



Rapid market recovery 'amazing'

THE SEMI-rural idyll of Zwaanswyk in Cape Town's southern suburbs which was badly affected by the devastating fire that raged across the peninsula during March this year, is recovering well.

The fires raged for four days, causing more than R60 million worth of damage to property, as well as infrastructural damage close to R6m in a large swathe across the peninsula from the False Bay side to Hout Bay on the Atlantic Ocean.

Hundreds of people were evacuated from their homes, many treated for smoke inhalation, and 13 properties were either extensively damaged or totally destroyed.

Dawn Bloch of Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty in Zwaanswyk says: "In Zwaanswyk, three homes were badly affected, one of which burnt to the ground. At 3 Almondbury Lane, although the main house was burnt down, the guest cottages were spared but part of the main house as well as the whole of the cattery at Purr-more in Thorpe Close also burnt down."

She says that repairs and construction are already well under way at both properties.

The suburb also experienced extensive damage to trees and fencing, including those at Sahibi, which is a 12-acre property with a main residence and several livery stables.

Says Bloch: "In spite of the devastation to the area, the property market has quickly stabilised as residents have repaired fences and cleared the debris in record time, restoring the area as far as possible



RURAL SPLENDOR: This five-bedroom house in Zwaanswyk with a double garage, a studio, staff quarters, a swimming pool and a wireless streaming sound system is for sale at R27 million.

to its pre-fire state."

The property that was worst affected by the fire, 5 Thorpe Close, has already been sold by Bloch and is the second property sold in Zwaanswyk since the fire. A further eight properties were also sold by Bloch in the nearby New Court at Steenberg Leisure Estate.

Bloch says that as the former residents of 5 Thorpe Close are elderly and well into their 80s, they felt it would not make sense for them to rebuild the property at this stage.

"In spite of the trauma they experienced, Geoffrey and Francis

Collings are well and, assisted by friends and Zwaanswyk residents, are now settling into a nearby retirement village."

Bloch has donated 10 percent of her commission from the sale of the Collings' home to the Cape of Good Hope SPCA's Wildlife Unit, which has been working tirelessly to rehabilitate the wildlife in the area.

Lew Geffen, chairman of Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty, attributes the quick market recovery in the area to several key factors.

"An exclusive enclave in the

midst of pristine natural beauty, Zwaanwyk offers an ideal country lifestyle, and is also regarded as one of the safest suburbs in the Cape Peninsula, as it has only one entrance and exit point which is guarded and monitored round-the-clock.

"It is also one of the few remaining areas close to the city that still offers equestrians estate-sized erven on which they can stable their horses and ride safely in the area."

Bloch says: "Residents and investors who buy in Zwaanswyk are attracted to the rural atmos-

phere of the area, coupled with the proximity of Zwaanswyk to excellent schools, shopping centres, medical facilities, wine farms, restaurants and the Steenberg Golf Estate."

Geffen says: "As part of the Constantia valley, Zwaanswyk conforms to the price bracket of the area with the entry-level price for plots being R5m and a one-acre plot of land with False Bay views will fetch between R6m and R6.5m.

"Prices for older or renovation properties range between R7.3m and R9m, and luxury homes generally

sell for between R13m and R30m, the priciest property in the area currently being Stillness Manor at R58m."

Although much of the property in the area remained unscathed, nature was possibly the worst casualty of the devastating fire as the rampant flames devoured more than 5 000ha of indigenous vegetation and also many of the slower animals in the fire path, displacing and injuring countless more.

The natural beauty of the area, country lifestyle and the myriad outdoor activities available to outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers has always been one of the main draw cards for investors in exclusive suburbs such as Constantia, Zwaanswyk and Tokai.

However, in the wake of the fire, many of these amenities and recreational areas have been temporarily closed to the public, including the popular Silvermine section of Table Mountain National Park.

Table Mountain National Park srea manager (south), Gavin Bell says: "In the interest of public safety as well as for the protection of the environmental integrity, the Silvermine area will be closed until further notice while on-going rehabilitation work takes place as the area remains sensitive and unsafe."

Bell says that most footpaths were either completely destroyed or rendered partially indistinct which causes people to wander into the veld and form new paths, thereby trampling the germinating plants, fledgling bulbs and fragile under-

ground stems that were stimulated by the fire.

Bell says the badly affected areas of Tokai and Zwaanswyk also have teams on site who are busy with the installation of gabions in the water courses above Zwaanswyk, as well as run-off control along the tracks in Tokai by park teams.

CoGH SPCA Wildlife unit supervisor, Megan Reid, recalls the horror of feeling completely helpless as their team was forced to wait for the firefighters to bring the blaze under control before they could do anything to assist wildlife in distress.

"Many snakes and tortoises didn't survive the blaze and even faster, more agile animals were caught in the fire. However, we were able to rescue and treat many animals and recently we were thrilled to be able to finally release a porcupine that had suffered severe burns to its feet and has since been receiving treatment in our short-term care facility for wildlife, at our premises in Grassy Park."

Reid says they are also still regularly monitoring animals that were affected by the fire, including a troop of baboons that got trapped in the blaze and sadly lost 11 of its members.

"In the aftermath, they seem to be coping quite well and have been seen foraging, grooming and playing.

"Fortunately, there are plenty of toasted pine nuts for them to enjoy as well as exposed roots and new shoots that have already begun to push through the charred areas."