

## Sage advice

Advice compiled and condensed from actual sources by Kelly Jane Torrance, who composed the questions.

**I** made a terrible mistake. No, I haven't gotten back together with Samantha Ronson. (Or have I? Even I can't keep track anymore.) What I'm talking about is my decision to turn down a role in "The Hangover."

The script didn't do much for me.

It seemed like another of those guy-centered comedies, and I'm used to being in girl-centered movies. I thought I'd really have to get out of my comfort zone for this one. Well, the movie turned out to be the summer's biggest comedy and, so far, it's the fourth-highest-grossing film of the year. Heather Graham was happy enough to play a stripper and now millions of people are reminded of who she is.

How can I keep from missing such great opportunities in the future?



— Lindsay Lohan

Dear Lindsay,  
Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.

— Thomas Edison

**I** was worried I might lose my gig in the megasuccessful "High School Musical" movies a few years back when some nude photos I sent to my boyfriend Zac made their way to the Internet. I didn't — and in fact, it only seemed to bring me new (older) fans. So I've decided to go all the way and strip on the big screen — I've just signed to play a character named Blondie in a movie that has scenes set in a brothel.

Now that I've committed, though, I'm feeling a bit nervous. It was one thing to pose naked for pictures I expected just my boyfriend to see. It's another to actually do a movie nude.

— Vanessa Hudgens

Dear Vanessa,  
Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress.

— John Berger

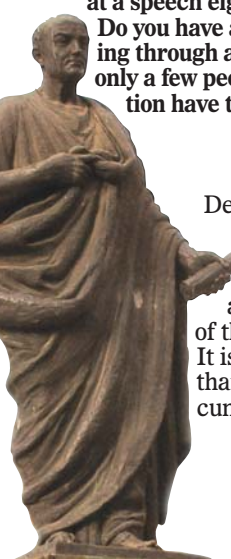
**I** don't think there's another woman — or possibly even man — who's under more pressure than I am right now. I'm facing tough grilling by some of the most powerful people in politics. One of them told me I will pass as long as I don't have a "melt-down." Now that he's said that, I've started worrying that I will. After all, I'm being forced to defend just about everything I've done in my career, including just two little words I uttered at a speech eight years ago.

Do you have any tips on coming through an experience only a few people in a generation have to face?

— Sonia Sotomayor

Dear Sonia,  
The pressure of adversity does not affect the mind of the brave man. It is more powerful than external circumstances.

— Seneca



## Environment

# BELLAVISTA



## Treehouse village boasts natural life

BY ALLISON SHELLEY  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**F**inca Bellavista is not an easy place to reach — nor is it necessarily intended to be. Unlike other developments springing up across southern Costa Rica, this community is markedly devoid of flashy advertising billboards or even a simple street sign labeling the steep, gravel entrance road.

Better pull on those rubber boots and grab a machete upon arrival because encountering a spider as big as one's face is as likely as being stuck in rush-hour traffic back home. And that is precisely the point.

Bellavista co-founder Matt Hogan, 34, dreamed of such a hideaway, albeit on a slightly smaller scale, three years ago during his two-hour daily commute from Frederick, Md., to Baltimore.

"My wife, Erica, and I were looking for a little fixer-upper surf shack, and we ended up accidentally creating this hippy, eco, treehouse community," he relates not without a glimmer of self-deprecation and the swell of pride.

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## Philanthropy

# Brides comfort the sick

BY KAREN GOLDBERG GOFF  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**W**hen hundreds of brides-to-be visit the Westin Arlington Gateway this weekend, they will be searching for the special wedding gown and other accessories to make their day a perfect one.

The Westin is the site of the Washington stop of Brides Against Breast Cancer, a nonprofit that organizes wedding gown sales in more than two dozen U.S. cities. Money from dress sales goes to the Making Memories Breast Cancer Foundation, which grants wishes to Stage IV breast cancer patients and their families.

Making Memories was founded in 1998, after Fran Hansen, a Portland, Ore., woman who had worked in the bridal business, read about a cancer patient who wished she could

afford Christmas gifts for her family. Since then, the foundation has amassed thousands of wedding dresses and granted several hundred wishes, says Barbara Raskin, senior national tour director for Brides Against Breast Cancer.

"People have been very willing to donate what is a precious possession," she says.

Today, about 85 percent of the merchandise comes from manufacturers, designers and retailers (including Washington-area donors Rizik's and Hannelore's of Olde Town). The remaining come from individuals hoping another woman will wear their dress and still another woman will have a wish granted.

About 4,000 gowns are in a warehouse waiting to be sold, Ms. Raskin

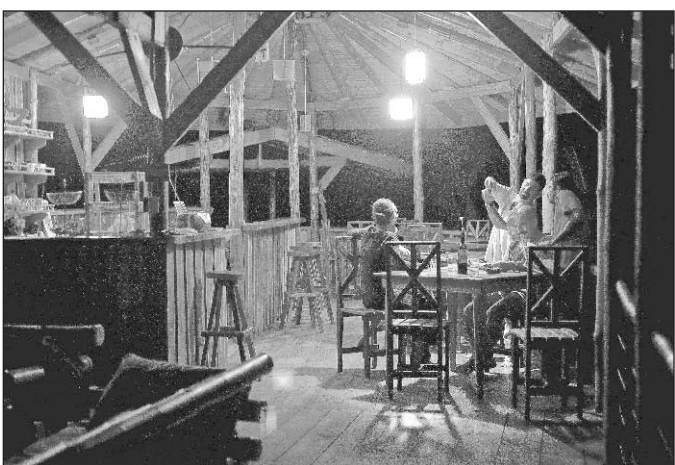
» see **BRIDES**, page B3



Brides Against Breast Cancer organizes wedding gown sales where the money goes to granting wishes to Stage IV breast cancer patients and their families.

# Brand New You

Lot owners (near right) Shannon Bishop and Kevin (partially hidden, who preferred not to give his last name) relax together at base camp while Bellavista co-founder Matt Hogan shares digital photographs with finca overseer Marcial Corella and finca worker Randall Picado Alvarado. The base camp offers (below) a communal bathhouse, kitchen, dining area and game room.



## HOGAN

From page B1

Contrary to its name, which hints at Spanish gauchos and high-living elite, this “finca” is actually an adventurer’s paradise — a lush rain forest boasting temperate, mosquito-free nights; canopy-level zip line “trails” that carry residents overhead across the 350-acre property; and two major rivers just shallow enough to ford on foot but big enough to provide swimming holes and waterfalls.

It’s all yours for the taking. Parcels of 2 to 4 acres, so densely forested with tropical wonders that new owners have been known to spend entire afternoons simply crossing their own property, are being sold by the Hogans for \$49,000 to \$65,000 — well below what other local sellers are offering.

The main draw of this corner of the sky is not what has been built, however, but what can’t be built. Each lot is sold without any type of shelter, but buyers must sign a 20-page document that essentially makes them promise to not build a ground dwelling. The only structures allowed: treehouses.

“My wife envisioned Evok village [from “Return of the Jedi”], and I said, ‘Why not?’” says Mr. Hogan, strapping a leather-sheathed knife and a padded climbing harness around his waist.

“But I thought we could take it a step further and make it like a natural, adult amusement park,” adds Mrs. Hogan, 31. “After I said my idea out loud, I remember looking at Matt and thinking, ‘In 20 years I’m going to look back on this moment and think, ‘That’s when our lives changed forever.’ And it is.”

Indeed, it’s not hard to imagine a gaggle of furry “Star Wars” creatures bounding out of the arched entrance when pulling down the retractable stairs to the couple’s two-story arboreal home. A showroom of its surroundings, the wooden structure was crafted of local cypress (superstructure and beams), sustainably harvested teak from a nearby plantation (walls and ceilings) and naturally felled manu negro and corteza from the finca itself — every piece laboriously carried by hand to the site. It blends so convincingly with the neighboring trees that it’s not until one is nearly above

its roofs on the access zip line that it draws attention.

“It’s an oxymoron to say ‘sustainable development,’ but the finca was founded on the principal that we should try to adapt to nature and live alongside it as opposed to cutting down trees and making nature accommodate our need to build big-square-footage, big-footprint houses,” Mr. Hogan explains.

Dwellings on metal or wooden supports are permitted, but they have to be at least 4 feet off the ground to promote the movement of animal life. The village-like cluster of buildings sprouting at “base camp” — including a bathhouse, kitchen, dining and relaxing areas — are all in this style and allow residents to share space and community.

Electricity is generated with solar panels, which power the high-speed satellite hookup (because let’s be realistic, even in the rain forest it’s nice to have Internet access). There is also running water at base camp, gravity-fed from rain-water catch tanks mounted at a higher elevation, so the toilets flush. Where do the contents go? Into special tanks called biodigestors that break the waste into compost. All of the above is required equipment for all the homes at Bellavista.

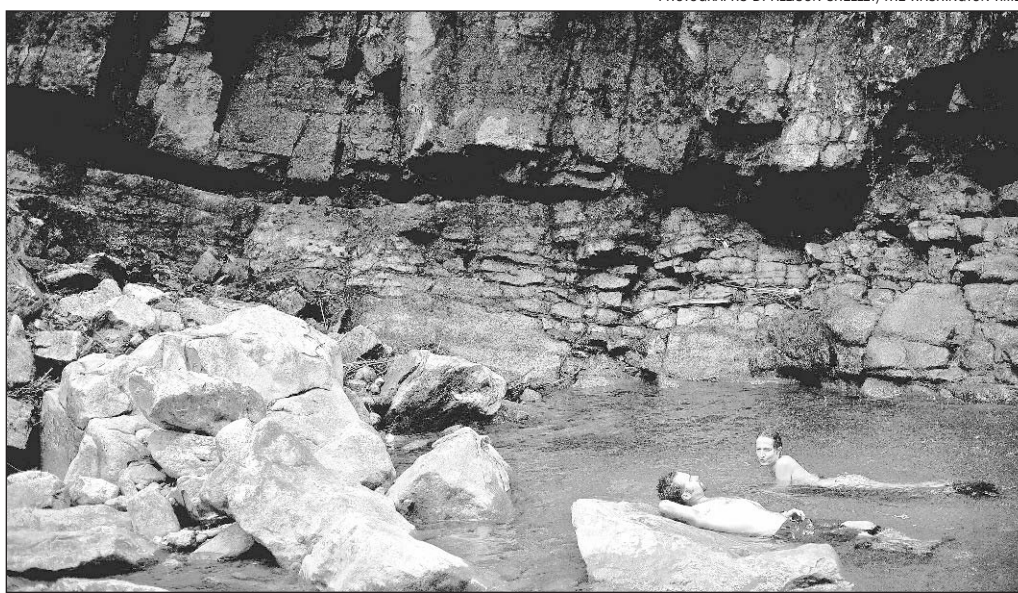
“Really, we aren’t reinventing the wheel,” laughs Mrs. Hogan. “It’s a matter of simplifying, and using what we have here to make it work. Americans and the Western world in general are so used to being tied to a grid for all of these things that people forget there are other solutions, and they oftentimes take fewer resources, are more economical, and easier to come by.”

Despite the restrictions — and maybe because of them — just more than half of the finca’s 82 lots have been snapped up. New owners, most of whom will use their treehouse property as a second home, include ornithologists, yoga instructors and dot-com prodigies. They are starting to design their own dream homes, even as work on the rest of the property progresses. So far, six totally customized treehouses have been completed.

Once a lot is purchased, owners work with a botanist to identify potential home sites on the property. Owners have the option of hiring Bellavista’s in-house design and construction company for the entire project, or bringing in outside experts, such as treehouse engineer Charley Greenwood. Mr.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALLISON SHELLEY/THE WASHINGTON TIMES



Greenwood has been working with lot owners K.C. and Shawna Rudy of Texas, crunching variables such as wall thickness and span strength to identify the right type of steel to use for the home’s superstructure. The couple then will work with Bellavista’s in-house company to acquire materials and bring everything to the site. The local team will then do the building.

A massive, open-sided structure with a transparent plastic roof that Mr. Hogan calls “Home Depot” shelters drying lumber hewn from standing dead trees culled from the finca or brought in from local, sustainably harvested sources. A shallow concrete trough resembling a single-lane lap pool recently was completed so the wood can be pressure treated in the most environmentally sustainable way possible.

Also under the roof is a

\$250,000 hydroelectric pump, which eventually will be set into one of the rivers. It will divert a small portion of the river’s flow through a 12-inch PVC pipe to create enough power to satisfy the entire community and then some. The couple has been told that when it is done it will be the largest privately owned hydropower grid in the country — possibly in all of Central America.

It was precisely these nontraditional logistics that attracted lot owner Shannon Bishop, 36, a photographer and dog walker from Takoma Park, to Bellavista.

“I’ve always been interested in alternative home design. So many of the houses we live in are just like boxes. I wanted something organic,” she says.

She recalls her very first visit, in the early stages of Bellavista’s development.

“When I first came, people were in tents and they had this sort of a makeshift kitchen under this big blue tarp held up by sticks. We were sitting around with lanterns playing Jenga at night!”

Despite the Spartan conditions, she fell in love instantly.

This time, visiting Bellavista to check out tags left by a botanist who is helping her choose the best trees in which to build, she describes conditions as “a total transformation” and says she can’t wait to spend more time with the finca’s growing community of lot owners.

She laughs, “When I was a kid, my brothers’ friends had a treehouse that they wouldn’t let me come up in because I was a girl. Now that I’m grown up, I can have my own treehouse and I’ll see if I invite them or not.”

On the cover: Finca Bellavista lot owner Shannon Bishop buzzes past the treehouse home of finca co-founders Matt and Erica Hogan, as she takes a zip line tour of the property.

Finca Bellavista lot owner Shannon Bishop (left) of Takoma Park descends the retractable stairs of the treehouse belonging to co-founders Matt and Erica Hogan. The 350-acre property is set against a lush rain forest in the southern Pacific region of Costa Rica. Mr. Hogan (below) chats with Ms. Bishop as they swim in the river.

### Gadgets

What’s the greatest feature of the new Nikon D5000? For starters, it can handle just about any task you throw at it, from landscapes to portraits to close-ups. Its built-in metering and autofocus features complement a 12.3-megapixel capacity, fast shutter speed and excellent image stability.

In my opinion, it’s well worth the \$729 estimated selling price Nikon USA

lists on its Web site for the camera body. (Even better, you probably won’t have to

## D5000’s versatility is impressive

pay that price: Amazon.com offers it for about \$60 less.)

The D5000 is a lightweight, digital single-lens reflex (SLR) camera that offers a wide variety of shooting modes, including HD movies at 1080p or 720p, that should satisfy most of us who are out there taking pictures. During a recent outing at the Cloisters branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in upper Manhattan, I put the camera through its paces and was delighted every step of the way.

The versatility of the D5000 was apparent. Shooting nearly 150 pictures, I got great images of the structure and its contents, both of which are part of the legacy of oilman and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller.

The Cloisters are a showplace of medieval art and architecture, with the result being a lot to photograph. Overlooking the Hudson River and with a view of New Jersey and the George Washington Bridge, the scenery and the gardens at the Cloisters offered some great photo opportunities, as well.

Mixing indoor and outdoor photography with close-ups — literally — of birds and bees as well as a few shots of my spousal unit, as the Census Bureau now defines a wife (or husband), the D5000 proved its power. Sitting across the courtyard from a roof of terra cotta tiles on which two small birds had perched, I was able to zoom in (with a 55-200mm Nikkor lens from my “old”

D40x outfit), and get a nice shot. Using the 18-55mm lens, supplied with the D5000 for review, I got a number of other good shots.

The movie capability was quite nice; I shot a brief HD movie of a water fountain, and the camera picked up the “native” audio of water flowing into the basin quite nicely. HD picture quality was quite good, too.

In my hands, the D5000 felt solid, but was light enough to carry without worry. The 2.5-inch (diagonal measure) LCD display screen, which can be used as a super-large viewfinder, for playback of images, and, of course, to display a myriad menu options, flips out and folds down, for a host of viewing angles.

My greatest “difficulty” — and I use that word advisedly — came when switching lenses; the new one was set to manual focus mode. A quick switch to autofocus, or AF, mode, and everything was, suddenly, clear. Moreover, the facial and scenic recognition features of the camera made it difficult, in AF mode, to get a “bad” shot.

There are enough modes and overrides to satisfy the most ambitious photographer. For those of us who prefer to let the camera do the heavy lifting, automatic modes capture things quite nicely. The camera can shoot up to four frames per second, helpful when a tiny bird doesn’t want to wait for you to get the best angle, or when you want to squeeze off

a round of pictures quickly.

Battery life for the camera is quite good. That’s nice. I also like the SD card capacity of the unit: You probably can go with a 4 gigabyte card; the 2 GB card I used was good for a couple hundred photographs and one short video and still had plenty of capacity remaining.

Preferences for cameras are somewhat subjective things: Canon, of course, has its legion of fans, as does Nikon. My overall experience with Nikon’s digital SLRs, going back six years, has been consistently superb. They know what they’re doing, and that makes this avowed amateur feel confident I know what I’m doing. The D5000 earns my highest recommendation.

Details on the camera can be found at [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com), and it’s well worth investigating.

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