

HOMES

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2023

‘Very different landscapes’:
Modern Richmond Week returns with
events that explore ‘Site + Place’

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Homes Pulled From Listings Pull-In Buyers

BY MARILYN KENNEDY MELIA | CTW FEATURES

With a shortage of homes for sale in most markets, serious buyers keep a constant watch on the latest new listings.

But sometimes, the right home could have been listed months ago, and the discouraged seller “delists,” or takes it off the market.

The chances that a seller will welcome a buyer after he’s stepped away from the pressures of keeping his home showing-ready depend on many factors, including “the owner’s willingness to sell, the buyer’s approach and the attractiveness of the offer,” says Joy Aumann, co-founder of JoyLuxurySoCalRealty in La Jolla, CA.

History Lessons

The first step, though, is for a buyer and his agent to dig-up information. “Agents can access public records and disclosures, which may provide details such as the property’s ownership history, previous sale prices, tax

assessments and any recorded liens,” says Aumann.

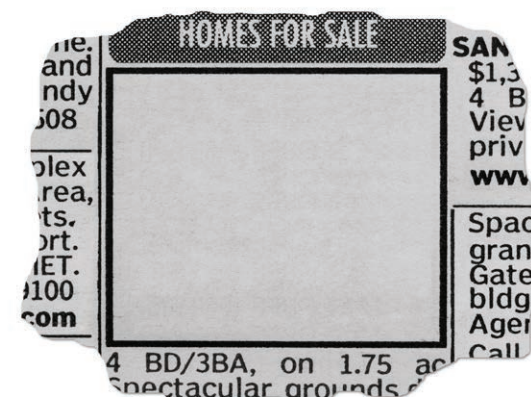
Fair Price

Given that home prices spiked during the pandemic years and in many markets have now dropped somewhat, “It’s not uncommon for sellers to delist their property if they initially set an unrealistically high price and were unable to secure a sale,” says Eric Bramlett of Austin, TX- based Bramlett Residential.

“In these situations, sellers may still be motivated to move,” Bramlett adds. But, “both the buyer and the seller should have a clear understanding of the property’s value.”

Usual Procedures

Although a buyer made the initial contact and possibly even a price offer, it doesn’t mean that all that’s needed is for both parties to close on the sale. “I advise the owner of the delisted home of all the regulations



and requirement for selling in the local area, including advising them of any further assessments or inspections necessary,” shares Bramlett.

Worth Trying

No telling whether a homeowner will be receptive to selling, of course. But armed with data and also “asking the seller why they pulled their property off the market will open up a conversation about what their needs are,” says Ron Resha of Coldwell Banker, Canton MA.

“You can reassess what their needs are, and what you can offer that may be different,” Resha concludes.

The art of pricing real estate

ASK THE EXPERT

BY PETER G. MILLER | CTW FEATURES

Question: Do we price our home based on the latest sales, or something a little higher so we have negotiating room?

Answer: Pricing real estate is part data, part art and part magic. Even when two appraisers look at the same property the estimate values are likely to be different. The marketing approach that might be sensible in one place may produce anything but a quick sale in another.

The place to start is with a good understanding of the local market. Comps – recent and nearby sales reported in public records – can certainly help, but they often lack the very information you want.

For example, if two homes sell for \$500,000 it does not mean both owners get the same check at closing. One may

have sold for \$500,000 and the other may have been sold for \$500,000 plus the cost of a new roof, HVAC repair, and new carpets. While the comps list the same price for both properties, the value of each transaction is different.

Thus, while comps have value, it’s also important to visit open houses when possible. What you’ll see is that no two homes are alike. They vary in terms of such things as location, condition, decor, appliances, traffic, etc. It’s a good idea to keep notes for each property you see, including what made each home attractive and what you might want to avoid for marketing purposes.

While at open houses it’s a good time to speak with the agents you meet. Ask about market trends, the latest sales, neighborhood news and current financing. As we’ve seen during the past year,

rising interest rates reduce sales activity and that can give buyers more leverage.

Alternatively, maybe there are fewer sales because of limited inventory. A market where there isn’t much to buy surely helps owners.

One useful measure of local real estate activity is to ask how many days homes have been on the market and how that figure compares with a year ago. In general, if days on the market (DOM) are significantly higher, buyers are favored, if the DOM is falling then sellers have an edge.

Always take a look at systems and appliances, things that can wear out over time. The latest and greatest items are usually in demand, especially if there is remaining warranty coverage that can be transferred to a new owner.

You’ll want to speak with local real

estate brokers, surely more than one.

Each will have a listing presentation that includes a comparative market analysis (CMA). While it may be flattering to get a high CMA, if you speak with several brokers and one has an especially high or low CMA you might wonder if such a valuation is realistic.

Lastly, don’t forget about the part art and part magic aspects of the process. The broker you pick will be representing your interests in the marketplace. You want someone with a combination of experience and competition, but salesmanship is also important. Think about the open houses you’ve visited, and which stood out because of good presentation.



Question for the Expert?

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Josh McCullar Architects PLLC

‘Very different landscapes’:

Modern Richmond Week returns with events that explore ‘Site + Place’

By Doug Childers | Homes Correspondent
Cover photo | Ansel Olson Photography

For at least the first half of the 20th century, Richmond enjoyed a long and staid marriage to the Colonial Revival style, with seemingly thousands of white-columned porches and symmetrical red-brick façades marking the fecundity of the relationship’s success.

In recent years, though, the city’s quiet flirtation with Modern and Contemporary styles has gotten more attention, thanks in part to the efforts of Modern Richmond, a nonprofit group that organizes tours of Modern-style residential and commercial buildings.

Now, it’s time to sightsee again. The organization will host the fourth annual Modern Richmond Week from May 16 to May 20. This year’s theme is “Site + Place.”

“We wanted to tie Modern buildings to distinctive landscape



Ansel Olson Photography



Photo © Keith Isaacs



Photo © Keith Isaacs

design,” said Mimi Sadler, historical architect and a board member of Modern Richmond. “So we picked properties where we knew there was a designed landscape context.”

Two private residences will be open to visitors, including a recently built home in Richmond’s Westhampton neighborhood and a Contemporary-style vacation home in Mathews County.

An adaptive-reuse project overseen by Richmond-based 3north will also be on the tour. The firm converted a 1940s warehouse just north of Scott’s Addition into a corporate headquarters, showroom and fabrication facility for McKinnon and Harris, a local company that designs and produces outdoor furniture.

“Overall, these will be tours of very different residential and commercial landscapes,” Sadler said.

In addition, Jill Nolt, a landscape architect and principal of Charlottesville-based Water Street Studio, will give a presentation at VCU’s Singleton Center for the Visual Arts.

“I’m really excited to hear her talk about the intersection of designed landscapes and architecture,” Sadler said.

‘A timeless and distinctive’ urban home
The first house on the tour is a striking example of how rapidly the area around the intersection of Libbie and Grove avenues is transforming, often with a touch of Modern or Contemporary flair.

Previously, a single-story house from the 1950s stood on the site. But the owners wanted something more suitable for their needs.

The project posed challenges, said Josh McCullar, whom the homeowners hired to design the new house.

“Not only was the site narrow and we would have to comply with additional setbacks, but the topographic change from the front to the rear of the lot was a full story in vertical drop and very wet at its north end,” said McCullar, principal of Richmond-based Josh McCullar Architects.

McCullar’s solution was to set the new, 3,000-square-foot house in a landscape that transitioned from a semi-public, sunny forecourt in the front to a private sunken garden in the rear.

“This cross-section between public and private space was a very early clue in how we would organize the house and its urban garden simultaneously,” McCullar said.

The homeowners hired Anna Boeschstein, founding principal of Charlottesville-based Grounded, to serve as the project’s landscape architect.

“She’s a Modernist whose complementary skills would allow us to achieve reciprocity between architecture and the landscape, and I think it turned out quite well,” McCullar said.

For the house itself, McCullar designed an exterior that features lime-washed brick and a recessed oak-and-glass entry loggia, as well as



Adjacent ugliness

An unsightly house next door can impact your home for sale

By Erik J. Martin | CTW FEATURES

You've prepped your home carefully, priced it right and are ready to put it on the market. But before you list it, there's one box you forgot to check off: What to do about your next-door neighbor's downright unsightly abode.

That's a problem, say the pros, because an unkempt adjacent property can turn off prospective buyers or force you to lower your asking price.

"An ugly home next door can create questions about who the neighbor is and what sort of issues a potential owner may encounter once moved in," says Matt Miner, co-principal, and owner of the Get Happy at

Home team of Seattle-located Coldwell Banker Bain. "It creates uncertainty, and buyers may choose to pass on your home for sale because they don't like unknowns."

From trash piled up in the yard to overgrown grass and weeds to faded exteriors sporting peeling paint, the eyesores can add up fast. Other red flags include beer cans strewn about the grounds, broken or boarded-up windows, sagging gutters and pools of stagnant water.

"A house with an unideal color, yellow grass, spider webs and junked cars can also certainly deter some buyers and give the impression that the neighbor-

hood isn't well maintained or has residents that just don't care. That can cause a substantial perception of declined value for your property, potentially devaluing it by as much as 10 percent," Andrew Abas, managing director at Carlyle Capital in Irvine, California, says.

Keep in mind that some blights are light and not worth fussing over.

"Faded paint on the house next door shouldn't worry you," says Alexander Lurie, founder of San Francisco-headquartered The Lurie Group. Additionally, "deferred maintenance that can't be seen, like a neighboring roof with a hole in it, probably isn't a concern," says Abas.

While it's not your responsibility to fix more visible blemishes, it's in your best interest to act—at least with words.

"Communication is key. Politely asking your neighbor to mow the lawn or clean up yard trash is totally reasonable. You just need to overcome the potential awkwardness that might ensue," suggests Ben Mizes, CEO of St. Louis-based Clever Real Estate.

The key word here is "politely." You don't want to come across as pushy, hostile, disgusted or threatening. Aim to establish a friendly relationship with your block mate. If that doesn't work, volunteer to do some of the minor work yourself—no strings attached.

"If it will help get your home sold, it's worth it to even offer a little financial support to your neighbor by promising to pay for some improvements, like lawn or landscape repair," notes Lurie.

If your neighbor balks at these requests, activate plan B: camouflage.

"Put up tall shrubs or landscaping to hide their property, which can improve your curb appeal while also curbing the unattractive view," Mizes recommends.

"If there are windows in your home that look out into their not-so-nice yard, try to obscure the view with plantings. Your best bet is it make that unappealing home less visible from all the rooms inside your home for sale," says Miner.

Another smart tactic if the neighbor won't make the improvement you want? Push the narrative that this is only a temporary issue.

"Have your agent and the buyer's agent emphasize that it's only a matter of time until that house gets fixed up, since the neighborhood is improving in such an upward trend right now. Note that people in many markets like yours often fiercely seek out ugly homes they see as great potential to buy, upgrade and sell," says Mark Cianciulli, agent, and co-founder of The CREM Group in Long Beach, California.

Prepare, however, for worst-case scenarios. If your home hasn't sold in a desired period of time, consider plan C.

"If your house isn't moving, even if you can't determine if the neighbor's house is causing the issue or not, a price cut may be warranted," Abas says. ■

MODERN continued from page 7



Photo © Keith Isaacs

10-foot windows on the first floor. The interior has three bedrooms and 4½ baths. Among the interior standouts is a custom, white-oak library.

A 266-square-foot art studio is tucked away at the rear of the property.

The finished project meets the homeowners' original request to be "both timeless and distinctive, and look as fresh in 50 or 100 years as it does today," McCullar said.

A vacation home that blurs 'inside' and 'outside'

The second residence on the tour is the vacation home architect Sanford "Sandy" Bond designed for himself and his wife, art gallery owner Page Bond, in Mathews County. The 12-acre property, which the couple bought in 2001, has 400 feet of waterfront at the mouth of the Piankatank River.

Initially, Bond planned to build an expansive, 3,500-square-foot house, but the price tag – roughly \$2 million – proved to be a little too high. At Page's suggestion, he scaled it back.

"She said, 'Let's do a wharf cottage – something we can sweep out in 10 minutes,' said Bond, cofounder of 3north and now principal emeritus with the firm. "It was the right idea."

That's not to say the redesign – completed in 2018 – was simple.

"I must have done 30 different designs for the house," Bond said. "The hardest thing an architect can do is to design his own house."

The final design called for a 1,000-square-foot, Contemporary-style home that featured a soaring, 17-foot-high main living and dining area, with a pair of oversized bifold doors in the southeast corner that could be opened to the outdoors. Another standout feature: a 17-foot roof overhang that provides shade for a terrace facing the water.

Siting the house on the property was a critical part of the design process.

"A design for a site like this is all about developing continuity with the place, feeling that one is part of the outside and the interior is merely a covered area of the exterior – i.e., bio-design," Bond said.

Perhaps most importantly, that meant siting the house based on water views.

"It's situated to get the maximum benefit of the view," Bond said. "We are 17 feet above the water and see Fishing Bay, Stove Point, the Chesapeake Bay and Gwynn's Island looking east. Every



Photo © Keith Isaacs

day, we get a sea breeze, and because it drives the mosquitoes back, we can open the house to the outside."

Including the house on this year's Modern Richmond Week tour was an easy decision, Bond said.

"Page and I have been longtime sup-

porters of Modern Richmond, and as an architect, I want to make more people in Richmond aware of Contemporary design, which is, of course, my preferred style," he said.

For more information, visit moder-richmond.org. ■

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