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## Outdoor living, great schools and accessibility keep Lamorinda real estate hot

By Diane Claytor



The easy flow, open concept style in this new contemporary Lafayette house is what homebuyers seem to be hoping for. Photo provided

Realtors does - especially when it comes to the schools. "It's pretty simple," he stated. "The reason people come here hasn't changed in 20 years. For all that time, it's been schools, schools, schools."

Both Dudum Del Santo and Colhoun report that another big plus for Lamorinda is the convenience - convenience to public transportation, proximity to the freeway, employment opportunities, retail centers and a good variety of excellent restaurants. It's the old adage realtors have been repeating forever: location, location, location.

According to Dudum Del Santo, the ability to enjoy indoor-outdoor living has gained in popularity, which, of course, goes back to our great climate. "People want to have an extended living space that goes outdoors," she said, "or at least the ability to add it. We're seeing more and more buyers looking for that total outdoor living area - not just a backyard, pool or patio, but an outside great room, complete with a TV, barbecue and covered section."

Coldwell Banker's Larry Hood echoed this thought and added that large backyards and the abundance of open space surrounding Lamorinda increase its appeal. "There are so many recreational opportunities in our area," Hood said. "Younger, energetic families are choosing the area in part because of all the activities available to them. And large yards, someplace for the kids to play, are also a big plus."

Hood added that Lamorinda is still more affordable than San Francisco, Marin or the Peninsula, and the commute to the business centers is typically easier. "It's a big draw anytime people can keep within 30-45 minutes of San Francisco's financial district," he noted. Anton Danilovich from Sotheby's International Realty concurred. "People are getting more 'bang for their buck' when moving here.

"We're seeing young professionals who were living in San Francisco moving to Lamorinda to raise their families," Danilovich continued. "A large house here is probably the same price as the two-bedroom loft or condo they're leaving. A \$2 million home in Lafayette would probably be \$6 million in Palo Alto or \$4 million in Marin."

One thing Danilovich noted is that often people moving to the suburbs "like the pricing but not the housing options. The style of houses in this area hasn't changed much over the years," he said. "I've had clients asking for contemporary homes and they don't want to look at anything else." He notes that these are typically the people that have been living in the city, in one of those newer ultra-modern, ultra-sleek high-rise apartment buildings. "They're telling me they don't want to spend several million dollars and end up living in their parents' house," he stated.

Hood agreed that people searching for homes in Lamorinda are looking for more contemporary designs. "Younger families tend to like higher ceilings, open space, less compartmentalized styles," he reported. Dudum Del Santo has found the same thing. She noted that while the craftsman and farmhouse style homes you might see on HGTV are popular, "people also like the sleek, clean lines of the contemporary design." Sothebys Maribel Cribb added that simplicity and energy efficiency are also key features homebuyers are looking for.

Danilovich told about a Lafayette house he recently sold. By doing a significant style and design rehab, "we literally doubled the value of the home without adding any square footage," he said. "You can't believe the dramatic difference high quality new floors, paint, tile, door knobs and even hinges can make." Admittedly, the kitchen layout was changed and opened up but, according to Danilovich, "most everything else was purely aesthetic."

People would rather move into a home that's been upgraded and modernized, Dudum Del Santo noted. "They'd rather pay a little more, even wait a little longer, for that move-in ready house," she said.

No one has to tell those of us lucky enough to live here: Lamorinda is a very desirable place to be. According to the Contra Costa Association of Realtors, home sales continued their fast pace of activity in the first quarter of 2017 with 67 of the 90 homes sold going for more than their asking price and spending an average of only 27 days on the market. Looking at the current number of "sold" or "pending" signs throughout the community, it appears that the second quarter, often the busiest in the real estate world, will be even better.

We know the schools in our area are outstanding. (In fact, the three Lamorinda high schools ranked in the top 100 - out of more than 2,300 - in California, according to U.S. News and World Report's 2017 High School Rankings, with Campolindo and Miramonte in the top 30.) And the weather we enjoy is about as good as it gets.

But is that why people choose to move here? Julie Dudum Del Santo of Dudum Real Estate believes those factors are definitely two of the most important reasons. And most realtors agree; Jim Colhoun of Alain Pinel

Colhoun agreed. "Most working couples simply don't have the time or energy to renovate."

Once here, Lamorinda homebuyers may never want to leave. As one longtime resident recently said, "Why would I want to live anywhere else?"



Photos provided



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