Reston homes and gardens will be part of Virginia's Historic Garden week on Tuesday, April 25. Featured here, a home on Lake Newport Road. See http://www.vagardenweek.org

Photo by Donna Moulton/Fairfax Garden Club
Conversion wins regional “Contractor the Year” award.

BY JOHN BYRD

Converting a circa 1960’s split-level into a spacious neoclassical-style residence has won Sun Design Remodeling a regional “Contractor of the Year” award from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. The Fairfax residential makeover was named the best whole house remodeling in the “$250,000 to $500,000” range in a 10-state area that extends from Maryland and Florida to as far west as Tennessee.

Owners Jack and Marie Torre have been so pleased with the outcome that they’ve held several open houses just to show the changes to curious neighbors. Another open house will be held in the annual Parade of HomeLifeStyle, April 22-23.

To accommodate the owner’s requirements, Sun Design added a 300-square-foot addition, introduced a front veranda with a foyer, and elaborated the exterior in a wholly new architectural language.

The Torres had purchased the 3,000-square-foot brick and siding structure in 1984, and a found a perfect spot for raising children. As the children moved on, however, the couple recognized that the changes they wanted to make to the house were apparently infeasible.

“We couldn’t add on to the rear because of set-back restrictions,” Jack Torre said. “The bigger problem, though, was a six-foot roof overhang in front, and the seven steps required to walk from the ground level foyer to the primary living area.”

The couple were actively looking at relocating when a chance visit to a Sun Design remodeled split-level nearby convinced Marie Torre to make an appointment with Bob Gallagher, the company’s president. In the first meeting, a “wish list” emerged that included a larger kitchen, a formal dining room with a tray ceiling, a family room with a view of the tree-lined back yard, and a spacious first-level powder room.

With these goals in mind, the design team focused on how best to configure the essential components within a well-integrated whole.

Since new space couldn’t be added on the rear, the east side of the house was designated for the new dining room/sitting room wing.

Still more problematic: under the existing plan, one entered the house from a narrow front foyer — ascending to a main level hall that segued in three directions.

What was missing, Gallagher observed, was a “procession” in which rooms unfolded in an inviting orderly sequence.

“The structural challenge was finding an optimal way to raise the front door to the main level of the house,” Gallagher said.

“This would require extending the front foyer eight feet to get past the existing roof overhang. We also needed to redesign the front elevation to better rationalize the difference between the grade at ground-level and the home’s main living area — a distance of about seven feet.”

What evolved was not merely a larger foyer, but an improved and more appropriate architectural context that allows for a front verandah that surrounds and presents the front entrance to the home.

The resulting interior meanwhile revolves around two comparatively modest additions: a 44-square-foot foyer aligned with the front door; 300-square-foot west wing that houses a formal dining room and an adjacent rear-of-the-house sitting area.

The new addition includes a two-sided fireplace visible in the living room. The enlarged kitchen now accommodates a custom-designed banquette, and storage pantries.

The gourmet kitchen, according to Marie Torre, provides spaces for all cooking utensils, even items formerly stored in the basement.

Replacing the roof over and raising the ceiling from eight feet to nine feet has made the living room feel substantially larger.

Better yet, the remade rear elevation — which includes a “bump-out” with divided light windows and French doors — invites abundant natural light.

“This is a completely different house,” said Marie Torre, “One much more satisfying to occupy.”


From Split-Level to Neoclassical

The split-level’s former bow window was converted to a set of French doors which overlook the new veranda. Though the execution makes the addition hard to detect, the dining room beyond the fireplace is actually in the home’s new wing.
Butterfly Weed Wins Perennial of the Year

BY CAROLE FUNGER
The Connection

The designation Perennial Plant of the Year is awarded each year by the Perennial Plant Association to the perennial that outshines its competitors not only in appearance, but also in its noteworthy characteristics. To be considered, a plant must be able to grow in a wide range of climates, require little maintenance and have multiple seasons of interest. And, it should be relatively pest and disease free.

That's a tall order for many plants, but late last year, orange-flowering butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa) more than rose to the occasion. In November it was voted 2017 Perennial Plant of the Year, becoming the 27th in a distinguished line of perennials to receive such an honor.

What makes butterfly weed so special?

Native to much of the continental United States as well as Ontario and Quebec, butterfly weed grows wild in a variety of climatic conditions including dry forests, along roadsides and in prairies and open fields. A member of the milkweed family, it tops out at about 1 to 2 feet. Its natural preference for average to dry soil makes it an excellent drought-resistant plant.

BUTTERFLY WEADED's large clusters of flowers are a brilliant orange-yellow, a beacon among other subtler-toned plants. Happily blooming from June through August, they produce copious amounts of seed that germinate the following year, ensuring a good population of the plants in the future.

See Perennial, Page 4
Kitchen Design Trends to Expect in 2017

Local designer share popular design ideas.

By Marilyn Campbell
The Connection

Those looking for kitchen design ideas have a new source of inspiration: the National Kitchen & Bath Association’s (NKBA) list of trends for 2017. Local designers reveal which trends are most popular in the Washington, D.C. region.

NKBA predicts that contemporary-styled kitchens will overtake traditional to become the second most popular design after transitional. Locally, Michael Winn, president of Winn Design + Build expects to see “a strong move towards transitional and contemporary styles, with no fussy designs.”

Homeowners are looking for “kitchen spaces that look comfortable, calming and clutter-free,” said Shannon Kadwell of Anthony Wilder Design/Build, Inc. Clean lines, built-in shelving and simple door styles dominate kitchen designs. Megan Padilla, senior designer for Aidan RK Designers Partners, echoed the interest in custom storage ideas. “We’re inspired by our work with clients who often have collections of table décor — everything from antique trays to vintage oyster plates,” she said. “By creating custom storage these cherished items can be readily accessible.”

When it comes to painted cabinets, gray is the new white and the popularity of both colors shows no signs of slowing down, according to the NKBA survey. However, blue painted and high gloss kitchen cabinets are emerging, especially in the Washington area, says Winn. “Blues and grays are very popular [and] ‘White continues to be popular.’”

For overall color schemes, two-toned kitchens are gaining popularity while blue and black are emerging as sought after colors. “We’re seeing a rise in product offerings available in matte black — from appliances to plumbing fixtures to cabinet hardware,” said Padilla. “We love it paired with white in a classic black and white kitchen, but also as an accent piece. Matte black also pairs beautifully with brass, apricot, and green.”

In addition to painting cabinets, homeowners are purchasing appliances like steam ovens and induction ovens more than ever before. “There is an increased desire for appliances that can accomplish that,” said Padilla. “Appliances that let people be able to cook quickly, so they’re looking for convenience and efficiency.”

 NKBA professionals surveyed reported recent projects that included wiring and pathways for future tech integration. “I would also expect the technology side to be a focus in D.C.,” said Samantha Klickna, project developer with Case Design/Remodeling, Inc. “The ease and comfort of controlling your home while at the office or on travel is very appealing and convenient for the city dweller.”

Cabinets are seeing a trend toward black as well. “Black is very appealing and convenient for the city dweller,” said Padilla. “For overall color schemes, two-toned kitchens are gaining popularity while blue and black are emerging as sought after colors.”

New manager joining Two Poor Teachers after 18 years in business.

By Andrea Worker
The Connection

It’s been 18 years since Ken Nies co-founded Two Poor Teachers, LLC, but the kitchen and bath remodelling company isn’t resting on its laurels. “We always want to earn an A+ from our customers,” said Nies. “That hasn’t changed since Day One.”

Nies started the company in 1999 with then-partner Tom Pennell. Both were Fairfax County physical education teachers at the time, and their collaboration was originally meant to be a sideline to their “day jobs, but before too long, Nies retired from teaching in order to focus fully on the rapidly growing company in Chantilly.

He may have left teaching behind, but his background and devotion to education still comes through when Nies speaks about the importance of educating homeowners on the ins and outs of remodelling work, and the “dangers of dealing with unlicensed contractors.” He has produced numerous “whiteboards” and videos available on YouTube that explain the local and state importance of educating homeowners on compliance for the homeowner.

Nies also says that the company gives their customers all the discounts they receive at the specialty stores where they have established strong vendor relationships.

It was because of just those kinds of relationships that Nies was able to recruit Jeremiah Klein to take over the reins as Two Poor Teachers’ next general manager, when he felt it was time to become “just a little less hands-on.” Klein had been associated with the contractor for some five years, when he worked as an agent for a wholesale sales, and then decided to take over the reins.

“Guaranteed start and deadline move further and further away from the original date promised during the bid proposal, will no doubt agree,” added anyone who has ever undertaken one of these home remodelling projects, only to see the finish deadline move further and further away from the original date promised during the bid proposal, will no doubt agree. Another attraction for the homeowner when choosing a contractor is the fact that Two Poor Teachers only requires 10 percent down to start the work, and generally “don’t ask for another penny until the job is completed.” Many contractors require the down payment, and then ask for ongoing “draw” funds periodically throughout the length of the project.

Perennial of the Year

From Page 3

nectar that attracts hordes of butterflies, birds and a wide assortment of insects. The distinctive flowers are composed of five petals that stand up (called hoods) and five petals that hang down. The hoods enclose a single orange horn that when cross-pollinated, forms a follicle. Later in the season, the follicle opens up along one side to disperse silky-tailed seeds.

Not to be outdone, butterfly weed’s foliage has its own attractions. Long and pointed, the 4” leaves provide food for the larva of native Monarch butterflies, while also lending a deep green backdrop to the brilliant flowers.

Plant butterfly weed in full sun in well-drained, moderately dry soil. For an eye-catching composition, pair it with other strong-hued perennials like Liatris spicata, Echinacea ‘Double Scoop Raspberry’ and Hemerocallis ‘Stella D’Oro.’ Or, let its orange flowers shine amidst subtler toned flowers like lemon-yellow Hemerocallis ‘Happy Returns’, white Phlox ‘David’ and apricot Cosmos. For overall color schemes, two-toned kitchens are gaining popularity while blue and black are emerging as sought after colors. “We’re seeing a rise in product offerings available in matte black — from appliances to plumbing fixtures to cabinet hardware,” said Padilla. “We love it paired with white in a classic black and white kitchen, but also as an accent piece. Matte black also pairs beautifully with brass, apricot, and green.”

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