

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 05 Issue 22 Wednesday, January 4, 2012



Going Solar-one way to cut your electricity bill ...read on page D7

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

## Starting Fresh!

By Cynthia Brian

*"Every man should be born again on the first day of January. Start with a fresh page!"*

*Henry Ward Beecher*



*Winter waves with the beauty of barren bark on deciduous trees.*

*Photo Cynthia Brian*

Over the holidays, our family engaged in our revered tradition of watching family videos on Christmas Eve. How quickly we forget what we looked like, talked about, wore, and how we acted one, two, three, or more decades ago! Every year we look forward to this ritual filled with laughter, cheers, jeers, and tears as we meander down memory lane. Perhaps because I was in the movie business, or perhaps because I didn't want to miss a moment of my children's youth or the changes in my garden, it appears I lived with a video camera at the ready. Everything from pulling weeds and planting seeds, to my kids rescuing ducks, deer, goats, and dogs was captured on celluloid.

The one central theme that stood out throughout the years of filming was that we are an outdoor family. I was blessed with farmer parents who lived their lives in the fields and I fostered this love of time in nature in my own offspring.

... continued on page D4



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## Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

City	Last reported:	LOWEST AMOUNT:	HIGHEST AMOUNT:
LAFAYETTE	6	\$675,000	\$1,360,000
MORAGA	3	\$480,000	\$1,400,000
ORINDA	3	\$435,000	\$1,395,000

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

- 3302 Glenside Drive, \$1,360,000, 5 Bdrms, 3041 SqFt, 1942 YrBlt, 11-30-11;  
Previous Sale: \$1,570,000, 07-11-07
- 3357 Mildred Lane, \$745,000, 4 Bdrms, 1543 SqFt, 1953 YrBlt, 11-23-11;  
Previous Sale: \$470,000, 01-24-03
- 3368 Mildred Lane, \$675,000, 4 Bdrms, 1534 SqFt, 1954 YrBlt, 11-30-11;  
Previous Sale: \$725,000, 10-28-09
- 502 Silverado Drive, \$834,000, 3 Bdrms, 1851 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 12-7-11;  
Previous Sale: \$800,000, 07-18-03
- 3333 St. Mary's Road, \$1,300,000, 3 Bdrms, 3719 SqFt, 1946 YrBlt, 11-28-11;  
Previous Sale: \$525,000, 07-30-93
- 1014 Sunnybrook Drive, \$1,260,000, 5 Bdrms, 3183 SqFt, 1948 YrBlt, 12-2-11;  
Previous Sale: \$1,250,000, 10-21-09

### MORAGA

- 7 Baltusrol Street, \$480,000, 2 Bdrms, 1743 SqFt, 1979 YrBlt, 12-5-11;  
Previous Sale: \$777,000, 08-25-05
- 34 Brandt Drive, \$1,400,000, 3 Bdrms, 3586 SqFt, 1989 YrBlt, 11-23-11;  
Previous Sale: \$1,450,000, 11-19-04
- 217 Rheem Boulevard, \$695,000, 3 Bdrms, 1610 SqFt, 1955 YrBlt, 11-30-11;  
Previous Sale: \$580,000, 09-26-01

### ORINDA

- 60 Claremont Avenue, \$435,000, 3 Bdrms, 1732 SqFt, 1949 YrBlt, 11-23-11;  
Previous Sale: \$115,000, 03-03-78
- 38 La Cuesta Road, \$675,000, 2 Bdrms, 1873 SqFt, 1954 YrBlt, 12-6-11
- 258 Sundown Terrace, \$1,395,000, 4 Bdrms, 3616 SqFt, 1988 YrBlt, 12-2-11

## Lamorinda Foreclosures recorded

### LAFAYETTE

- Brown Avenue, 94549, Ing Bank, 11-30-11, \$543,353, 2120 sf, 3 bd
- North Thompson Road, 94549, Bank of America, 12-05-11, \$1,108,200, 2427 sf, 4 bd

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*J. Rockcliff*

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## SOLD

Address	Party	Sold Price
Springhill Manor	Seller	\$2,400,000
Crofton Court	Buyer	\$1,775,000
Samantha Drive	Buyer	\$1,750,000
Eagle Point Road	Buyer	\$1,700,000
Michael Lane	Seller	\$1,635,000
Las Huertas Road	Buyer	\$1,500,000
Powell Drive	Seller/Buyer	\$1,470,000
Read Drive	Seller	\$1,340,000
Via Nueva	Seller/Buyer	\$1,339,000
Rossi Street	Seller	\$1,328,500
Woodside Court	Seller	\$1,276,000
Rimrock Road	Seller	\$1,250,000
Castello Road	Seller	\$1,250,000
Glenside Circle	Seller	\$1,220,000
Castle Court	Seller	\$1,170,000
Old Jonas Hill Road	Seller/Buyer	\$1,149,500

## SOLD

Address	Party	Sold Price
Lucas Circle	Buyer	\$1,100,000
Hawthorne Drive	Seller	\$1,019,000
Walnut Lane	Buyer	\$955,000
Woodview Drive	Seller	\$806,000
Warner Court	Seller	\$735,500
Foye Drive	Seller	\$690,000
Rahara Drive	Buyer	\$685,000
Quandt Road	Buyer	\$670,000
Victoria Avenue	Seller	\$655,000
Sibert Court	Buyer	\$550,000

## PENDING

Address	Party	Offered at
Happy Valley Road	Buyer	\$2,950,000
Las Huertas Road	Seller	\$1,399,000

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# Starting Fresh!

... continued from page D1



*Fabulous ferns perk up a shady walkway.*

*Photos Cynthia Brian A cheery container of red and white cyclamen, blue pansies, and white alyssum signal the Presidential election year of 2012.*

Today, kids are bombarded with so many technological gadgets, that it's hard to get them unplugged and outside. Instead of medication for hyperactivity, we exercised our excessive energy with building forts, hanging tree swings, and running through the hills pretending to be explorers. Now, more than ever, every family needs to start with a fresh page of al fresco renewal.

According to the Mayan calendar, 2012 portends the end of the world as we know it. Being a history major taught me that although it is important to learn from the past, it is up to us to forge our futures. Every January we have the opportunity to begin anew. I predict that 2012

is the beginning of an era of awakening and starting fresh. With that thought in mind, my gift to readers this year will be improved health in body, mind, and spirit with regular tips on how you and your family can discover the wonders of the natural world by getting outside with unstructured open-air activities to allow the imagination to run wild and creativity to soar.

Whether it's pruning roses or walking in the woods, by exchanging screen time for green time, your internal clock will regulate your body to be alert during the day and tired at night. Numerous studies show that gardening fights obesity as well as sleep deprivation by offering a full

body workout that builds strong muscle mass while improving cognitive skills, providing relaxation, increasing stress reduction, and developing deeper sleep patterns.

This year, let's plan and plant our meals for year-round plot to plate, potager to pot, patch to platter originality. Put in peas, kale, Swiss chard, broccoli, lettuces, and Bok Choy to reap the riches of vitamins, antioxidants, and minerals, low in calories and packed with nutrients everybody craves. When we teach kids how to grow their own dinners, we introduce them to a whimsical wonderful world of wellness and wealth through the joys of garden sowing and harvesting.



*A basket of freshly picked Meyer lemons makes delicious tea rich in vitamin C to ward off colds.*



*Tillandsia, a genus in the Bromeliad family, is an air plant. They are wonderful specimens for terrariums.*



*A spider weaves its magical web while protecting the garden from intruding pests.*



*Cymbidium orchids bloom in the January outdoors.*

Let 2012 be the year that you tap into the power of plants, grow your own food, and nurture your natural instinct to bond with the land. By being mindful of our fragile earth connection, we restore balance to our neighborhoods and community. It's time to get off the couch, power down the phones and computers, turn off the flat screen, and let our surround sound be that of the chirping birds, howling winds, and trickling creeks.

Get up, get out, and get dirty. It's Digging Deep time and we're starting fresh. Welcome to a bright new year.



*A calla lily grows by the babbling brook.*

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# Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for January

*"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant."* Anne Bradstreet  
1612-1672, Poet

As winters dark cloak blankets January days, gardeners are given the luxurious time to contemplate their spring and summer gardens. Curled up in front of the fireplace with a cup of herbal tea, we sift through our piles of catalogues, dreaming of fragrant blossoms, tasty herbs, and sweet vegetables in the months to come. After a snooze, it's time to leap into tomorrow by getting yourself and your children outside for some face time with Mother Nature.

- **SPRAY** your fruit trees and roses with the final dormant spray of horticultural oil to kill overwintering insect eggs.
- **PICK** a sunny window in your kitchen and plant an all season herb garden to star in your culinary creations.
- **SAVE** trees by recycling Christmas cards as gift tags or tree decorations for next year.
- **PRUNE** crepe myrtles and roses this month. Canes from the roses may be shared with friends. I will again be offering complimentary rose canes to anyone who is interested at the end of January. Email me for information at [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com).
- **TERRARIUMS** have made a fashion come back. I remember making terrariums for friends and families when I was in college! Soil-less tillandsia, humid loving orchids, and rainforest ferns are terrific terrarium selections.
- **HEIGHTEN** harmony with nature by reducing or eliminating chemical usage in your yard.
- **CREATE** a backyard habitat for birds, butterflies, and beneficial bugs.
- **REPLENISH** bird feeders with nutritious seeds keeping our avian visitors nearby while supplementing their dietary requirements during the cold season.
- **MULCH** your beds with three inches of organic matter.
- **PLANT** bare roots now, including roses, fruit trees, berry bushes, and vines.
- **PERK** up the dreary landscape with color spots of primroses, violas, and pansies.
- **STUDY** plant catalogues for ideas on new specimens to order or buy at your garden center.
- **COMPOST**, compost, compost. You'll enrich your garden while saving the environment, too.
- **CELEBRATE** Three Wise Kings Day on January 6th (also known as the Epiphany) by surprising the children with fresh oranges and tangerines plucked from your tree. It's been a family custom in our household for over a century.
- **SPROUT** onions and chives in your kitchen by cutting the greens, then putting the roots in a glass of water. Within a week you'll have fresh greens for your salads and soups. This is a simple, fun growing opportunity for kids! (Change the water daily)
- **START** a new garden project plan. Consider trellising for vertical growing.
- **RECORD** your landscaping escapades by writing in a garden journal this week. Save your journals to track trends and seasons.
- **REDUCE** watering on houseplants as they rest for a winter's nap.
- **RESOLVE** to spend a minimum of thirty minutes per day outside. Studies indicated that every person needs at least fifteen minutes of outdoor sunlight daily for necessary Vitamin D replenishment. An additional fifteen is for frolicking.
- **TAKE** oodles of videos and photos of your garden and children. When you look back in a few years, you'll be shocked at how quickly both have grown and changed.
- **THANKS** to reader Jo for emailing me this note regarding our feathered friends: "When the birds eat the berries in the winter and then are seen flying "drunk", they are, in fact, not drunk on fermented berries. Birds are like airplanes with specific weight/balance properties. When they stuff themselves in a feeding frenzy, they are out of balance and haven't learned to fly straight with the change in center of gravity."



*After cutting shallots or small onions, put the roots in a glass of water. Delicious, edible green sprouts thrive. Photo C. Brian*

Wishing everyone a bright, cheery, healthy, wealthy 2012 as we grow into the people we are meant to be. My gratitude to you all for the role you play in the creation of my garden stories. Happy New Year!

Happy Gardening to You!

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Cynthia Brian

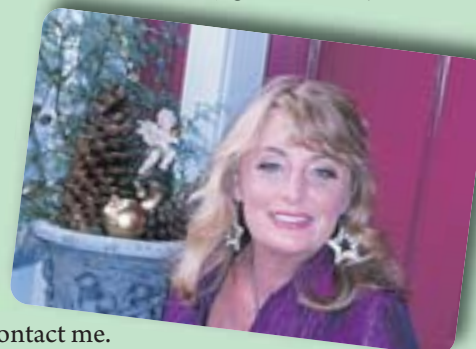
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## Green and Greener Going Solar!

By Dave Rochlin



Measuring the roof

Photo provided

In sunny climates - like most of Lamorinda - your roof might actually be a valuable piece of real estate. This year, we decided to put ours to use and go into the renewable energy business... by putting up solar panels.

Solar power is not cheap. But neither is traditional electricity, if you use more than the bare minimum. If you study your bill, you'll notice that PG&E sells you both low-priced electricity (enough to keep your lights on and food cold), and really expensive energy (the juice you might be using to power your plasma TV, hot tub, pond, air conditioner, desktop computers, and cable box). In our house, the first 330 kWh/month cost only \$40. But the last 330 kWh? That runs us another \$120. And if you are thinking about getting a plug in Prius or Chevy Volt (350 kWh per 1000 miles), or adding a hot tub - you'll be paying a lot, even with special off-peak rates available for electric vehicles.

So if you hate paying big energy bills, or simply feel badly about gobbling up more than your share of the grid, you can either conserve like crazy or add solar.

It turns out that going solar is both maddeningly complicated and surprisingly easy. There are quite a few variables to consider - including which solar panels and inverter, how big a system, how much sun your roof gets, whether your electrical panel is suitable, tax credits, utility subsidies, upfront investment vs. discounted future cash flow, and so on. Fortunately, there are a number of entrepreneurial firms that want to make solar easier for consumers, by removing the risk and taking on the gauntlet of complexity. Some of the leading firms are Solar City, Sungevity, Sun Run, and the Solar Company. They all follow the same basic business model, acting as a "one call does it all" system designer, master contractor, and financing specialist.

We contacted two companies. Each has a website that asked for our typical electrical bill and basic roof info, and used Google-earth style mapping software to determine if we were good candidates, and how big a system would be needed. The key is that they don't just calculate how much energy you can produce, but also compare it to both the costs and

government incentives associated with the system.

Here's where a word of caution is necessary: Virtually all solar firms make aggressive assumptions in calculating your savings/benefits vs. costs. The most common practice is to assume that your energy bill will rise 4 to 5% per year over the next 10-20 years, which is a plausible possible scenario, but by no means the only one, particularly as appliances, heating, and lighting become more energy efficient. At least one solar firm also factors in the expected increase in the home's value - the same fool's gold that has launched a thousand other home improvement projects.

Oddly, one company said our location was too shaded to generate enough power, while another was quite confident that we could. To start the process we gave them our last 12 months of energy bills, and they sent an inspector out to look at our roof (you need to have enough roof life left, enough space, and the right angles.) They then designed a system and generated several quotes for us for different leasing and purchase options. We chose a 10-year prepay lease, since this option made them responsible for system maintenance, gives us flexibility down the road, and included a guaranteed minimum output, which was particularly important given the mixed messages we received about our location.

The process took several months, including getting sign off from our neighbors (as part of our HOA), system design, city permitting, applying to PG&E, and an inspection of our

electrical system. The actual installation only took a few days, but was followed by another month of waiting for meter hookup and PG&E approval.

Now, we get the pleasure of our meter telling us when we are feeding rather than consuming from the grid, and an oddly satisfying web monitoring tool, which tracks our production by the hour.

The impact on climate change

is moderate (the equivalent of driving 4000 miles less per year), as is the expected financial return (more or less like buying a 10-year CD that pays 4% interest.) But we are hedged against any price/energy shocks, and have the psychic benefit of knowing that we are in a small way helping build a green economy.

Information on all of the solar companies mentioned is available on the web.



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# A Shared Thanks from Trusted Neighbors.

The beginning of a new year brings with it new possibilities. For more than a decade, home buyers and sellers throughout Contra Costa County have turned to the team at Village Associates to help navigate the often turbulent waters of the local housing market. As Lamorinda's leading Real Estate firm for each of the past eleven years, we thank them for their overwhelming support.

Best wishes to our families, friends and neighbors for a happy, healthy and safe 2012.



Your Village Associates: *Top Row left to right: Dexter Honens II, Steve Smith, Jeff Snell, Hal Kaufman, Margot Kaufman, Joan Evans, Clark Thompson, Sue Layng, Art Lehman, Patty Battersby, Sue Olsen, Terri Bates Walker, Lynda Snell, Kurt Piper, Marianne Greene, Dan Weil, Ignacio Vega*

*Seated left to right: Tara Rochlin, Debbie Johnston, Linda Ehrich, Joan Cleveland, Ann Ward, Joan Eggers, Linda Friedman, Pamela Halloran, Karen Murphy, Judy Schoenrock, Ashley Battersby, April Matthews, Margaret Zucker*

*Not pictured: Charles Levine, Ben Olsen, Ann Sharf*

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