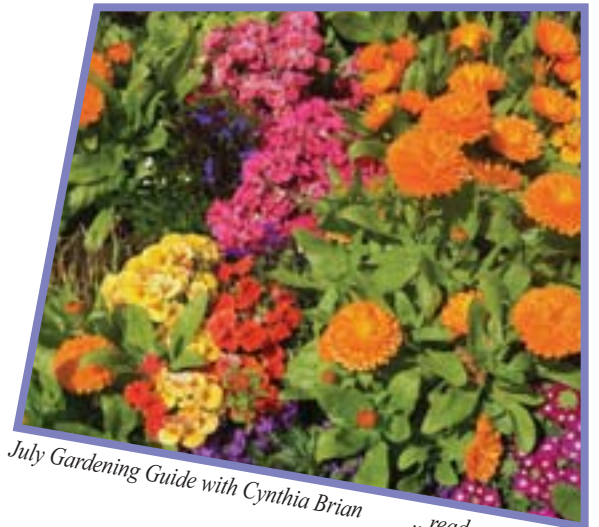


Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Fire transforms homeowner

By Cathy Dausman



Joe and Betsy Magagna's home after the North Bay fire.

Photos provided

“If I were 10 years younger, I’d be rebuilding,” says former North Bay resident Betsy Magagna. It’s summer and Magagna, dressed in shorts and a tee, looks happy, relaxed and tan sitting on the deck of her rental home on a Lamorinda hillside.

Less than a year ago Magagna and her husband Joe were feeling “very settled” in the Santa Rosa home they had purchased 10 years previously, having retired from Chicago to be near family. With a strong network of friends and activities, the couple anticipated living in that house for another 10 years.

Magagna filled her home with books, a collection of artwork 50 years in the making and furnishings from grandparents and in-laws – an 18th century mantle clock, Limoges and Haviland china, a 1915 wedding photo and Magagna’s beloved grand piano. A photo taken several years ago shows 16 rose bushes in full bloom along the backyard fence and deer grazing on the golf course just beyond.

“We were very happy there,” Magagna says. “The last thing on our mind was fire.”

That all changed Oct. 8. Magagna called 911 that night to report smelling smoke; she was told it had drifted in from a fire to the south. But three hours later police were rushing house to house, frantically knocking on doors, compelling residents to leave – now.

Magagna grabbed her purse and iPad, asked her husband about his medications and the couple, dressed only in shoes, shorts and a T-shirt, drove away. ... continued on page D4