

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Signature Trees Speak for Themselves

Lone trees or a collection can define a home's personality

By Chris Lavin

While many homeowners take painstaking care to keep their lawns and properties in top curb-appeal condition – or at least make every attempt to keep them that way – sometimes it's the lone tree that takes charge, calls us to attention, and alerts us to its spectacular presence. The house itself is secondary. These are “signature trees,” trees that define their landscape, put the house in perspective.

Like seeing the splash from a Japanese maple that could not possibly be that true to the color red and simply must have been painted on by the fire department, trees can create the “wow” effect like nothing else in the front of a home. Gone are the yard ornaments, the trimmed lawn, the potted azalea or the wreaths on the door. The tree stands alone.

“The decision to plant a particular tree is really important,” says Geoff Olmstead, the nursery manager for Orchard Nursery in Lafayette, who has helped hundreds of Lamorindans make the right decision. “It can make a huge difference in how your house looks, how to present your house to others.”

Walk back into the nursery with Olmstead and one starts to get barraged by Latin names that don't help someone who doesn't know a *borealis* from a *gigantum*. (Those probably aren't even trees.) That doesn't deter Olmstead, though, because he is capable of quickly changing to regular-person-speak.

“So first, how big would you want it to get?” he asks. When told, let's say, about 100 feet, he throws back his head and laughs loudly. “Really? I



A Japanese maple brightens up the exterior of this home.

Photo Jennifer Wake

don't think too many trees get that tall, not even oaks. Redwoods will. People think they want redwoods but they don't really want redwoods.”

Which of course leads a person who is still amazed that the spell-check on the computer accepted “borealis” to an obvious question for Mr.

Olmstead: Why not? (She means, *sequoia sempervirens*, two of only two Latin words she knows, is just about the most spectacular tree ever to take root in Lamorindan soil.) Who could argue with a coast redwood?

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