

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 05 Issue 25 Wednesday, February 15, 2012



Going Solar—Two Years Later
...read on page D6

Lessons Learned from a Remodel

By Sophie Braccini

Everyone said it couldn't be done in four months, but it was—just one week after the estimated completion date—the total remodel of a ranch house that added 800 square feet and rebuilt the entire interior; all that was left at one point was a wall. But a stressful four months it was, for homeowners who had never remodeled anything, not even a closet. We survived, without

a single, major fight.

One month into our new space, we're still settling down and after the last check was cut to the contractor we had to admit that we went over our budget by 20 percent. Was it worth it? We are sure that our living space is much more pleasant. The financial wisdom of it all remains to be assessed.

Our ranch house presented some challenges: Two of our three kids shared a bedroom, the entertainment space was far from optimal, and the galley kitchen was not the hub of our family life. When we looked for a larger space, we found out that our fixer-upper home would be hard to sell in the current market; in fact, two of our neighbors took their homes off the market because of insufficient or failed offers.

We had problems in the past finding the right design for a remodel. We thought our request was simple: add a bedroom, a bathroom, a dining room, and transform the kitchen. But our lot, with its pie-slice shape and a hill behind, was not an easy fix.

... continued on page D4



The new dining room has a western exposure.

Photos Andy Scheck



IF I HAD A BUYER FOR YOUR HOME WOULD YOU SELL IT?

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Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

City	Last reported:	LOWEST AMOUNT:	HIGHEST AMOUNT:
LAFAYETTE	6	\$425,000	\$2,200,000
MORAGA	3	\$420,000	\$1,285,000
ORINDA	3	\$215,000	\$929,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal REsource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California REsource. Neither Cal REsource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

LAFAYETTE

461 Donegal Way, \$425,000, 3 Bdrms, 1548 SqFt, 1967 YrBlt, 1-19-12;

Previous Sale: \$740,000, 05-22-06

3392 Las Huertas Road, \$1,350,000, 3 Bdrms, 2090 SqFt, 1956 YrBlt, 1-20-12;

Previous Sale: \$1,500,000, 06-03-11

8 Lois Lane, \$2,220,000, 7 Bdrms, 8801 SqFt, 1985 YrBlt, 1-19-12;

Previous Sale: \$1,260,000, 09-03-99

750 Los Palos Drive, \$560,000, 3 Bdrms, 1674 SqFt, 1951 YrBlt, 1-12-12

3272 Woodview Drive, \$905,000, 3 Bdrms, 2612 SqFt, 1955 YrBlt, 1-12-12;

Previous Sale: \$583,000, 10-08-98

850 Reliez Station Road, \$880,000, 4 Bdrms, 3283 SqFt, 1980 YrBlt, 1-18-12;

Previous Sale: \$850,000, 09-27-00

MORAGA

775 Augusta Drive, \$1,285,000, 3 Bdrms, 2456 SqFt, 1974 YrBlt, 1-18-12;

Previous Sale: \$1,190,000, 09-07-06

161 Fairfield Place, \$801,000, 5 Bdrms, 2521 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 1-20-12

7 Josefa Place, \$420,000, 2 Bdrms, 1847 SqFt, 1984 YrBlt, 1-19-12;

Previous Sale: \$730,000, 07-27-07

ORINDA

73 Brookwood Road #31, \$215,000, 1 Bdrms, 673 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 1-18-12

237 La Espiral, \$929,000, 2 Bdrms, 2338 SqFt, 1937 YrBlt, 1-18-12;

Previous Sale: \$140,000,

66 Tara Road, \$600,000, 3 Bdrms, 1404 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 1-6-12

Lamorinda Foreclosures recorded

LAFAYETTE

Highland Road, 94549, JP Morgan Chase Bank, 01-12-12, \$431,145, 1924 sf, 4 bd

Oak Street, 94549, Bank of New York, 01-19-12, \$542,547, 1394 sf, 2 bd

Pleasant Hill Road, 94549, Flagstar Bank, 01-17-12, \$439,200, 1020 sf, 2 bd

Westminster Place, 94549, Bank of America, 01-17-12, \$733,140, 2845 sf, 5 bd

MORAGA

Ascot Drive #10, 94556, Osmond Murdock Limited, 01-09-12, \$148,300, 1130 sf, 2 bd

ORINDA

La Cresta Road, 94563, RWW Properties, 01-12-12, \$623,865, 2025 sf, 4 bd

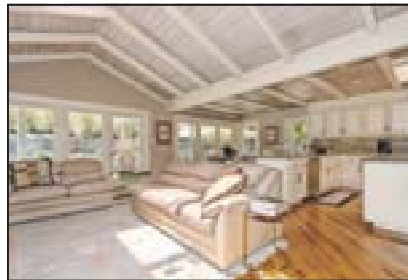
Loma Linda Court, 94563, US Bank, 01-18-12, \$669,237, 2459 sf, 3 bd



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Happy Valley Pristine Property!

3819 Palo Alto Drive, Lafayette

3,469 Sq. Ft.* .75 Acre*

3 Bedrooms + Large Living Suite, 4 Baths

Beautifully Updated, Single Level Home
 Great Happy Valley Neighborhood with Cul-de-Sacs
 Lovely Private Yard with Pool, Views of the Surrounding Hills
 Kitchen/Family Room + Large Living Suite perfect as a Second
 Family Room/Office/4th Bd or In-Law Quarters
 Walls of Glass and Eleven Skylights
 Wonderful Indoor/Outdoor Access, Great Entertainer
 Walking Path up street to Happy Valley School
Offered at \$1,499,000



*per Public Records

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Tony Cristiani
 925.785.8948

Moraga. Fabulous Tuscan Designed Estate Home on 11 ACRE hillside in Moraga. Approx. 1 acre vineyard & separate temp. controlled wine room. 4 bed, 3.5 baths, approx. 4,600 sq. ft. Great room, hardwood & the finest of materials thru-out! **\$2,150,000**



Dale Price
 925.785.9035

Alamo. Prime Westside loc. Level .89 acre w/room for in-law, pool or grapes. 5th bdrm large studio style w/separate bath & entry far end from other bdrms. Modern prof. kitchen w/ Rose Granite counters. Brazilian Hardwood in entry/Kitchen. New carpet, paint. **\$1,450,000**



Jay Weymouth
 925.915.1100

Alamo Oaks. REBUILT AS NEW. Level ac w/Pool, Heritage Oak, meandering walking paths, circular drive & appr 3700 sf.GOURMET KITCHEN Brazilian granite, Dacor 5 burner, walk around island, hardwood, high ceilings,arched windows, Custom lighting. Master w/spa-like bth. Bonus rm AU Pair w/SEPARATE KITCHEN & entry or 4 bd, 3.5 bths . **\$1,399,000**

Castro Valley: 510.690.9600
 Livermore: 925.447.9000

Danville: 925.838.4100
 Montclair: 510.739.4000

Fremont: 510.739.4000
 San Ramon: 925.242.9000

Lafayette: 925.283.9200
 Pleasanton: 925.847.8900



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Lessons Learned from a Remodel

... continued from page D1



An abundance of natural light now fills the kitchen.

But our lot, with its pie-slice shape and a hill behind, was not an easy fix. We finally asked Allan Sayles, a local architect, for his input – he came up with a great vision that pleased us all.

Having attended Design Review Board and Planning Commission meetings, I knew that following the Town's guidelines and getting the neighbors on board would save us time and money. I checked the Town's municipal code: it is accessible online at moraga.ca.us (use the quick links on the left), and paid attention to the setbacks in my zoning area.

The architect also checked and we asked for the meeting with the Town's Planning Department before we finalized the drawings. Planners took the time to look at the plan, offered their comments and confirmed that we should be able to get administrative approval. I visited all my neighbors before submitting the drawing as well, offering to show them the plans.

The rule is that neighbors receive a notification from the Town when the plans are submitted and can appeal if they feel that the remodel would compromise their privacy or would be out of character with the neighborhood. We got the Town and County permits easily. Do

not underestimate the price of the permits; everybody wants a share, including the School District when someone is adding more than 500 square feet.

That brings me to the "soft costs" associated with the project – architect, Title 24 compliance, structural engineer, permits, moving costs, renting another place; all of these added 20 percent to the cost of the construction itself.

When large municipal projects are budgeted, 10 percent is included for incidentals – the things that come up during the construction process. Among the major surprises of our project were the need for a new furnace and accompanying duct work, a new roof and hardwood floor, and a serious draining problem. Then there were a few add-ons like a new pathway to the entrance, a terrace on the hill, two additional skylights, and more recessed LED lights.

We had decided on a fixed-price bid and had four contractors submit proposals. The lower bidder, Daniel Leleu's Lamorinda Construction and Remodel, was also the one who promised to finish everything within four months. We signed the contract on August 15, moved out within a few days and the contractor started digging the new foundation right away.



Daniel Leleu builds a new foundation at the front of the home.

Leleu worked with his nephew, Ben, his brother David and one worker, Jesus. They did almost everything themselves, from digging the dirt, to laying the tiles in the bathrooms. After a month we were fortunate enough to be able to rent the house next door. From there we saw them everyday, in the heat of September and October and in the cold of December, from dawn to dusk, moving our project forward.

The rapid construction was a blessing in many ways, but represented a challenge for us. Every day choices had to be made and since we were in charge of all the finishes, a lot of research, visits and negotiating had to take place for everything from the floors, to cabinets, paints, tiles, etcetera. That's where we could have used some additional help—working with an interior designer would have eased the stress.

Now we have a very large kitchen with a center island and a charming breakfast area, and lots of natural light. The new dining room has proven very functional for the few guests we've had so far. The mud room, where shoes are dropped and bags hanged, is currently underutilized, largely because there is still so much stuff in the garage, but it will certainly prove useful in the future.

My favorite new space is the master bathroom. It feels private and serene; perfect for long, relaxing baths.

I am enjoying the sense of cleanliness and comfort that was hard to find in a house that had not been touched since it was built, some 60 years ago. Now the whole house gets warm when we turn on the heat, and the bathrooms no longer feel damp all the time. We have learned so much about construction and material that if we ever remodel again we will feel like pros.

Even the cats have adopted the new house—this must be a good sign.



The happy homeowners.

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5 Moraga Way
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New Listing! 426 Castello, Lafayette



Located in the heart of Burton Valley. 5+ bedrooms, 3 baths, just over 3000 sq.ft. Desirable family home within walking distance to Burton Valley Elementary, bike trails, Community Center and Swim Club. Call for a private showing.

\$849,000



Lily Wescott

925.330.6108

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License # 01368005

Benefits of the Pre-Sale Home Inspection

by Andi Peterson Brown

There's always been location, location, location. And now there's inspect, inspect, inspect. In today's real estate market, contracts are almost always contingent upon property inspections. And while buyers are traditionally the party that initiates this process, it is now becoming more common for sellers to perform pre-sale home inspections before their homes hit the market.

A pre-sale home inspection has numerous benefits that can make for a smoother and less stressful close of escrow. Those benefits include the ability to:

Set a More Realistic Price – Having a more accurate picture of a home's true condition is essential to setting a price to which the market will respond positively. If desire and budget allow, repairs can be done ahead of time, preempting surprises down the line and allowing the home to make a first impression that is as appealing as it is accurate.

Absorb Impact – Buyers tend to be more receptive to potential issues when they are aware of them up front. Costly and unexpected surprises that pop up halfway through the deal can be challenging for both parties to accept and sometimes become deal breakers.

– Buyers will still perform their own inspections, but a pre-sale inspection will allow for fewer surprises that come with a price tag. Awareness of problems ahead of time allows a seller to mitigate issues and/or market the home with those repair costs in mind.



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Going Solar—Two Years Later

By Andy Scheck



The biggest of our three solar panel arrays holds 16 of the 32 panels.

Photo Andy Scheck

The time of big bucks government tax rebates or credits from solar panel installation is over, so is it still worth helping the state meet its renewable energy goals? California's goal is to increase its procurement from eligible renewable energy resources to 33% of total by 2020.

Our 6.5Kw home solar system, purchased in 2009, gave us 44% in rebates and incentives. An installer told us today's system price is 7% less, but the rebates are only 33%. The same system we bought in 2009 would cost \$2,700 more today.

Let's look at what made us invest in solar power originally. Our motivation was a mix of saving money, helping the environment, adding to our house value and being one of a growing group of renewable energy producers. Like many we try to save energy whenever we can but with a pool, air conditioning and a home office we use power all day long.

In 2008 we attended a presentation by a solar company at St. Mary's College. Shortly afterwards we contacted the company to take measurements and give us a

quote.

Roof position and shade had a big influence on the placement and performance of our system. We decided to take out one tree in front of the house. We planned to do that sooner or later anyway. That opened up a better roof position, which allowed us to get higher performance while installing a smaller system.

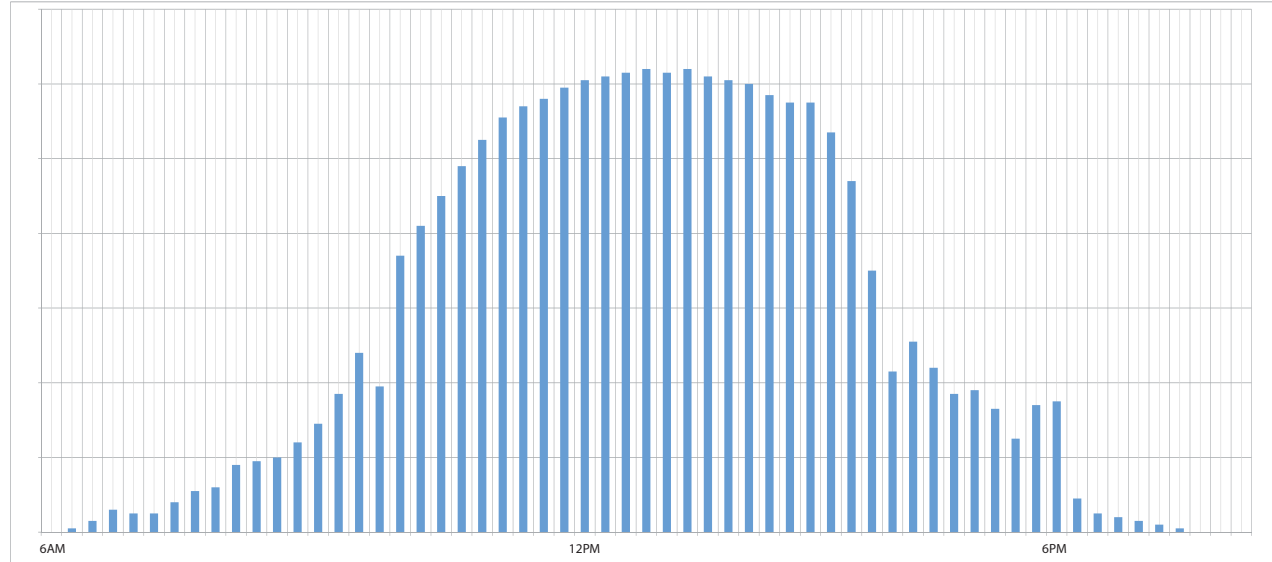
Take the time to talk about different installation options with a solar system provider. Solar systems are designed for 30 years of use and a slightly better performance will add up over the years.

Solar panels produce DC power which has to be converted to AC before being uploaded to the grid. That is done with an inverter; ours is located inside the garage because we didn't like the look of the box outside. Inverters last approximately 12 years and the replacement cost is about \$3000. The solar panel mounts and frames are black to match our black roof.

The predictions for our generated power and energy savings were as promised. ... continued on next page

In 2010 and 2011 we offset our power usage by 44% and we saved about 65% on our power bill. That means that our investment will be paid for by our energy savings in less than six years. In moments of high production our meter runs backwards, but PG&E doesn't buy power back.

In the last two years the system needed no extra care or maintenance. We are very happy with our decision to install solar panels and would recommend them both for financial and green reasons.



This chart represents a typical energy production day in the summer. Most solar companies offer a monitoring system that tracks the daily, monthly and yearly production of a solar system.



The indoor inverter is mounted on a garage wall

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So don't wait until it's too late, call your local ISA certified Arborist at Advance Tree Service and Landscaping to help you be safe.

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ORINDA



New Listing

0 Monterey Terrace

Last undeveloped lot in Monterey Terrace, an exclusive neighborhood of multimillion dollar custom homes. Beaut pvt 1.15 ac site has gorgeous views, backs to open space.

Offered at \$329,000

ORINDA



65 La Espiral

Villa Romantica! One of OCC's finest homes. 4349 sf, 4bd/4ba on .69 acre knoll setting w/lvl lawn, saltwater pool, patios/terraces. Incredible attn to detail, numerous upper-end amenities.

Offered at \$2,595,000

LAFAYETTE



3398 Ridge Road

Special Lafayette Trail 4bd/3ba home nestled among oaks with views of hills on .29 acre. Easy walk to downtown, shopping, restaurants & 9 yrs. of schools. Backs to bike trail.

Offered at \$869,000

ROSSMOOR



2600 Tice Creek Circle

Located right on the Golf Course, this 2bd/1.5ba home has a beautiful remodeled kitchen, plantation shutters, crown mouldings and an inside laundry. Easy walk to new restaurant!

Offered at \$239,000

ORINDA



New Listing

130 Meadow View Road

Cute, cozy ranch style home on fabulous .60 acre lot in the Glorietta neighborhood. Updated thruout with high end finishes. This turnkey property is a must see!

Offered at \$875,000

MORAGA



101 Brookline Street

Detached spacious 2bd/2ba + office in MCC. Wimbledon model, large bedrooms, vaulted ceilings. Great views from top of the hill. Flat yd in back, potential patio, dog run, etc.

Offered at \$695,000

LAFAYETTE



8 Hawks Hill Court

Absolutely stunning pano views of Mt. Diablo, hills & Carquinez straits. Custom built in 2006 w/master suite, LR, DR, FR on main level, 3 more bdms & 2nd fam rm downstairs.

Offered at \$1,458,000

WALNUT CREEK



New Listing

1300 Walden Road #124

Why Rent? Terrific 1st floor end unit condo in prime location! Looks sharp & ready to move in. Detached gar & commun pool. Next to Iron Horse Trail & mins to Bart & downtown.

Offered at \$289,000

ORINDA



New Listing

5 La Noria

Wonderful 4bd/3.5ba mid-century modern on .70 ac in OCC. Floor to ceiling windows, hdwd in LR & DR. Sep 200+ sf ofc. Fab setting, privacy, views of golf course.

Offered at \$1,295,000

MORAGA



1825 St. Andrews Drive

Stylishly updated Sequoyah detached 4bd/2.5 MCC home of 3424 sq. ft. Spacious kitchen/famrily rm combo. French drs open to courtyard, plenty of storage, striking views.

Offered at \$979,000

LAFAYETTE



New Listing

3819 Palo Alto Drive

Beautifully updated Happy Valley sgl lvl 3bd/ 4ba home incl lg living suite w/frple & bath (2nd fam rm/ofc/in-law/4th bd) on .75 ac. Lovely pvt yd with pool & views.

Offered at \$1,499,000

WALNUT CREEK



New Listing

1520 Whitecliff Way

Rudgear Estates 5bd/2.5ba, 2604 sf jewel in tranquil country setting yet downtown close! Updated kitchen {& baths, ofc, plantation shutters, commun pool, lvl lawn, patio & play area.

Offered at \$799,000

ORINDA



New Listing

33 Bates Blvd.

Vacation at home at this beautiful property reminiscent of the finest resorts. Updated open floor plan, amazing gourmet kitchen, spa bath. Rare .61 ac lvl view lot w/pool, spa, sports ct.

Offered at \$1,595,000

LAFAYETTE



3245 Judith Lane

Delightful 3bd/2ba 1204 sf hm at end of lane in beautiful oak tree setting. Updated kitchen & baths, spacious deck & patio, skylights, tranquil setting yet close to dwntwn & Bart.

Offered at \$549,000

LAFAYETTE



4145 Canyon Road

Happy Valley estate - one-of-a-kind kitchen & Mt. Diablo views are just two of the features of this gorgeous home.

www.4145CanyonRd.com.

Offered at \$2,950,000

WALNUT CREEK



New Listing

687 La Vista Road

Estate home of 4bd/3+ baths in heart of Lakewood area, dramatic interior, .48 acre pvt park-like grounds backing to open space, vineyard too! Quick walk to swim & tennis club.

Offered at \$1,189,000

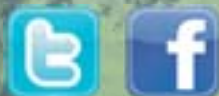
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