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# Spring 2016 HomeLifeStyle

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# HomeLifeStyle

## Buying or Selling?

BY ANDREA WORKER  
THE CONNECTION

**H**ere 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 require-



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.**

ments, 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.

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

**A primer for doing either and avoiding pitfalls.**

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 Foster 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.** The buyer will have an inspection done, but being proactive could help locate potential problems that might stall, or even end a sale. 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.** Neutralize as much as possible, put away the toys and pet paraphernalia. Pay special attention to closets and bathrooms.

**First impressions.** 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.** 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.

**FOR BUYERS.** Just as with the sellers, buyers should shop around for a trusted real estate partner.

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

❖ **Get pre-qualified.** pre-approved by a lender before you start looking.

❖ **Think about resale.**

❖ **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.

❖ **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.

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## 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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# HomeLifeStyle

## Remodeled Home Tour Set

### 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).

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 open 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, which was too narrow. The kitchen clean-up area was too exposed from the family



**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.**

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 exist-

ing 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.”

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

“The way people now use their homes 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,” said Durosoko, Sun Design’s founder and chairman.

Once Smith and McCarthy established that the front-facing living room could be incorpo-

rated 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 succession:

- ❖ The wall between the kitchen and the dining room would be removed, extending the kitchen 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;

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

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 lifelong 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.”

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.

- ❖ A food prep island and dining counter, topped with blue flower granite and equipped with an under-cabinet microwave and a warming drawer.

- ❖ Six burner gas stove with hood.

- ❖ Dining room with coffered ceiling; Wedgwood interior design. In a nod to the 18th-century 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.”



**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.**