

# As Lake Keowee home prices escalate, builders work to meet a higher-dollar demand

BY DAVID CARAVIELLO FOR THE POST AND COURIER  
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A spec home built by Cliffs Builders, 125 Waterfern Court in The Cliffs at Keowee Springs became one of the biggest sales ever on Lake Keowee when it closed for \$6 million on Aug. 29. THE CLIFFS/PROVIDED

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There are the exposed wood ceiling trusses that run from the living room into the kitchen, the reclaimed wood paneling and tile fireplace in the rec room, the outdoor seating area and kitchen under a vaulted wooden ceiling connecting seamlessly with the interior of the home.

They're just some of what Chris Calloway calls the "wow" elements of 125 Waterfern Court, one of the latest high-dollar homes to sell on Lake Keowee.

Located in The Landing section of The Cliffs at Keowee Springs, 125 Waterfern closed Aug. 29 for \$6 million, putting it on the short list of the most expensive homes ever sold on Lake Keowee. Scott Reid of Cliffs Realty represented the buyer.

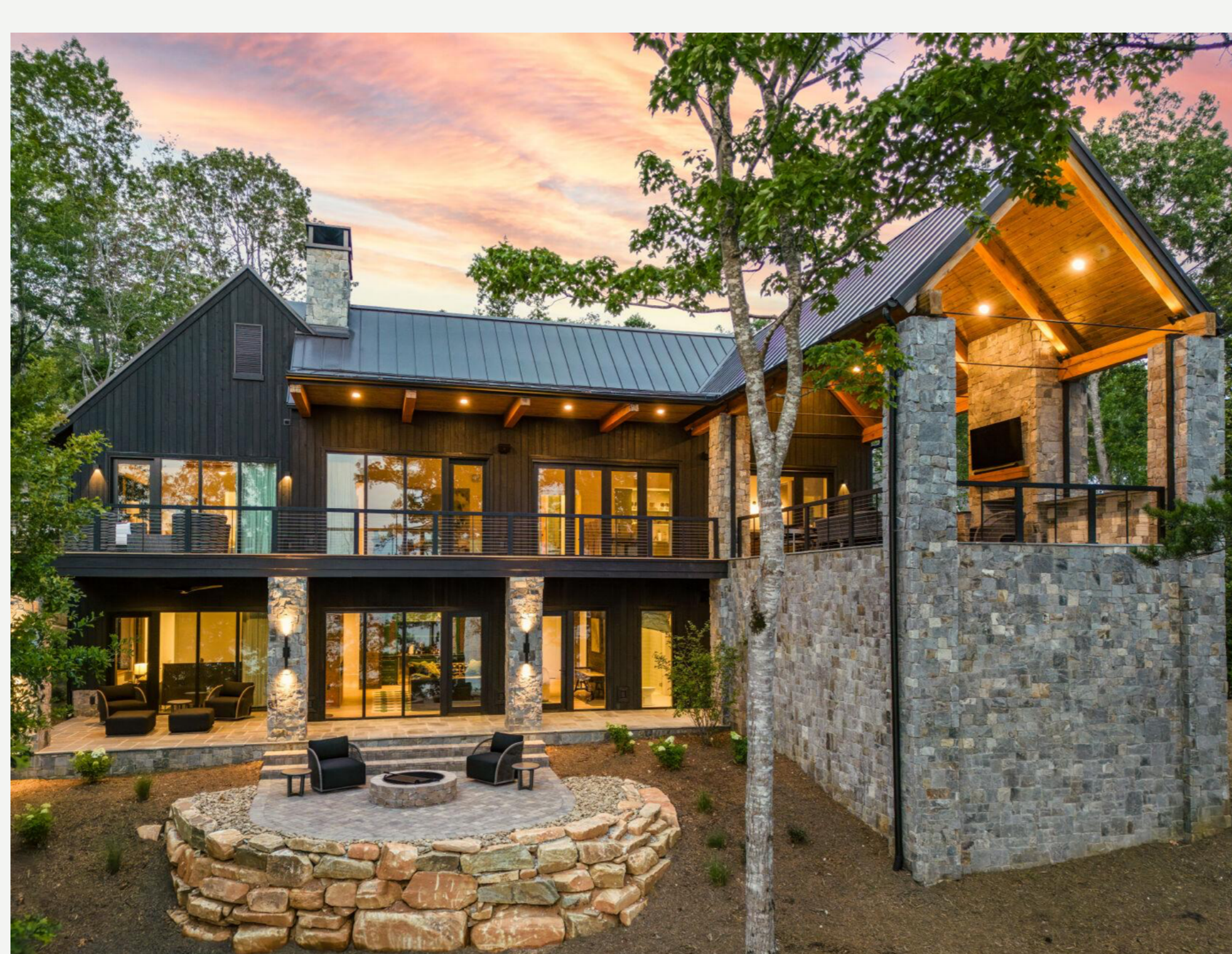
The residence was a spec home constructed by Cliffs Builders, The Cliffs' in-house home-building division, and is just the latest example of how builders are working to satisfy potential buyers in a Lake Keowee market where prices keep going up and up and up.



Chris Calloway

"When we're doing the high-end luxury side of things, we're very particular on the preconstruction side in trying to understand what people are looking for and how to maximize the value of what they have in their space," said Calloway, vice president of homebuilding at The Cliffs. "So with the price points escalating, we always want to do things that are going to give you those little 'wow' moments throughout the house."

That can begin with the lot, and situating the house to maximize lake views, sunrises and sunsets. It can mean upping the ante on details well beyond the typical high-impact areas like the kitchen and master suite. And it can mean pushing the envelope on design, and offering a more contemporary look — evident to a degree in 125 Waterfern, and definitely in its neighbor 126 Waterfern Court, at \$6.237 million the second-biggest sale on Lake Keowee to date.



The \$6 million home at 125 Waterfern Court in The Cliffs at Keowee Springs features some modern elements like an exterior covered in dark wood that's been heated and kiln-dried in the Japanese "shou sugi ban" method. THE CLIFFS/PROVIDED

## Function and flow

Fueled to a degree by cash-rich buyers feeling more congested urban areas during the pandemic, Lake Keowee residential real estate prices shattered the \$5 million mark in 2021 and continue to edge upward. The lake's largest on-market closing to date was the \$6.267 million closing of 107 Waterfern Court in October of 2022, followed 126 Waterfern at \$6.237 million in July of 2022, and 129 Bright Water Trail at \$6.195 million in July of 2023. All of those homes are in The Cliffs at Keowee Springs.

There are currently five on-market listings that would break the Lake Keowee sales record should they close at or near their list price, led by the \$12 million offering at 132 Mountain Shore Trail in The Cliffs at Keowee Springs. There's also 824 Top Ridge Drive in The Reserve at Lake Keowee, listed for \$7.499 million; 222 Long Ridge Road in The Reserve at \$6.939 million; 414 Peninsula Ridge in The Reserve at \$6.789 million; and 108 Ivey Hollow Court in Keowee Springs at \$6.44 million.

The Lake Keowee market is very different than it was just five years ago, and builders are working to meet the demands those higher prices bring.

"We want to make sure that we're doing things that continue to hit this buyer profile," Calloway said. "Our thoughtful approach to building is one of the things that kind of sets us apart. And when you when you start getting in that range of \$6 million-plus, you just have to be very, very thoughtful about what that buyer profile is and very thoughtful of what modern conveniences that they're going to want within their house."

What does that mean in a practical sense?

"Everyone obviously still wants the master on the main floor, elevators, those types of things," Calloway added. "But then it comes down to the little details of, how are you hiding your pantry? Can you do that in a cool way that makes it look like the pantry is an extension of the cabinetry, instead of just this big, open room people can see into? How do you hide your washer and dryer? How close is it to the master bedroom, or the place that's going to utilize it a lot? A lot of it is in the fit and finish, for sure, but it's also in the function and flow of how the whole thing works."

## New and innovative things

Then there's tweaking the element of home design, which on Lake Keowee largely consists of heavy stone and heavy wood trim — all of it echoing a mountain lodge feel that so many lakeside homes try to emulate. But the first spec home that Cliffs Builders constructed, 126 Waterfern, went in a more contemporary direction. There are stone and wood elements, to be certain, but also steel and glass and a sleek interior that gives it all a far more modern and updated vibe.

"The lake houses in The Cliffs, they are all very, very nice. The waterfront lake houses are all done really well," Calloway said. "What we did notice is, a lot of them were more traditionally designed lake houses with heavy wood trim packages, very much in the more traditional style. And what we have seen recently, through, with the developments that we have and just seeing kind of where trends have gone in architecture and interior design, we see more and more people wanting more modern looks, more contemporary looks."

For the home at 126 Waterfern "we went about as contemporary as you can go at The Cliffs," Calloway said — with steel framing, fully retractable door systems, even pushing the home as close as possible to the shoreline so it feels like you're hanging over the water when you're standing on the upstairs deck. Clearly, it paid off; the home sold for \$6.237 million. While 125 Waterfern is less overtly contemporary, the home designed by Cheatham Fletcher Scott of Augusta still possesses more modern elements like an exterior covered in dark wood that's been heated and kiln-dried in the Japanese "shou sugi ban" method.

Did it work? A \$6 million sales price speaks volumes.

"We're not scared of doing things a little differently than other people do," Calloway said. "Is it everybody's style? Of course not, just like traditional isn't everybody's style. But looking at submittals and things coming in, we quickly picked up on the fact that people wanted more contemporary stuff. And we like to do new and innovative things."

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