

## Paul Allen's Legacy of Extraordinary Homes

The late co-founder of Microsoft left behind a lavish collection of properties across the country, and beyond, and it isn't clear what is going to happen to them.

BY NANCY KEATES

When Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen died in October at age 65, he left a cache of real-estate treasures, from a 4,000-acre Idaho retreat with meadows, trees, forestland and views of the Tetons, to a penthouse in a coveted Manhattan building, to hundreds of acres on a peninsula in the San Juan Islands, replete with custom-designed homes, huge gyms and swimming pools, libraries and music studios.

While geographically diverse, these properties share common elements. They aren't by any means on the wrong side of town, but they also aren't typically in a hot spot. For example, rather than Seattle's elite, pricey community of Medina, where Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos have homes along what is called the Gold Coast, he chose the more suburban Mercer Island, where he bought on the less-desirable south end of the island. In Los Angeles, his compound is in what's called "Beverly Hills Post Office," where homes can sell for about half of those in Beverly Hills proper. His ranch in Idaho is over the Teton Pass from the ritzy ski area of Jackson Hole, Wyo., near where the workers who can't afford Jackson live and commute. His property on the peninsula he bought on Lopez in the San Juan Islands, Wash., is on the island's less prestigious side, far from the village. Yet the homes he built were impressive estates.

Real-estate brokers and architects who worked with him say he valued privacy: He didn't need to worry about driving distance because he usually arrived by helicopter. In most cases, Mr. Allen didn't simply buy a home, he created a compound, snapping up adjoining properties and building new houses. The Mercer Island compound comprises 13 adjoining lots and includes some eight houses.

He tore down houses, too, most notably the 10,000-square-foot, 20-room mansion designed by architect Wallace Neff on a 120-acre property in Los Angeles called Enchanted Hill. At many of his properties, neighbors only knew when he was in town because his yacht would be spotted off the coast or his helicopter would arrive.

"I've lived here almost 50 years, I never saw him. Nobody ever saw Paul Allen," says Dan Gottesman, a broker for Engel & Völkers on Mercer Island.

Does all this mean there will soon be a set of unparalleled properties across the country for sale?

Estate attorneys say probably not. Mr. Allen, who wasn't married and had no descendants, directed his estate to a living trust he created in 1993, with his sister Jody Allen and her children listed as beneficiaries. The details of the trust aren't known, but the process of getting everything appraised will take many months, if not longer. Even then, Mr. Allen's holdings are so rare and valuable, the beneficiaries might not want to sell them.

"In my experience, prestige properties like this are usually kept," says Bernie Vogel, the chief executive officer of Silicon Valley Law Group. Seattle Seahawks General Manager John Schneider said recently that the NFL team, owned under the Paul G. Allen Trust, won't be sold and that Jody Allen is now officially the Seahawks chair.

The reporting for this article is based on public records of homeownership and interviews with architects, real-estate agents and others, including former employees and local residents. In most cases, the ownerships are under trusts identified as tied to Mr. Allen and his company Vulcan Inc. Both Vulcan and Mr. Allen's sister, Jody Allen, declined to comment, according to a spokeswoman for Vulcan.



ESTIMATED VALUE: \$15 MILLION

### SANTA FE, NM

Property records show the trust that bought the former 20-acre estate of artist Georgia O'Keefe, Sol y Sombra, 3 miles outside of Santa Fe, is registered at Vulcan's headquarters in Seattle. Locals say it is common knowledge that Mr. Allen was behind the 2000 purchase. But, as with most of his properties, no one tied to the transaction will speak on the record, and it is hard to find anyone who saw him. "I live four doors away and drive by the gate every time I go to town and I never saw him," says Neil Lyon, of Sotheby's International Realty. At the time of the sale, Sol y Sombra had a five-bedroom, 9,685-square-foot, 1930s main house, a 5,000-square-foot lodge, a guest cottage, a carriage house and gardens. The list price was \$12.2 million; the sale price wasn't revealed. ■

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*Courtesy of Neil D. Lyon, CRB, CRS, GRI*

