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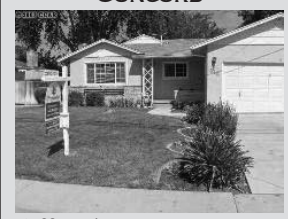
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Remodeling that Pays: How Far to Upgrade a Lamorinda Home

By Ken Ryerson, Sales Associate Pacific Union Orinda

For homeowners contemplating a remodel project, an important consideration is how much to do; that is, how much work is appropriate for a kitchen makeover or landscaping upgrade? The cardinal rule of real estate applies here: It's "Location, location, location" that determines how much effort pays off and how much is too much.

In general, the best remodeling returns are realized by projects that bring a substandard house up to the standard of its surroundings. Lamorinda is predominantly a bedroom community of families here for the quality schools. The standard for a house as a whole is a stylish master suite plus two or three smaller bedrooms, good landscaping, living room, and connected kitchen-informal dining-family room space. In our community, projects that address these spaces realize the largest returns on remodeling, to 125% of costs or better.

But for an individual

project, how much is enough?

As is the case for a house as a whole, an individual project shows the best payback when it suits the community. In our area, this means family-friendly remodeling that takes into account our beautiful setting and gentle climate. For example, one of the most cost-effective projects nationally provides relatively poor returns in Lamorinda: refacing a home with vinyl siding. In most parts of the country homeowners appreciate the tough, easy-care qualities of vinyl, but here in our mild area, natural siding is preferred.

Landscape work here offers the best returns when it enhances the natural setting of a house, while at the same time offering space for children to play safely outdoors. Landscaping that fills a yard with ornamental plants or rockeries is less attractive to family buyers and thus returns less value.

Adding an outdoor pool

generally provides a very low remodeling return, in Lamorinda as elsewhere. A pool dominates the outdoor space of a typical lot, and it may be considered an unwanted hazard by families with small children. Of course for large properties or dedicated swimmers, a pool may be a very desirable addition, but for our community in general, pools offer the least remodel value of any project. Indeed, some homeowners with older pools prefer to fill them in rather than upgrade them.

Family factors likewise dominate inside a Lamorinda home. For remodel projects this consideration commonly means choosing sturdy, reliable finishes and fixtures over the latest fashions. And flow is important, to channel the activities of energetic children.

"To get a good return or payback on a kitchen remodel, for example, a good design is more important than overspending on the highest end appliances and finishes," says

Orinda's Rick Kattenburg of Kattenburg Architects. "We see many projects where people pay quadruple what's necessary, either because they are status-driven or just unaware they are paying too much."

Kattenburg continues, "Stainless steel finishes on residential appliances cost more but are popular because they offer the 'commercial look' promoted in home magazines. Stainless, I believe, is generally a bad idea in a home with children. Smudges made by sticky fingers on a stainless steel refrigerator door are less than attractive and tough to clean."

Accordingly, very high-end luxury upgrades return less value in Lamorinda than do mid-range makeovers. But homeowners needn't scrimp on budget materials.

"Cabinets, granite, tile, and plumbing fixtures have a wide range of costs," says Kattenburg. "You don't have to save as much as the typical tract developer does with their finish selections, but if you're going for payback



Ken Ryerson

on a remodel, take a lesson from their approach to finish selection. Select products with inherent value. Not having an overrated brand name won't be a critical factor when you sell. Good flow and general appearance will."

Of course each remodeling project differs as much as people do, and the final value of any project depends on the situation. The concepts presented here provide general guidelines for approaching a remodel in a typ-

ical Lamorinda family home and won't apply for all. In the end, the real worth of a remodeling job is judged by the homeowner alone, and almost any work can return real value if properly considered.

Ken can be reached at 925-253-6279 or by email ken@ryersonrealty.com

Council Faces \$38 Million Wish List for \$17 Million Palos Money

However, Town Treasurer Robert Kennedy stated that the Town is projecting an annual "structural budget deficit" averaging around \$200,000 beginning in 2013 and continuing thereafter. Kennedy explained that projected deficit is because property tax revenues are expected to increase only 2% per year under Proposition 13, while personnel-related expenditures are expected to increase 5% per year.

Vince told the Council that "beginning in 2013 or 2014 we will face dramatic reductions in services and personnel if we don't find a way to reduce the deficit." Since everyone at the meeting agreed that this Council cannot bind future Councils, that projection may make the option of spending none of the Palos money or interest until 2017 unlikely.


Regarding the \$1.5 million legal fund he is recommending, Vince explained that the Town "has made land use decisions", that "there are initiatives coming down the pike—MOSO 2008" (the Moraga Open Space Ordinance), "which will be on the ballot in June or November", and

... continued from page 3 that "an applicant (the Bruzzone family) has sued the Town over its design guidelines." Regarding the prospect of the Town spending legal fees to defend MOSO, Bird commented that "these initiatives get passed and then it's on the company dime of the city to get it all sorted out."

Toward the end of the meeting Police Chief Mark Ruppenthal made a second pitch for \$500,000 for the Town's estimated share of the regional emergency radio system. He also asked the Council to consider spending Palos money for "one or two more police officers," which went beyond the \$38 million wish list presented by Vince. Ruppenthal's comments illustrate the dilemma the Council faces in selecting from a growing wish list the items on which the Town will spend the one-time Palos Colorados development fees.

In his presentation Vince included an illustration which showed that if the Town did that and spent none of the Palos money or the interest it would have over \$25 million by 2017.

Lamorinda Home Sales continued



LAFAYETTE Last reported: 7
LOWEST AMOUNT: \$665,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT: \$1,350,000

MORAGA Last reported: 10
LOWEST AMOUNT: \$405,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT: \$2,900,000

ORINDA Last reported: 5
LOWEST AMOUNT: \$1,085,000
HIGHEST AMOUNT: \$2,300,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal Resource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California Resource. Neither Cal Resource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

- LAFAYETTE**
- 1661 Foothill Park Circle, \$1,135,000, 4 Bdrms, 2102 SqFt, 1957 YrBlit, 11-9-07
 - 1154 Glen Road, \$1,315,000, 7 Bdrms, 3427 SqFt, 1951 YrBlit, 11-1-07
 - 124 Haslemere Court, \$680,000, 3 Bdrms, 1638 SqFt, 1988 YrBlit, 11-9-07
 - 3239 Judy Lane, \$1,350,000, 3 Bdrms, 2329 SqFt, 1890 YrBlit, 11-1-07
 - 866 Mariposa Road, \$1,050,000, 3 Bdrms, 1545 SqFt, 1955 YrBlit, 11-6-07
 - 1042 Sunnybrook Drive, \$665,000, 3 Bdrms, 1305 SqFt, 1950 YrBlit, 10-31-07
 - 3108 Teigland Road, \$1,100,000, 3 Bdrms, 3130 SqFt, 1957 YrBlit, 10-31-07

- MORAGA**
- 1997 Ascot Drive #C, \$405,000, 2 Bdrms, 1124 SqFt, 1975 YrBlit, 10-31-07
 - 819 Augusta Drive, \$870,000, 2 Bdrms, 2488 SqFt, 1978 YrBlit, 11-6-07
 - 1434 Camino Peral, \$555,000, 3 Bdrms, 1348 SqFt, 1971 YrBlit, 10-31-07
 - 694 Carroll Drive, \$906,000, 4 Bdrms, 1548 SqFt, 1958 YrBlit, 11-7-07
 - 4 Donald Place, \$1,549,500, 4 Bdrms, 2269 SqFt, 1958 YrBlit, 10-30-07
 - 23 Greenfield Drive, \$990,000, 4 Bdrms, 2270 SqFt, 1970 YrBlit, 10-30-07
 - 3 Julianna Court, \$2,900,000, 4 Bdrms, 3983 SqFt, 1988 YrBlit, 10-30-07
 - 10 Kimberly Drive, \$719,000, 11-5-07
 - 161 Miramonte Drive, \$555,000, 2 Bdrms, 1514 SqFt, 1966 YrBlit, 11-6-07
 - 425 Woodminster Drive, \$570,000, 3 Bdrms, 1800 SqFt, 1974 YrBlit, 10-30-07

- ORINDA**
- 10 El Sueno, \$2,300,000, 3 Bdrms, 3669 SqFt, 1949 YrBlit, 11-9-07
 - 225 El Toyonal Road, \$1,110,000, 4 Bdrms, 1958 SqFt, 1938 YrBlit, 11-1-07
 - 4 Santa Lucia Road, \$1,900,000, 3 Bdrms, 3040 SqFt, 1937 YrBlit, 11-1-07
 - 81 Tarry Lane, \$1,085,000, 2 Bdrms, 1692 SqFt, 1951 YrBlit, 11-6-07
 - 28 Vallecito Lane, \$1,143,000, 3 Bdrms, 3275 SqFt, 1978 YrBlit, 11-6-07



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