

The Ebb and the Flow

By Andi Peterson Brown

While most people are aware that our housing market is part of broader economic cycles, many people do not realize that there is also a seasonal influence affecting market activity throughout the year. And when it comes to this annual cycle, all months are not created equal. Sleepy August cannot hold a candle to lively March, spirited April, and bubbly May. And poor January. It tends to get lost in the shuffle.

Why is this? The answer is quite logical. The spring and early summer weather is the perfect backdrop for selling a home. Gardens are blooming, the sun is shining, and it's easy for buyers to get out and see what's available. Many of those buyers also pay attention to kindergarten and school registration dates. Thus, market activity is almost always at its highest during April, May, and June. We tend to see activity drop off towards the end of July as both buyers and sellers take their vacations and enjoy their summer days. Here in Lamorinda, once the school year kicks in and routines are established, there tends to be a second surge in market activity. This "mini-spring" lasts through the beginning of November, but once Thanksgiving hits, market activity usually drops off. Most people are in holiday mode, and buying or selling real estate slides onto the backburner if it is not a necessity.

Lamorinda inventory remains tight. If you've been thinking about selling your home this spring, now is the time to call a Realtor and get the ball rolling.



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The Waterman House

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Upon entering, one is immediately struck by the uniqueness and harmony of the place that does not surrender all of its mystery and elegance at once, but guides the visitor from the public to the more private areas of the home. Richards used to describe his work as "gates opening into new spaces, walls folding away to reveal more and more."

Up a small flight of stairs is a landing in the form of a gallery entirely made of windows on one side, opened on the privacy of the back garden. A meditative nook has been designed at the top of the stairs, including built-in bookshelves, an ideal place to read a book and contemplate nature.

Every room inside is wood paneled, Philippine mahogany for the family living area and red ash in the bedroom aisle. The Watermans are displaying on the walls some of Richards' painting, that Marie Waterman describes as in the style of Georgia O'Keeffe.

"When my uncle created this house, he discussed the plan with my mother so it would be functional for her family," says Waterman. In his original idea, the kitchen and family room would have been a one big room, as is seen in his other plans, but Waterman's mother wanted to be able to close the door if she needed to. The living room and family room are connected through large openings, reflecting Richards' design of one big space where people flow and gather along the day.

The family room has windows on two opposite sides, getting views and light from the back garden on one side, and from the beautiful view on the Orinda hills on the other side. The fireplace is set at an angle, entirely made of bricks, and seems to be only a decorative element since its backing is completely flat and cannot contain an exhaust duct. "He created a very complex system with the exhaust turned at an angle and into the wall to the left of the fireplace," explains Marie Waterman, who appreciates the elegance and simplicity of the lines and perspectives throughout the house.

Richards' other creations are preserved all over the house, including the encased light features that he designed. "Like Wright, he created some of the furniture and features for his homes," says Waterman. A lot of the built-in original cabinetry is still used today since it is both functional and made with quality natural material.

The only aspect the Watermans struggle with is the lack of insulation of the house that was conceived as a San Diego home. "When you look at the wood ceiling, this is just below the tar and gravel roof," says Marie Waterman. They think that if the siding has to be replaced, then it would be a good time to rethink the insulation of the house. But the quality is such that it might not be anytime soon.



There is wood throughout the home.



Some of the home's light features.



A modern outside statement.