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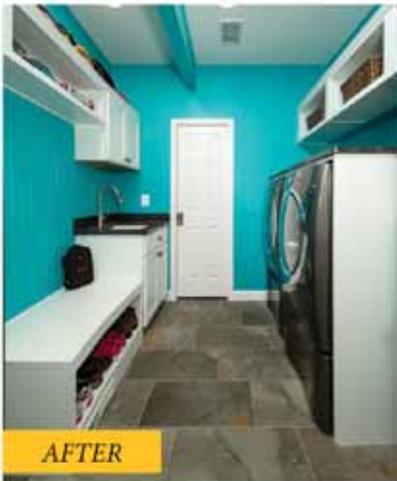
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# HomeLifeStyle

## Buying or Selling?

BY ANDREA WORKER  
THE CONNECTION

Here we are, once again right on the heels of the Spring/Summer real estate season when it seems like “For Sale” signs become the most common lawn ornament or condo window decoration. Selling, and certainly buying a new home should be an occasion for celebration, but you might not be doing too much of that unless you understand the basics of either process and have them well under control.

With help from some knowledgeable sources like the Northern Virginia Association of Realtors (NVAR), the National Association of Realtors (NAR) and some respected local experts, here’s a bit of a primer on buying or selling a property. We’re going for the basics here with a few comments about our local market.

**Let’s start with sellers**, since for the most part, they have the most work to do to get the job done. First question. Use an agent or go it alone? You may think only saving the real estate agent fees is the basis for the answer, but if you decide to be your own agent, be sure you have done the homework on legal and regulatory requirements, and be prepared for the paperwork. Sadly, one misstep here could be pretty costly and there goes those potential savings. And are you ready to be your own marketer and be available night and day and weekends to show your property? Another thought ... many potential buyers are not comfortable dealing directly, especially during negotiations, with the homeowner and would prefer the buffer of a trustworthy agent that they can really share their thoughts with. Statistics have also shown that properties for sale by owner more often receive lower initial offers.

Let’s assume that you are working with an agent. Hopefully, you asked all the right questions before signing an agreement to sell. Don’t be shy. It’s okay to “interview” several agents and ask for references. Ask to make contact with their last two or three clients – not just the ones that they offer up as testimonials. What’s their typical “Days on Market” and how do their times compare to others. And a biggie – what’s the average variation between the initial listing price and the final sales price? The answer here may spare you some disappointments and provide some indication about your real estate agent’s skills at pricing your property and negotiation the best price.

Now what? Put on your thickest skin, open your wallet just a tad, listen to that agent, and before you even have that first showing:

**Be realistic about your asking price.** “Don’t be too aggressive,” cautioned real estate agent Jennifer Boyce of Long and Foster in Burke. Anita Lasansky, CRB, managing broker-vice president Long and Fos-



PHOTO BY ANDREA WORKER

**What’s wrong with this picture? It’s a gorgeous kitchen, but real estate agents will tell you that the green plastic cup, the dishwashing soap and the drainboard should all vanish from the selling photos of your house, and certainly during any showings.**

ter Reston North Hills-Herndon, agrees with that advice, and adds that sellers around the Wiehle Metro station in Reston shouldn’t expect a big bump in sales price just because of Metro’s arrival. Lasansky has seen sellers factor in 5-10 percent increases on that basis, but “it just hasn’t had that effect,” she said. Getting a pre-appraisal or advice from a lender can help in setting the best realistic sales price, since most buyers will need a mortgage.

**Think about getting a pre-sale home inspection.** This could cost a bit. Think at least \$500, depending on the size and age of the property. The buyer will have an inspection done, but being proactive could help locate potential problems that might stall, or even end a sale. Even if you don’t go for the professional inspection, take a look around and get on with those repairs or more affordable upgrades you’ve been meaning to tackle. While you’re at it, locate those warranties and manuals - something that really impresses those buyers, while last-minute searches could pose a problem at closing.

**Clean and get organized.** Here’s where you need that thick skin. Your agent isn’t casting aspersions on your personal taste or “dissing” your kids, pets, hobbies, etc. when she tells you to neutralize as much as possible, put away the toys and pet paraphernalia, and all the other stuff that is part of our comfortable living. Your agent is merely looking out for you, and making your home appealing to the widest pool of potential buyers. Pay special attention to closets and bathrooms. If there isn’t space inside the house, consider the smallest space at a storage facility for the the extra boxes,

furniture, gadgets and whatnots while your property is on the market.

**First impressions.** That means check out curb appeal, from the condition of lawn and landscape to the front entryway. Trim those bushes. Edge that grass. Put down some new mulch, and clean up those oil spots on the driveway.

**Photos.** Unless you are one gifted photographer, let the professionals handle this one. Most buyers today do their scouting online. Lots of quality photos attract the most visitors. Equally, photos that don’t show off each room to advantage, or contain pets wandering by, the piled-high laundry basket, or a reflection of the photographer can put your property on the “don’t want to see that one” list.

**YOUR REAL ESTATE AGENT** can give you a more comprehensive checklist and do a walk-through before an Open House or to prepare for showings, but here are some of the “musts” as advised by some of our area experts:

❖ Double check for clutter, and clean, clean, clean. A thorough cleaning by a professional service is much recommended. Don’t forget the windows and the carpets.

❖ Do the “**Sniff Test.**” This one is critical for homes with pets or smokers. Again, put on your thick skin armour. Refrigerators, garbage disposals, trash cans and carpets can be odoriferous stumbling blocks to a good showing. Give your home a thorough airing out before show time, especially in the kitchen.

❖ **Stage it** – Consider a professional “stager” or at least give each space a neutral, de-cluttered living “story” that helps

A primer for doing either and avoiding pitfalls.

buyers visualize themselves right at home. To highlight upgrades or bring attention to items/features in a room, you might add an attractive picture frame with a few well written and formatted sentences on classy writing paper. Of course, a little light music and a plate of yummy cookies make everyone feel welcome.

❖ Put away small valuables, jewelry and medications.

❖ **Don’t hang around** – and take Fido or Fifi with you if possible. If not, confine pets to crates or one room and be sure to warn agents in advance. Be sure you have left contact information in case of questions or issues.

❖ **Make your property accessible** – If potential buyers can only see your property from 10 a.m. until noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays, prepare for a long wait before a successful closing. Selling a home is often a numbers game. As disruptive as it can be, the more people who look, the better chance of a sale.

**FOR BUYERS.** Just as with the sellers, buyers should shop around for a trusted real estate partner. Again, ask those questions, get those referrals and be sure that your agent understands your needs and expectations and that you understand the process as they describe it. The best starting place is making sure that you know what you are looking for.

Some of the basics as advised by the NVAR and NAR and some of their area experts:

❖ **Get pre-qualified.** Better yet, get pre-approved by a lender before you start looking. Megan Bailey of Bailey Fine Properties says “Buyers must be pre-approved before going out to look at homes with me. It’s important to know that they feel comfortable ... by having the lender provide them with a “Good Faith Estimate” to break down the costs and to make sure the lender can finance the home. Taking someone to look at homes out of their price range ... sets the client up for disappointment.”

❖ **Think about resale.** This may sound counter intuitive at this point, but especially for first-time buyers with an average of 10 years in the home, it’s good to think ahead and consider what the area and the home might be like when it’s time to move on.

❖ **Keep repair, maintenance and running costs in mind.** Even a brand-new home may require some work or customizing to suit your lifestyle, so consider those costs. You may have the approval for that attractive “McMansion” but are you prepared for the electric bills, mowing that acre, and the property taxes on top of the monthly mortgage?

❖ **Don’t go “house-blind,”** when you are so taken with the house that you might ignore factors that could make for a poor buying decision. Visit the property several times, inside and out, at various times of the day and on different days of the week to get a real feel for the neighborhood.

# Nanny Suites Add Value

High-end live-in quarters attract au pairs and can increase property values.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

**W**hen Peggy Delinois Hamilton relocated to the Washington, D.C. area and began working full-time after spending eight years as an at-home mother of two children, childcare was one of her top concerns. She decided that a live-in au pair was the best choice for her family.

"I like the live-in because I don't have to worry about issues with transportation on the caretaker's part," said Hamilton. "I don't have to worry about them having competing obligations."

Finding and keeping a live-in nanny in a competitive childcare market can be a high stakes game. To lure and retain experienced, nurturing caregivers, many families shell out as much as \$100,000 to create stylishly appointed living space for their au pairs. From kitchens with marble countertops and stainless steel appliances to bathrooms with luxury showerheads and rich wood cabinetry, local designers create living quarters so enchanting and thoughtfully designed that a nanny wouldn't dream of leaving.

"If you're a live-in nanny, you want your own space. In fact, nannies won't take a job from a family that won't provide it," said Jackie Wood-Gobuluk, owner of Metropolitan Nannies in Herndon, Virginia.

The spaces most often used for nanny suites are the lower level or attic, says Christopher Dietz of Dietz Development. "We try to create a close mimic of the main house and the primary kitchen and bathrooms of the main house," he said. "We don't do Formica or IKEA cabinets. We generally use ... granite, marble or Silestone. You don't want people to say, 'Wow, we can tell you really cut corners on this space.'"

Maintaining a continuity in quality while being budget conscious requires judicious planning. "We may splurge on custom window treatments and a bedskirt and save on things like furniture using retail pieces," said Marika Meyer, principal of Marika Meyer Interiors in Bethesda.

When an Arlington, Va. family enlisted architect J.P. Ward of Anthony Wilder Design/Build, Inc. to design an au pair suite for their home, they wanted him to maintain continuity in both color and materials. A cathedral ceiling, granite countertops, and under cabinet lighting were key as he blended the rich aesthetic quality of the original home with the new space. "We used a higher end tile and materials that blended with the rest of the house," said Ward. "It turned out to be like a high-end studio apartment that you could get high rent for."

The au pair's space has a separate entrance, something that offers privacy to both



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRUPLACE

**The space serves as a nanny suite in an Alexandria home. Additional living areas can increase a property's value, say real estate agents.**

the nanny and the family. "We made it so that the au pair has an independent way of coming in and so they're not working 24 hours a day," said Ward.

Contractors say the cost of adding a nanny suite can range from \$5,000 on a property where there is an existing bathroom and space for a bedroom to more than \$100,000 on properties where plumbing must be installed or a small addition is required. "[A] bathroom is the biggest expense because of the plumbing," said Ward.

Because such an addition requires a significant investment, Kai Tong of Hopkins and Porter Construction in Potomac, Md. encourages clients to think long term. "One of the most important and useful realizations when considering nanny suites is that, unlike your kitchen or bath or bedroom, the nanny suite will only be a nanny suite for a finite amount of time in your lives," he said. "As your children grow, the nanny will move on, and the nanny suite is destined to become something else."

In the Washington, D.C. area, adding an au pair suite to one's home can make a property more appealing. "Particularly in neighborhoods with lots of young, affluent families, nanny suites are a popular, although not essential, amenity," said David DeSantis, Partner and Managing Broker of TTR Sotheby's International Realty. "Ideally these suites are somewhat separated from the family sleeping quarters and have their own entrance so the nanny can come and go freely."

A nanny suite can offer a good return on investment. "The fact that it could be used as a nanny suite is a plus, but it's the same sort of thing as an in-law suite [so] it offers the ability for multigenerational living with some level of privacy," said David Howell,

may make a difference in price from 5 to 10 percent as they ... would count as an additional bedroom," said real estate agent Nancy Itteilag, of Long and Foster Christie's International Real Estate.

**"We try to create a close mimic of the main house and the primary kitchen and bathrooms of the main house."**

— Christopher Dietz,  
Dietz Development

Ann Dozier Michael, an Alexandria-based associate broker with McEneaney Associates, has a current listing that includes a nanny suite. "When you have a property listed that can serve the various needs of buyers, then that will add value because you have a larger buying pool," she said.

SEE NANNY SUITE, PAGE XX

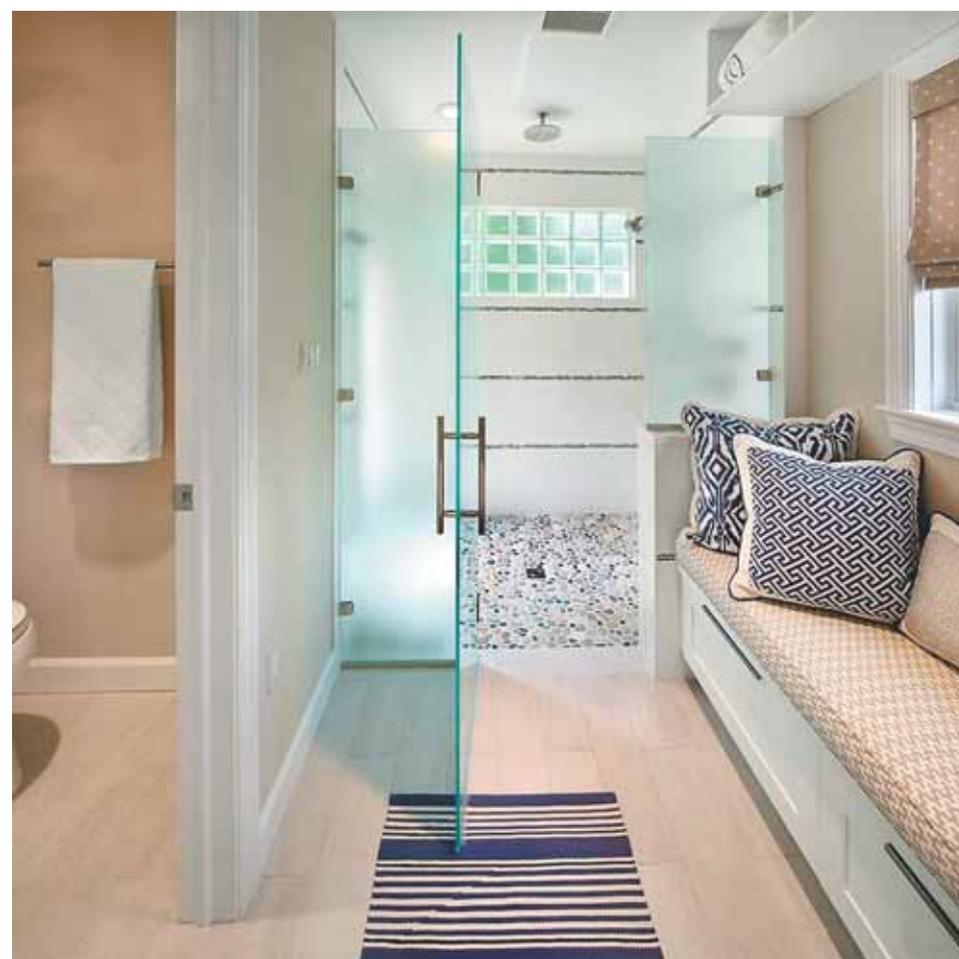


PHOTO BY MORGAN HOWARTH

**Families create spa-like living quarters to attract and retain live-in**

## Good Advice:

"I let sellers know that they need to expect that some of their privacy will be compromised ... their home needs to be in showing condition every day before they leave, clean kitchen, beds made, everything put away, pets secured and comfortable, and that the home smells clean and fresh. I always suggest they visit model homes to see examples of what buyers fall in love with and why."

— **Megan Bailey, Bailey Fine Properties**

"For buyers, please be careful what you say. There could be a recording device in the house. Not unusual anymore with today's security technology. For example, don't look at pictures and say that their children look creepy. ... Sellers, put away medications and jewelry. It's rare, but prescription drugs are the number one item that 'goes missing' during open houses or showings."

— **Smita Lal, Long and Foster Reston North Hills-Herndon**

"Recently had a listing that needed a bit of updating. The seller was fine with spending some money, but balked at my suggestion to replace the fluorescent lighting in the kitchen. Four months later, the seller finally agreed to spend the \$1000 to replace the light. We ratified a contract 5 days after the work was done. Moral of the story: If you are hiring a pro to help you buy or sell a home, listen to their advice."

— **Andy Krumholz, Keller Williams Realty, Utopian Homes**

"I always tell my sellers, 'To be clear, I will give you a list of customized items to prepare your home. It will be in order of importance. I assure you, the more you complete, the fewer days on the market, and of course at the right price.' So far I haven't missed."

— **Lisa Carlisle, Long and Foster Reston North Hills-Herndon**



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## Remodeled Home Tour Set for March 12

Home evolves from center hall colonial to open plan with boldly original finishes.

BY JOHN BYRD  
THE CONNECTION

**A** dramatic “kitchen-centric” first floor interior design solution in a 30-year-old Colonial-style production house will be featured on a “Remodeled Home Tour” sponsored by Sun Design Remodeling on Saturday, March 12.

The house at 7990 Oak Bridge Lane in Fairfax Station is owned by Andrew Smith and Madelyne McCarthy. The residence will be opened to the public from noon-4 p.m.

Purchased by Smith and McCarthy in 2002, the original house was a traditional center hall Colonial with four bedrooms. The couple, now in their late 50s, have occupied the home for 14 years.

While the 4,000-square-foot house (the couple’s second) has been satisfactory to the owners in many respects, the first floor’s comparatively small rooms, narrow doorways and builder-grade finishes had come to seem dated and cramped as the couple looked ahead to retirement years.

“We wanted our house to be more of personal residence that reflects our tastes,” Andy Smith said. “A place we can really enjoy for another 10 years, or more.”

As longer occupancy became a consideration, the production house limitations seemed glaring.

“The kitchen was space-constricted and pretty drab,” Smith said. “There was a small island with a cooktop that didn’t provide a useful working surface. Doors to the hall closet and powder room frequently obstructed traffic at the kitchen archway,



PHOTOS BY GREG HADLEY

**Fairfax Station homeowners Andy Smith and Madelyne McCarthy relocated an adjacent dining room in order to gain 78 feet for a gourmet kitchen that accommodates a large food prep island and a three-stool wine bar a few steps from the back deck. The island surface is “blue flower” granite.**

which was too narrow. The kitchen clean-up area was too exposed from the family room. Overall, we wanted a more balanced, aesthetically-pleasing interior.”

An addition off the back of house was an earlier space-enhancement consideration.

“We had plans to remove the rear wall and add 800 square feet,” Smith said, “but when we looked more closely at our real requirements this approach didn’t make economic sense. Fundamentally, we just wanted a larger kitchen and pantry, and a

warmer interior that would work well for entertaining; we weren’t sure how to accomplish this.”

A seminar by Sun Design Remodeling last year unveiled to a new way of assessing priorities.

“The program prompted us to explore ideas of re-purposing space within the home’s existing footprint,” Smith said. “I suddenly recognized we were getting almost no use from our 200-square-foot formal living room. It was just wasted space.”

### Details

Sun Design Remodeling will be sponsoring tour of a recently remodeled Fairfax Station home on March 12, 2016. Headquartered in Burke, the firm has a second office in McLean. Call 703-425-5588 or visit [www.SunDesignInc.com](http://www.SunDesignInc.com).

Soon after the seminar, the couple contacted Craig Durosco at Sun Design Remodeling for an on-premise meeting.

“A center hall Colonial has long been one of the most popular floor plans in northern Virginia” said Craig Durosco, Sun Design’s founder and chairman. “The way people now use their homes, however, has changed dramatically in the past few decades. There’s a movement towards open, well-defined, interactive spaces, and departure from interior walls that may not be strictly necessary.”

Durosco sees his role as one of helping owners develop a plan tailored to how they want to use their home in the foreseeable future — one that will also present an appropriate interior design solution.

Once Smith and McCarthy established that the front-facing living room could be incorporated into a broader floor plan reconfiguration, Sun Design’s team began re-assigning “use zones” within the existing first floor template.

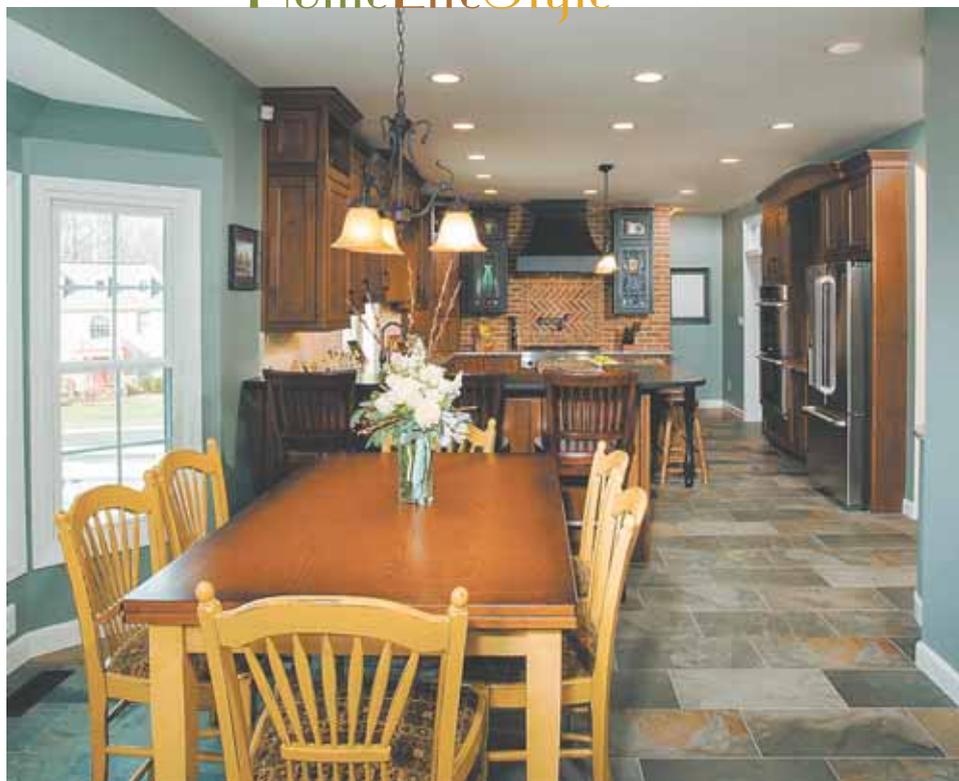
Several critical decisions followed in rapid



**The bow front farm sink, six-burner stove and food prep island form the three sides of a work triangle that facilitates cooking and clean-up tasks. The custom-designed barn door (right) leads into the new formal dining room.**



**With its coffered ceiling and Wedgwood interior treatment, the dining room explores 18<sup>th</sup> century (Colonial-era) themes. The circa-1890’s glass-and-wood barn door mounted on rollers was created by Sun Design. The innovation provides privacy, yet allows light from the home’s west-facing rear elevation.**



The exposed brick, tile floor and raised square panel cabinet facings create a softly textured, elegant-but-casual interior. The floors conceal a radiant heating system which keeps the room comfortable in cooler temperatures.

## Remodeled Home Tour Set for March 12

FROM PAGE XX

succession:

❖ The wall between the kitchen and the dining room would be removed, extending the kitchen by 78 square feet while allowing generous square footage for a walk-in pantry and a new powder room;

❖ The hall powder room would give way to an enlarged and upgraded laundry room/mudroom linked to the garage and only accessible from inside the kitchen;

❖ All 200 square feet of the old living room would be re-purposed as a distinctively finished formal dining room accessed directly from the new kitchen;

❖ With the cluster of doors between the foyer and the kitchen relocated or replaced with pocket doors, front-to-back access from the foyer is now unencumbered and free

flowing, an effect aided by improved sightlines.

Simultaneously, a series of interior design conferences evolved into an inspired collaboration.

“In a finish work elaboration, the details are everything,” Smith said, noting that his enthusiasm for design extends from a life-long interest in architecture. “Maddie and I had done a lot of research into the kinds of materials, colors and textures we wanted, but Katie Coram at Sun Design really helped us narrow and refine our choices, assembling the pieces into a coherent whole.”

Some highlights of the makeover’s interior design solution include:

❖ **A custom-designed barn door between the kitchen and the new**

**dining room.** While the interior makeover generally explores rustic, early American sensibilities, a glass-and-wood barn door created to specification by Sun Design carpenters is an iconic stand-out that keeps the dining room private as needed while allowing light from the west-facing rear windows;

❖ **A dining counter/wine bar situated at the back door accessing the deck.** Equipped with a wine rack and wine refrigerator for easy access to the rear deck, the wine bar also obstructs sightlines from the family room to the kitchen sink, making the fireside space a visually-independent entertainment zone.

❖ **A food prep island and dining counter.** Topped with blue flower granite and equipped with an under-cabinet microwave and a warming drawer, the built-in is positioned for easy access to a circumscrib-

ing U-shaped counter completing useful work triangles in several directions.

❖ **Six burner gas stove with hood.** Designed in black mocha glazed wood, the distressed facing picks up several of the kitchen’s rustic themes, including the exposed brick, and flagstone-accented tile flooring which conceals a radiant heating system.

❖ **Dining room with coffered ceiling; Wedgwood interior design.** In a nod to the 18th-century (Colonial era) sensibilities, the new formal dining room’s elegant wall elevations include raised panels, crown molding and wainscoting.

“From room to room, the new first floor explores a lot of style elements in well-balanced combinations,” Andy Smith said, “It’s a much warmer, more inviting interior. People will enjoy seeing what we’ve done.”

*John Byrd (byrdmatx@gmail.com; www.HomeFrontsNews.com) has been writing about home improvement topics for 30 years.*



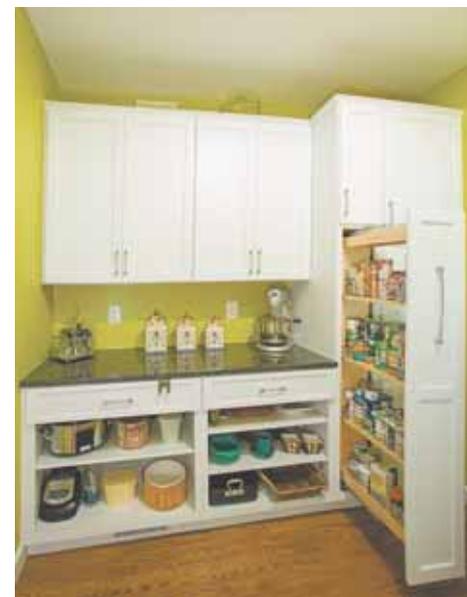
A wine rack and wine refrigerator are convenient to a serving counter convenient to the family room and back deck.



Exposed brick, a cooktop hood and glass-facing cabinets in distressed black mocha glaze are elements in the kitchen’s distinctively rustic interior design.



Relocating the hall powder room added square footage needed for a laundry and mudroom that links to the garage.



The home’s new rear footprint accommodates walk-in pantry with pull-out storage racks — as well as a larger powder room

# Fairfax County REAL ESTATE

## 2016 Assessments by Area

Also home values for members of  
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

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2016 — \$674,430  
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Dranesville Supervisor **John Foust (D)**  
2015 — \$2,939,290  
2016 — \$2,788,330  
- 5.14%



Mason Supervisor **Penelope Gross (D)**  
2015 — \$462,630  
2016 — \$478,490  
3.43%

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0.72%  
**\$1,055,259**

Reston  
1.03%  
**\$428,378**

McLean  
0.99%  
**\$894,285**

Herndon  
0.60%  
**\$475,057**

Vienna  
1.85%  
**\$698,974**

Chantilly  
2.78%  
**\$462,509**

Oakton  
1.19%  
**\$694,101**



Sully Supervisor **Kathy Smith (D)**  
2015 — \$579,780  
2016 — \$607,140  
4.72%

Centreville  
0.90%  
**\$385,089**

Fairfax  
1.28%  
**\$482,115**

Falls Church  
3.17%  
**\$447,822**



Lee Supervisor **Jeff McKay (D)**  
2015 — \$774,620  
2016 — \$728,080  
- 6.01%



Providence Supervisor **Linda Smyth (D)**  
2015 — \$611,280  
2016 — \$617,810  
1.07%

Clifton  
1.70%  
**\$659,408**

Burke  
1.96%  
**\$447,099**

Springfield  
2.79%  
**\$428,503**

Alexandria  
2.06%  
**\$428,621**



Braddock Supervisor **John Cook (R)**  
2015 — \$664,480  
2016 — \$677,950  
2.03%



Springfield Supervisor **Patrick Herry (R)**  
2015 — \$599,600  
2016 — \$587,370  
- 2.05%

Fairfax Station  
0.63%  
**\$647,290**

Lorton  
2.39%  
**\$390,687**

Mount Vernon



Fairfax County Chairman **Sharon Bulova (D)**  
2015 — \$645,830  
2016 — \$665,090  
2.98%



Mount Vernon Supervisor **Daniel Storck (D)**  
2015 — \$579,700  
2016 — \$585,460  
0.99%



2016 Countywide average for all homes — \$527,648

Single family-detached homes — \$632,507, up 1.69 percent

Townhouse/duplex properties — \$392,951, up 2.05 percent

Condominiums — \$261,792, up 0.73 percent

ZIP CODE AREA	2015 MEAN	2016 MEAN	PERCENT CHANGE
Alexandria/Mount Vernon	419,966	428,621	2.06
Annandale	436,194	444,426	1.89
Burke	438,919	447,099	1.86
Centreville	381,645	385,089	0.90
Chantilly	450,015	462,509	2.78
Clifton	648,374	659,408	1.70
Fairfax	476,037	482,115	1.28
Fairfax Station	643,207	647,290	0.63
Falls Church	434,062	447,822	3.17
Great Falls	1,047,755	1,055,259	0.72
Herndon	472,236	475,057	0.60
Lorton	381,572	390,687	2.39
McLean	885,556	894,285	0.99
Oakton	685,967	694,101	1.19
Reston	424,021	428,378	1.03
Springfield	416,853	428,503	2.79
Vienna	686,293	698,974	1.85

for single family, townhouses and condominiums

The average assessed value of a  
single family home in Fairfax County  
for 2016 is \$632,507, up 1.69 percent

SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY