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## The Airbnb Listing Next Door

By Cathy Tyson



From left: Leo (Standing), Harold (in arms), Anthony and Dormain Drewitz Photo provided

map. With only one hotel in the tri-town area, hosts have found substantial demand for their properties.

The least expensive listing on a recent search is a private bedroom near downtown Lafayette going for \$59 per night. On the other end of the spectrum is a luxurious Sundown Terrace estate that sleeps 10 people; it can be rented for \$1,500 per night, with a hefty security deposit. However the majority of listings are in the \$70 to \$200 range for a wide variety of options, anything from a darling poolside cabana off of Lombardy Lane in Orinda for \$117 to a quiet in-law suite in Moraga for \$97 to a stylish stand-alone guest cottage for \$157 in Lafayette.

Karla and Barry McQuain are an outgoing couple who have a lovely private bedroom and bathroom listing in Happy Valley with full use of their expansive backyard, which includes a pool, ping pong table and trampoline, available for \$117 per night.

The couple truly enjoys meeting new people and couldn't be happier with their Airbnb experience. With a spacious, mostly empty home and Karla McQuain's past experience in the hospitality industry - she used to work for the Four Seasons - it seems like a natural fit.

All four of their kids are going to be in college next year, so they are considering expanding their operation. "We haven't had one problem" she says, and the kids have learned that "it feels good to share, and that it's okay to trust people."

"Our kids are still friends with a number of kids who stayed here and they keep in touch on Facebook," says McQuain. "We exchanged Christmas cards with over a dozen people who have stayed here. This summer we plan to stay with a family on the east coast who stayed with us last year." A couple from Scotland were able to experience their very first American Halloween party and even dressed up in costume.

There's transparency on both sides of the exchange. McQuain has an extensive dialogue with would-

On any given night, weary travelers can enjoy a comfortable bed, clean sheets and a warm welcome in homes across Lamorinda while their hosts earn extra money. With approximately 50 Airbnb listings in Moraga, Orinda and Lafayette, many residents may not be aware that the sharing economy is alive and well in the 'burbs.

The booming San Francisco-based company, founded in 2008, offers a marketplace for people to list and book unique accommodations in 34,000

cities in 191 countries from Phuket, Thailand to Avignon, France to Perth, Australia, and of course all across America.

Rentals in Lamorinda vary by price and location, with each listing clearly described on the easy-to-use website, along with a number of photographs, past customer reviews with a general neighborhood

be guests, and thoroughly checks them out before approving their request. The same is true for guests, as they can read customer reviews and investigate their potential hosts.

The McQuains started in February of 2015 and have now hosted guests from seven countries, including a number of groups from the U.K. who stayed for weeks at a time, visiting grandchildren who live in Lafayette. They have a young couple coming in the near future for seven weeks all the way from Walnut Creek while their home is being remodeled. McQuain has been amazed at a number of guests coming from Oregon who are very interested in hiking at Briones. A fellow from San Diego will be coming for his third visit while the hosts happen to be out of town, so he's happy to take care of their Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and water the plants.

When Anthony and Dormain Drewitz purchased their home in Orinda last November, it already had a cottage on the property that had been an Airbnb rental. The cottage has been rented almost continuously since they've listed it, with only an estimated 10 days of vacancies since their arrival. In Anthony's experience, he sees hotel guests and Airbnb people as completely different constituencies, due to the disparity in price. Because their unit has a small kitchen, living room and bathroom, guests have stayed for months at a time, something that would rarely happen at a hotel. One tenant stayed for two and a half months visiting children and grandchildren in the area.

Using his first name only, John stayed at the cottage in June and was one of many guests who posted a glowing review on the website. "Beautiful views and lots of wildlife. We saw deer grazing on the property with their fawns and also saw a wild turkey. Anthony was a great host and offered any assistance we might need as well as local recommendations. Would love to make a return visit."

"This is way too small for the city to be concerned about," said Drewitz, who argues that they aren't bothering anyone, and there's plenty of parking on their woodsy 1.4 acre parcel. "It would be a waste of the city's resources to regulate this." He adds their guests frequently spend money in local restaurants and bars, which is good for the city.

Lamorinda is an Airbnb regulation-free zone, at least for the time being. Orinda City Manager Janet Keeter reports that the city council recently discussed having a short-term rental registration program as the city does not currently regulate the rentals. "We anticipate bringing the matter back to the council in July," she says.

With only one complaint in the last year, Lafayette's City Manager Steven Falk doesn't yet see the need for an ordinance. Moraga has nothing on the books and no plans to change the current situation.

Carolyn, who preferred that her last name not be used, is an 81-year-old single woman with a large four-bedroom, three-bath home who just loves being an Airbnb host, preferring to have short-term tenants, a week at the most. She's earned the "Superhost" badge as someone who provides outstanding hospitality. Having a bit of extra income helps defray the expense of maintaining a large home and yard, and she enjoys the social benefits as well. She recently hosted a couple from Provence, France, who were in town to work with their Orinda-based wine distributor, which provided an opportunity to practice her French.

Interestingly, in a completely non-scientific poll, hosts that live in multi-family settings, apartments and town houses were reluctant to talk about their experience for fear the complex or homeowners association might shut down their business.

While San Francisco has wrestled with regulating Airbnb hosts, Lamorinda, at least so far, doesn't share many of these big city concerns. The vast majority of these cottages, in-law units and spare bedrooms are on private property and many hosts argue their rentals don't reduce the amount of potentially available housing for long-term lower-income renters in our increasingly expensive area. Housing activists note that over 350 listings in San Francisco appear to be full-time vacation rentals, which diminishes the city housing inventory.

"That's bunk" said one Moraga Airbnb host, who didn't want his name used. His in-law unit has a separate entrance, but is part of the home he and his wife live in; the space would be sitting vacant almost all the time and only occasionally used by visiting family if it weren't for Airbnb.

Lafayette's city manager agrees. "There's no evidence that it affects the available housing stock."

For more information, and to check out listings, go to [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com).



Below is Danny, who stayed with his parents, Jon and Judy from Falmouth, Maine. An amazing musician, he gathered the McQuain kids around their piano and sang songs for hours.



From left, Fiona and Bill from Scotland stayed with the McQuain family in Lafayette, and even participated in Halloween festivities. Photos provided



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