient 50-ish serial entrepreneur. Bruno founded 1stdibs, the online antiques market, and sold it for a number said to have ended in eight zeros. With a passion for grand old houses—he’s restored nine—Bruno decided to take a look at Tuxedo Park. He



**This page:** Coming to Tuxedo Park: The Blue Barn and Tuxedo Hudson Co. farm stand. **Next page:** Michael Bruno and two views of the Lake Inn’s rose courtyard.



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TUXEDO HUDSON COMPANY

found a 14,000-square-foot Regency-style mansion built in 1900 on just under 14 acres, and fell in love. For a bargain \$3.25 million it was his.

In 2012, Bruno and his partner, Alexander Jakowec, restored the house, moved in, bought a guest house and one of the most majestic mansions in the Park, known as the Loomis Lab, now on the market for \$12 million, and one hundred acres. The house was finished, but Bruno wasn’t. In 2015, he and his

Tuxedo Hudson Company launched a real estate brokerage. He also realized something else was missing: Tuxedo Park didn’t have any markets or commercial establishments. In the old days, servants brought hampers filled with food from city grocers or Long Island greenhouses. The mistress of the house told the cook how many to expect for dinner, and footmen set the table. That was then. Now, there were no hampers, only minimal staff, and no upscale markets for miles. Outside

# TUXEDO PARK IS STILL THE PARK; TIGHTLY HELD AND DEEPLY PRIVATE.



SEAN ZANNI-PATRICK MCMULLAN INC



TUXEDO HUDSON COMPANY



the Park, the nearby towns of Tuxedo and Sloatsburg largely consisted of modest houses, small stores and abandoned buildings.

Seeking a way to provision the Park without interfering with its Gilded Age ambience, Bruno bought 24 commercial buildings in Tuxedo and Sloatsburg and is seeking to transform them.

Bruno’s Tuxedo ambitions have ruffled feathers, inspired local skepticism and caused some to mutter that he is not a registered real estate broker, but as an agency owner, he does not need a license, and he has a licensed broker on the staff of Tuxedo Park Realty.

Tuxedo is only minutes from two of the last untouched greenscapes near New York City: the 22,000-acre Sterling Forest and the 50,000-acre Harriman State Park. Bruno predicts that biking enthusiasts will take the hour-long train trip to Tuxedo, and after a ride, freshen up and drop by his farmer’s market and café, both soon to open. If his dreams are realized, a restaurant,

antiques mall (four dozen dealers in a restored barn down Route 17 from the inn), artist’s studios, art dealers, an artisanal brewery, and a quality grocery store in a massive former warehouse will follow, “gateway to the Hudson Valley,” he says.

For those who live in Tuxedo Park, that all sounds convenient—the only place to eat out now is the Tuxedo Club, and not everyone is a member. The downside is the weekends, when the formerly uninviting area outside the gatehouse is likely to be crowded by day-trippers. Then, Park dwellers will have to bear the inconvenience of queuing in line with those visitors at the grocery store. But they will probably shop during the week and, like their predecessors, give dinner parties at home, although the host and hostess are now more likely to cook the meals and set their own tables.

It is also improbable that the men will wear tuxedos. Though the original tuxedo is often

said to have been introduced by either Pierre Lorillard IV or his son Griswold, in fact, another early Park millionaire was the first American to wear one the same year the Park opened. On a visit to England, the Prince of Wales sent coffee broker James Brown Potter to his Savile Row tailor, Henry Poole, to acquire proper dress for a dinner at Sandringham, the prince’s country estate. Back in Tuxedo, the tail-free evening jacket was a hit and got its name.

Any community behind a wall or inside a gate becomes a kind of island where commonly observed traditions develop. On the older “island” of Tuxedo Park, the grandeur of the Gilded Age mansions alone are reminders that *dolce* and *decorum* still have a place. The Tuxedo Autumn Ball, formerly the first deb party of the season, hasn’t been held there for decades, but the Park is still *the Park*, tightly held and deeply private. Bruno likes it that way: his lively new world will remain outside the guardhouse.

Silo Ridge is too recent to have defining traditions, but when Meldman talks about “casual,” he means it. The only “dress code” is no dress code: collarless shirts are fine on the golf course (as are golf carts blaring BYO music); coat and tie are not required in the restaurants. Through the proximity of houses on small lots, and the many community activities, members will unavoidably mix. Meldman wouldn’t be surprised if someone’s 9-year-old feels comfortable enough to ask his new neighbor, former Yankee first baseman Mark Teixeira, if the two of them could toss balls around.

Tuxedo Park gives a nod to the past, while Silo Ridge is purposely planned for the inescapable “now,” but they are more alike than they are different: both are gated—and gilded. ♦