



# Ray Interviews Joe Watson, Axis Point Developers

## Can you give us a bit of your background in commercial real estate, including your many trips to Saudi Arabia and their purpose?

In the early part of my career, like many developers, I worked in several commercial fields including shopping centers, office, apartments, and mixed-use developments. It did not take long to decide to focus on multi-family, both garden and mid-rise communities. For fifteen years I built apartments in numerous cities in six states. A lot of the equity for those developments was supplied by American ex-pats and Saudi investors, which necessitated a total of 23 trips to the Middle East. Those trips jump-started my interest in international travel, and hugely expanded my horizon from the small central Texas town where I was raised.

The oil crisis of the '80s was problematic for us, our bankers, and almost everyone in commercial real estate. The last mid-rise developments we built were Parc Royal and La Tour Fontaine, both luxury mid-rise communities, which elevated the standard of development at a time when everyone else was building two story garden apartments.

## How did you get into building homes?

We acquired a 3.3 acre tract to build a mid-rise multi-family community at a time when the market was getting softer. The terrific tract on the corner of Brown Way and Yorktown was a short half block from the Galleria.

At a time when the apartment market was "going south and taking the developer with it", I decided to convert the plan to 40 attached/detached high density townhomes. That was a much better and more successful plan. Had we not changed course, perhaps we would have gone to the same bad movie many of us had already seen.

I really liked the creativity and personal involvement of custom homes and completely enjoyed the wonderful people for whom we built homes. I still bump into some of those customers from long ago.

## How did you get into the lot development business?

We developed 100% of the land under our homes. We never bought lots from anyone. These tracts ranged from half a dozen homes in the Galleria area to the 496 lot Lake Cove community in Clear Lake with on and off-water lots, canals, and gated sections.

Having developed all our land, it was natural to transition to developing communities for other builders, instead of for myself. I like to plan the community and direct the construction process by being intimately, personally, and even emotionally involved in managing everything, down to the last and smallest detail...just like a movie director. And that is tremendously satisfying to me.

## I am told you have developed more waterfront lots around Clear Lake than anyone?

Yes, I believe that is correct. I am a water guy, having been a diver and sailor, racing in the bay and off-shore for decades. Developing waterfront lots is easier for me because water is my great love.

## What projects do you have in motion currently and can you describe what amenity packages these projects will have to differentiate them from your competitors?

We recently finished two projects which were not actually on the water, so we created it- we built lakes. Unlike the large majority of other developers, our homeowners actually live on the water's edge, meaning there are no buffers separating their backyards from the water; and by the way, no "No Fishing" signs.

The water is for wild life and people who love it. We encourage folks to connect to nature and that inevitably improves their appreciation and respect for the natural world we live in-which is a good thing.

We are just weeks from finishing NewPort Lake Estates, a 210-lot gated community in northwest Manvel. No water? Not a problem!

We built three people/fish friendly lakes with water up to the backyards. The lakes have gentle side slopes, piers with arbors, boat docks, a boat house, and wonderfully lush wetlands, which we created without being forced to do so by the Corps of Engineers. The plan was to make the lakes look like God created them, not some run and gun real estate developer.

NewPort has other amenities that set it apart, such as a community garden and an amphitheater for Friday night Netflix movies on a screen placed on a deck over the water, as well as other outdoor facilities.



Newport Lake Estates

TownHarbour will be adjacent to South Shore Harbour on Clear Lake and is in fact the last large developable tract on the lake. We are building a 2,200 foot long, 140 foot wide canal with homes on both sides. With a minimum lot size of 70' by 172', every homeowner will have backyard boat docking. In case you are not a boater, a 140' wide canal is beyond extraordinary. The boaters will love it. And yes, we will build substantial wetlands, though not required to do so. The bulkhead wall will be constructed from two-ton limestone blocks we will import.

## Joe, you are so diversified in your interests. One side of your brain seems to be extremely frugal and detail-conscious, and the other side brims with conceptual creativity. How did you develop these diverse business talents and how do you think they are influenced by your many hobbies?

Some of my interests do impact my creative thinking in business. I race sailboats, which helps me understand people/homeowners who like water. I am a master diver and a competitive aerobatic pilot, both of which hobbies provide perspective and an appreciation for the environment. I am a photographer who continuously travels the world shooting ancient ruins and street people in such fascinating corners of the world as Morocco and Nepal.

## Advice to young people starting out in real estate development?

In addition to the basics, a liberal arts education is very important. Young people should get out of their comfort zones early on, continuously observing, living life, and engaging people. They should expand their range by traveling the world to observe, listen and grow. Take it all in and imagine a better way. Don't stay in the same bubble in which you were born! ●