

H A V E N S

Weekender | Hillsdale, N.Y.

By KATHRYN MATTHEWS

HILLSDALE, a New York gateway to the Berkshires, feels like an insider's secret. Maybe that's because many weekenders there are friends who introduced each other to it, showing off their getaway of fields, forest and stunning views, threaded by winding dirt roads and babbling creeks. But in Chris Boneau's case, Hillsdale was not merely recommended; it was prescribed.

When Mr. Boneau, a partner of Boneau/Bryan-Brown, a Manhattan public relations firm representing Broadway theatrical productions, complained of job-related stress three years ago, his doctor, Ed Goldberg, showed him a photograph of his own Hillsdale country house and scribbled his real estate agent's name on a pad. "This prescription will change your life," Dr. Goldberg told his skeptical patient.

In August 2003, Mr. Boneau finally followed doctor's orders and bought his dream country house — a two-bedroom, two-bathroom converted 18th-century schoolhouse on five acres in Hillsdale — for \$269,000. He describes Hillsdale as magical and "a wonderful antidote to how I work in the city."

In a less dramatic case of one buyer's following another, Gary Apruzzese, a vice president at a Wall Street clearing firm, and his partner, Geoffrey Perry, a teacher, were inspired to purchase their four-bedroom, two-bathroom ranch on three acres (they spent \$126,000 for it in 2000) after visiting friends whose Hillsdale saltbox is just two and a half miles away.

That saltbox belonged to their friends Tina Isselbacher, 46, a lawyer at the New York City Law Department, and her husband, Jeff Singleton, 50, a chief technology officer at Kaz Inc. in Manhattan, who fell in love with the Hillsdale area after a family apple-picking trip. They bought the house, with three bedrooms and three bathrooms on five acres, for \$205,000 in 1999.

Hillsdale's second-home owners, mostly from New York City, include professors, lawyers, theater and publishing professionals, young families, artists and retirees. The town has, as its name suggests, gently rolling hills. It is 70 percent forest. The Roeliff-Jansen Kill, a stream that also flows through six other Columbia County towns, starts in Hillsdale. Views of the Catskills to the west and the Taconic range to the east are especially prized.

Mark and Ellen Levy insisted on those views, and when they didn't find a suitable farmhouse with them, they bought a nondescript two-story contemporary on 44 very scenic acres for \$225,000 in 1997 and imported a disassembled barn from Princeton, N.J., to add to it. The result was featured in

Even in this bucolic setting, however, change is in the air, with a great deal of residential building and several housing developments in the works. Limited commercial building is also under way, centered in the hamlet of Hillsdale. So far, said Patti Rohrlich, a 15-year weekender and chairman of the Hillsdale Planning Board, the town has been able to reconcile development with a desire to preserve rural character.

THE SCENE

"Hillsdale has an ideal country sensibility," Mr. Apruzzese said. "There are cornfields and dairy farms, but we're also close to great restaurants and cultural options." The best of those options, about 30 minutes away, are in Massachusetts: Tanglewood, Jacob's Pillow and Shakespeare & Co.

The social agenda of most weekenders revolves around the Saturday night dinner party, and not the catered kind, either. "Peo-

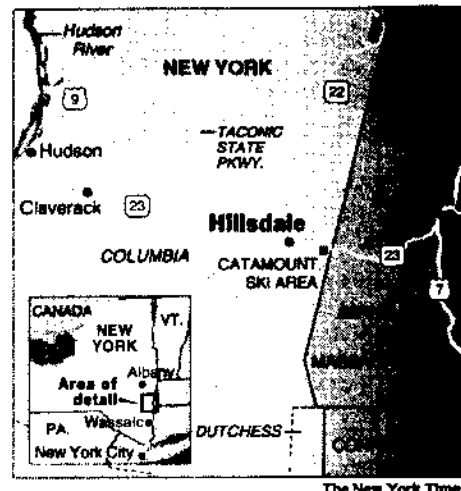
ple cook their own food and clean their own dishes," Ms. Rohrlich said.

At some of those dinner parties, the guests might include well-known weekenders like the filmmaker James Schamus and his wife, the author Nancy Krikorian; Jim Zarroli, a National Public Radio reporter; Victor Navasky, an author and the publisher of *The Nation*; Herbert Parmet, a historian and a biographer of Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy; or Madhur Jaffrey, the Indian actress and cookbook author.

Hillsdale embraces artistic and lifestyle diversity. It is home to the annual Falcon Ridge Folk Festival, a multistage celebration with folk music and dance performances, and to the Hawthorne Valley School, which follows the teaching ideals of Rudolf Steiner, whose creations included a "spiritual science" called anthroposophy and a type of organic farming called biodynamic agriculture, which is tied to natural rhythms like the lunar cycle.

About 40 percent of the town's 1,744 residents live there less than full-time, but they own about 70 percent of the township's land parcels, said Town Supervisor Art Baer, a weekender-turned-full-timer. This translates into active weekender participation in community affairs and local government. For example, Ms. Rohrlich and another weekender make up a third of the six-member Planning Board.

Second-home owners are finding ways to spend more time in Hillsdale. "A lot of people here work three or four days in the city, with the goal of eventually living here full-time," said Justin Hova, a sales associate at Barns & Farms Realty in Hillsdale.



The New York Times

PROS

Hillsdale has plenty for outdoor enthusiasts. Beautiful unpaved roads run alongside creeks, looping through the township, and are ideal for runners, mountain bikers and walkers. There are skiing and snowboarding at Catamount, two miles east of the village. Hiking trails are nearby, and in town,

residents can pay a \$1 fee to use the gym and the pool at Taconic Hills School.

Weekenders praise local food purveyors, like Random Harvest (open May to November), four miles west of the village; Guido's in Great Barrington, Mass., with a wide selection of locally produced, imported and natural foods; and Hawthorne Valley Farm Market, which carries biodynamic and organic produce, meat and poultry. During the summer, there is a farmers' market on Saturdays in Hudson, 15 miles away.

The hamlet of Hillsdale has a small commercial area with an IGA supermarket, a combination gas station and convenience store, a library, Herrington's hardware store (the largest local employer), Taconic Valley Lawn and Garden and a tattoo parlor. Places to eat include a pizzeria, a diner and Aubergine Fine Food and Lodging, where the chef and owner, David Lawson, serves upscale American cuisine like Hubbard squash ravioli and panko-crusted veal sweetbreads. Weekenders praise the selections at the B & G wine shop.



Stewart Cairns for The New York Times

HORSES AND MUSIC Winter at Long Hill Farm in Hillsdale, N.Y. In summer, the farm is the site of the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival.

CONS

Seldom are more than a few houses for sale at once. "We generally have about 16 properties available at any given time," said Mary Lou Kersten, owner of Hillsdale Country Realty.

During heavy rains, sewage surfaces at some low-lying points in the hamlet of Hillsdale, with a resulting smell, said Mr. Baer, for whom this longtime problem is a top priority. Lot sizes in the village are too small to accommodate adequate septic systems. Even though the paperwork and land acquisition process for building a new sewage system has begun, construction won't start until spring 2006 at the earliest.

Preservation of open land has not been easy. "Beyond the hamlet, the trend is toward development," said Judy Anderson, executive director of the Columbia Land Conservancy, based in Chatham, N.Y.

Eleven conservation easements under the

conservancy protect 1,018 acres in Hillsdale, but these do not preclude future development. And Hillsdale residents have been less inclined than those elsewhere in Columbia County to arrange for such easements.

Insufficient funding also hinders land preservation efforts. "Many farmers are willing to sell their development rights," Ms. Anderson said, but the conservancy "lacks funds to purchase them."

THE REAL ESTATE MARKET

Rising property values reflect the area's desirability. "In the last three years, older vintage homes have doubled in value," Ms. Kersten said. "An eyebrow colonial on 10 acres priced at \$445,000 in 2001 would now be worth at least \$800,000," she added.

"About 90 percent of my clients are looking for weekend homes," she said. Properties generally sell for the asking price, but there are occasional bidding wars. Between 2002 and 2004, the average house sales price in Hillsdale increased at least 50 percent annually, from \$187,000 in 2002, to \$430,213 in 2004, Ms. Kersten said.

Land prices, too, have increased greatly. In 2002, the price of an acre ranged from

\$5,000 to \$10,000; by 2004, it was \$8,000 to \$17,000, depending on the location. Land parcels with a rural setting and far-reaching views command \$17,000 to \$25,000 an acre; but prices are much lower, about \$8,000 to \$10,000 an acre, along well-traveled roads or where building is harder. The town requires that a new house have a lot of at least three acres, but it is difficult to find parcels under 10 acres to buy, Ms. Kersten said.

Copake Lake Realty in Craryville, N.Y., had a 3,000-square-foot, five-bedroom, two-bathroom 1915 house with a detached two-car garage on an acre for \$449,000. And Vantage Point Realty in Old Chatham, N.Y., listed a 2,600-square-foot three-bedroom, four-bathroom Greek Revival eyebrow colonial with a guest cottage, a swimming pool, a pool house and a pond on 5.6 acres for \$625,000.

Barns & Farms Realty had a two-level, 2,400-square-foot, four-bedroom, three-bathroom Greek Revival house in Hillsdale hamlet, with a 2,000-square-foot carriage house, for \$429,000. Hillsdale Country Realty has parcels from 15 to 24 acres with views, priced between \$240,000 and \$295,000, including one with a large pond.