

Spring 2015 HomeLifeStyle

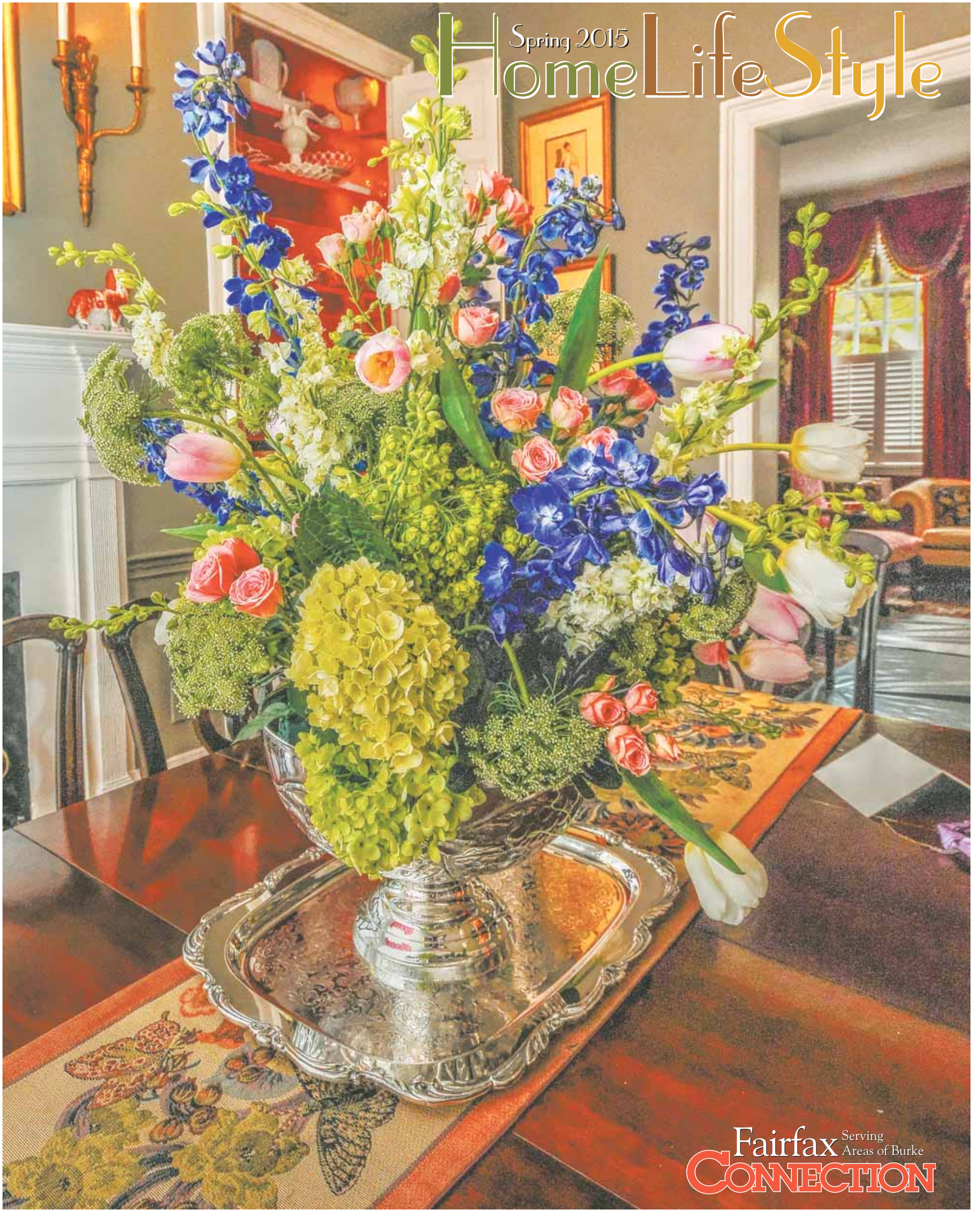


PHOTO BY LOUISE KRAFFT/VIRGINIA HISTORIC GARDEN TOUR

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Historic Virginia in Gardens

Tour includes a rare private look at special properties in Fairfax County, Old Town Alexandria and Leesburg.

The Virginia Historic Garden Tour is an 8-day event that stretches across the Commonwealth. Each spring visitors are welcomed to over 250 of Virginia's most beautiful gardens, homes and historic landmarks. This event provides the opportunity to see unforgettable gardens at the peak of Virginia's springtime color, as well as beautiful houses sparkling with more than 2,000 flower arrangements created by Garden Club of Virginia members.

The Clifton Historic District, registered as a Virginia Historic Landmark, was a Civil War railroad stop and is filled with shops, memorable restaurants and restored homes. Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, tended to soldiers after the Battle of



PHOTO COURTESY OF GARDEN CLUB OF FAIRFAX

Nestled in an equestrian neighborhood, a 10,000 square-foot contemporary home was built in 2013 for an active family with young children, and includes a stable.

Second Manassas at St. Mary's Church and the historic Fairfax Station, now a Railroad Museum.

A self-drive tour on April 21 features stables, vineyards, a world-class garden,

Georgian-revival architecture, and a 10,000 square-foot contemporary home with a vanishing edge swimming pool – four private

SEE HISTORIC GARDENS, PAGE 4

Old Town Alexandria, Saturday, April 18

Old Town Alexandria was in 1946 the third city in the country to create a historic district to preserve its downtown. Today it has 4,000 buildings with a historic designation. The April 18 walking tour in Old Town includes five row houses with courtyard gardens in this preserved area, and refreshments at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. In addition to the private properties featured, the tour ticket allows access to The Carlyle House Historic Park, Lee-Fendall House Museum and Garden, George Mason's Gunston Hall and George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens. The tour is hosted by The Garden Club of Alexandria and Hunting Creek Garden Club. www.vagardenweek.org

Clifton and Fairfax Station, Tuesday, April 21

This self-drive tour features stables, vineyards, a world-class garden, Georgian-revival architecture, and a 10,000 square-foot contemporary home with a vanishing edge swimming pool – four private homes with gardens and two stables in all. Tour ticket includes a tea at the Clifton Presbyterian Church. Advance Ticket Sales: \$30 at www.vagardenweek.org or email fairfaxtickets@vagardenweek.org. Visit www.gardencluboffairfax.blogspot.com for a list of local retailers selling tickets.

Leesburg, Sunday and Monday, April 19-20

Leesburg was mapped and recognized by the Council of the Colony in 1758. Most of the 11 featured tour properties are located on two historic roads, Edwards Ferry Road and Cornwall Street. The neighborhoods offer a variety of architectural styles and well established gardens. This two-day Towne and Country tour features 11 properties and coincides with the Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival, which takes place on April 18 and 19.

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Spring Pop for the Real Estate Market?

Agents again optimistic for a strong spring

BY TIM PETERSON
THE CONNECTION

Just like last year, real estate agent Ron Kowalski is optimistic coming out of the winter doldrums. He runs Ron Kowalski Real Estate Group with Keller Williams Capital Properties, covering Lorton, Fairfax Station and Springfield.

“Expectations are again high for the spring market,” he said. That’s due in part to mortgage interest rates being attractively low, just like last year. “The rates haven’t gone up, as we all thought.”

Interest rates for a 30-year fixed mortgage, both nationally and in Virginia, weren’t quite as low in April 2014 (4.1-4.2 percent) as the year before (3.3 percent), according to the online real estate database Zillow. But with the economy gradually recovering, agents were feeling a surge coming on.

In 2014, “the year started off strong until we got up to about July and August,” said Rex Reiley, with RE/MAX Allegiance in the Mount Vernon area, “when things started to taper off a bit.”

Agents were also anticipating a raise in rates, but that didn’t happen. And now, the national and state interest rates are currently hovering around 3.8 percent for a 30-year fixed mortgage with a credit rating of 740 to 850 according to Zillow.

Though rates have dipped somewhat from a year ago, prices and available inventory have grown.

In the past year, Fairfax County has seen the average selling price of homes rise from \$491,144 to \$526,786 (a 7.3 percent increase) versus the Mid Atlantic Region average increase of 3.2 percent. Over the same period the number of active listings in the county increased from 1,634 to 2,198 (a 34.5 percent increase over last January). (Source: RealEstate Business Intelligence)

With the spring 2015 market preparing to bloom, agents are hopeful the low rates and available inventory will motivate more buyers and sellers to get off the fence and into the arena. Particularly because it’s unclear when rates might rise again.

“People don’t want to wait,” said Pattie Mancini, whose coverage area with Avery-Hess Realtors includes Springfield. She said her office has been hitting sales goals for the first time in over a year. “With prices going up, and interest rates might be going up, this is the perfect storm.”

Mancini said she’s seeing more “millennials” coming into the market in Springfield, and finding more houses available from older individuals who had been holding out while the market was worse over the last five years.

“The millennials are getting older,” she said, “seeing it’s not such a bad idea, and



PHOTO COURTESY OF PATTIE MANCINI
5409 Yorkshire St., in the Kings Park area of Springfield, listed at \$535,000.



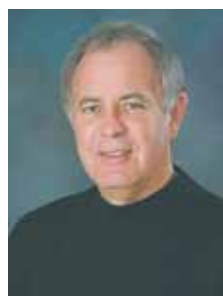
PHOTO COURTESY OF RON KOWALSKI
“The builder, McShay Communities from Springfield, is building four homes on spec since he’s optimistic about the spring market in this price range (\$949,900-\$1.3M),” said Ron Kowalski, of the new McDonald Estates development in Lorton. “We even painted, decorated and staged the model home (pictured, available for \$1.25M), which is rare for a seven-home development.” One active listing is 9324 Dachshund Drive, listed at \$949,900.



PHOTO COURTESY OF REX REILEY
8717 Falkstone Lane in Mt. Vernon Manor, Mount Vernon. “This house went on the market Feb. 25 and a contract was ratified Feb. 28th,” said Rex Reiley. “There were multiple offers because this was listed at \$370,000. The interior needed to be remodeled totally and with its low price, it attracted many investors and builders who will renovate it.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF REX REILEY
4505 Dolphin Lane, located in Yacht Haven, Mount Vernon, is listed at \$875,000. Its renovations include a two-floor addition on a half-acre lot.



Rex Reiley with RE/MAX Allegiance.



Ron Kowalski of Keller Williams Capital.



Pat Richter of Residential Preferred.



Pattie Mancini of Avery-Hess Realtors.

seeing more value in a mortgage than rent.”

Pat Richter with Residential Preferred Properties in Burke could use more sellers putting up their property. With more people gaining confidence in their economic stability, she said there are more buyers looking to “move up” in her area.

“For years, we haven’t had much of a move up market,” Richter said. “Now, people are starting to say this townhouse is

too small, this single family home is too small, and want a bigger one.”

With the move up market and more buyers looking to move into Burke, “It’s a good time to be a buyer,” she said. “But that doesn’t mean prices have escalated tremendously. It’s interesting because assessments all went up. Now starting April 1, we’ll see prices go up a little, pricing for the spring and summer market.”

Fairfax County mailed its 2015 real estate assessment notices Feb. 17: 74 percent of residential properties saw an increase.

SEE LOW INTEREST RATES, PAGE 7

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Historic Virginia in Gardens

FROM PAGE 2

homes with gardens and two stables in all. Tour ticket includes a tea at the Clifton Presbyterian Church.

Tour proceeds fund the restoration and preservation of Virginia's historic gardens, and provide graduate level research fellowships for building comprehensive and ongoing records of historic gardens and landscapes in the Commonwealth, and support the mission of the Garden Club of Virginia.

For a complete list of tours, see www.vagardenweek.org

Virginia Historic Garden Tour in Clifton and Fairfax Station

❖ Redlac Drive, Clifton: Located in a pastoral setting with grazing horses nearby, this graceful 1987 Georgian Revival house draws its elegant inspiration from historic Williamsburg. Large rooms with arching Palladian windows overlook a formal boxwood knot garden and serene five-acre landscape. The hardwood tree canopy shades a hillside azalea and rhododendron garden with a bridge over a swale. Details inside include formal dining and living rooms with deep crown and base molding and regal blue and gold wallpaper. Antiques and the owners' serendipitous flea market finds abound. The foyer, with Currier and Ives prints, leads to the living room with its 1876 grand piano.

The bedrooms upstairs are filled with vintage linens and family heirlooms including the family's first-communion dress, and are connected by a central library furnished with an antique parlor set. Balconies overlook a shaded flagstone patio and swimming pool. Dennis and Cyndy Patrick, owners.

❖ Willowbrook Road, Fairfax Station: Nestled in an equestrian neighborhood, this 10,000-square-foot contemporary home was built in 2013 for an active family with young children on the site of their previous house. A handsome entrance of stone, leaded glass and ironwork leads to a spectacular open-plan living, dining and kitchen area designed by the fun-loving owners with year-round entertaining in mind. The living area contains a double fireplace and a backlit onyx bar. Large doors open to a long covered veranda fitted with retractable screens where family and friends enjoy dining outside during warm months overlooking the infinity-edge swimming pool. Other thoughtful details include an elevator, a home gymnasium and a separate garage for the children's bikes and toys. The immaculate two-stall stable on the property has attached horse trailer storage and is home to a beloved horse and a pony. The wife is an accomplished equestrian as evidenced by a tack room filled with trophies and ribbons. Local equestrians will be in the stable to answer horse-related questions. Garth and Heather Viar, owners.

❖ Also Willowbrook Road, Fairfax Sta-



COURTESY OF GARDEN CLUB OF FAIRFAX

Located in a pastoral setting, this graceful 1987 Georgian Revival house in Clifton draws its inspiration from historic Williamsburg.

tion: Serenity awaits visitors at this single-story California-style property. The experience begins on the long drive that winds past a riding ring and pastures. Slate steps lead to the entrance courtyard, where a koi pond and bamboo fountain set the warm spa-like mood of this wonderful home. The house, purchased in 2003, has been completely renovated by the current owners, and has been personalized with twin studies, an open-plan kitchen. Clean, contemporary and connected to nature, the rooms along the back of the house each open to a series of graceful garden rooms with an entertaining deck, a yoga/meditation deck, an outdoor shower and a seating area surrounding a fire pit. Inside, visitors find delights like a glass conservatory and studio, a relaxing slate tiled guest bath with heated towel bar, solid cherry doors throughout, a master suite with his and hers dressing rooms and a sleek bath with heated marble floors. The eco-friendly, award-winning stable complex contains a four-stall barn, equipment storage, dry lots, round pen, composting system and pastures. Randall and Joan Onders, owners.

❖ Poplar Grove, Lakewood Lane, Fairfax

Station: Time stands still at Poplar Grove. A curving driveway leads visitors through towering oaks and flowering cherry and plum trees to a slower, more gentle way of living. The cream-colored Federal-style home was built in 1964 and renovated quite literally from the ground up in 2001.

The owners, one a landscape architect of world-class talent and the other a graduate of DuPage School of Horticulture and a seventh-generation Virginian, carved a paradise of 18th-century grandeur out of what had been seven overgrown acres. The owners' passion and expertise brought to life a two-level Colonial parterre kitchen garden with boxwood topiary, oyster-shell walkways and a climbing-rose-covered chicken coop. Nearby is a vineyard with over 400 Petit Verdot grape vines. Visit the swimming pool garden and follow a shady path that leads to the secret white garden with a pond and splashing fountain. In fact, fountains can be heard bubbling and splashing in every direction. Another fountain brings wandering guests to an alfresco dining area reminiscent of Charleston. Inside, visitors find grand moldings, sparkling chandeliers and museum-quality artwork and antiques. Master Gardeners will be available to answer questions in the gardens. Charles Prillaman and Parker Jennings, owners.

Nearby places of interest include the Clifton Historic District, St. Mary of Sorrows Catholic Church, Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, and Mason Neck State Park.

More at www.virginiagardenweek.org.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GARDEN CLUB OF FAIRFAX

The self-drive garden tour in Fairfax Station and Clifton in Fairfax County features stables, vineyards, a world-class garden, Georgian-revival architecture, and a stunning 10,000 square-foot contemporary home with a vanishing edge swimming pool – four private homes with gardens and two stables in all.

lost (adj): 1. unable to find the way. 2. not appreciated or understood. 3. no longer owned or known

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Home Improvements Earn Awards

Four Sun Design remodeling projects named Washington-area “Contractor of the Year” winners.

BY JOHN BYRD

It’s been a good year for Sun Design Remodeling.

In January, the full-service design/build remodeler won four “Contractor of the Year” awards from the Washington, D.C. chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). Then, in February, an already locally-honored gourmet kitchen was named category best (“kitchen above \$150k”) in the 10-state southeastern region.

Winning projects include: a rear elevation poolside recreation solution; a French Country gourmet kitchen (the southeastern regional winner); an open kitchen plan in a traditional interior style; and a lower-level build-out designed for use by three generations.

French Country Kitchen Is Local and Regional COTY winner: Residential Kitchen Over \$120,000

For Dr. Rick Layfield and his wife Kelly Layfield, the search for their dream kitchen started shortly after they purchased their 3,700-square-foot, four-bedroom home in Clifton eight years ago.

“The kitchen suite was a primary selling point,” Kelly Layfield said of the 400-square-foot room.

But she found the rear of the house dark and dated. Sightlines to the children’s backyard play areas were not well-aligned. And there was a visually obstructive bulkhead over the primary food preparation zone.

Also, the pentagon-shaped food preparation island and dining counter wasn’t well suited for in-kitchen dining. And the corner breakfast area was cramped — making it hard to access a door to the back porch which used to be a pathway to the family’s outdoor grill.

Fortunately, Kelly Layfield’s first meeting with designer John Benson was productive from the start. He proposed a rectangular food preparation island with a granite surface, parallel with the two corners of the cook’s work zones.

Benson also helped Layfield explore the lighter, more textured hues she had been seeking: marble subway tile wall covering; surfaces in Granite Bianco Antico; white cabinets with glass facings; and an oven backsplash in a white quatrefoil tiling. The coffers, likewise, are delineated in a white and grey duotone.

“This is just the balance I was looking for,” Layfield said. “It feels like home.”



PHOTO BY BRYAN BURRIS

With its private entrance, fully operative kitchenette and dining table for four, the new lower level allows Tina’s mother, Kay, to host bridge parties for friends independent of any other household activities.



PHOTO BY MITRO HOOD

BEST RESIDENTIAL KITCHEN: Sun Design’s winning kitchen solution takes full advantage of a 13’ cathedral ceiling with a two-level window wall. Owner Melynda Britt says the space is much better organized, yet more accessible — perfect for entertaining.

Open Floorplan Defines Casual But Elegant Kitchen Residential Kitchen; \$80k to \$120k; COTY Honorable Mention

Steve and Melynda Britt’s four-bedroom colonial in Vienna offered considerable charms when the couple purchased it 10 years ago.

There was a nicely finished library and living room, a formal dining room and a sizable family room in the back half of the house with a 13-foot cathedral ceiling framing a lovely view of mature landscaping.

For Melynda Britt, the larger goal was a kitchen footprint that offered an efficient work space — integrated with the surrounding great room.

“Since the emphasis was on a more intelligent use of limited square footage,” Sun Design’s Durosco said, “we thought custom-built-ins would help create better coordi-

nated work zones.”

Critiquing the kitchen now, Britt is amazed at how much more effectively the solution works on several fronts: The food preparation island protects the cook’s work triangle, and is positioned for easy service to the family room; the beverage station, an effective space divider, is accessible from both the breakfast area and family room; the coffee bar is situated between doors leading to the dining room and the breakfast room, out of the chef’s way; the kitchen’s mosaic tile flooring has been replaced by a refinished hardwood flooring.

“We can now comfortably entertain 20-25 guests,” Britt said. “Better yet, the space is really warm and comfortable.”

Finished Lower Level Offers Multi-Gen Family Solution COTY Honorable Mention

Eric Park and his wife Tina, both physicians, were already quite busy 10 years ago when they purchased a 3,400-square-foot two-level neo-colonial in Falls Church.

“Our plan all along was to create a family home,” Tina Park said. “We saw the lower level eventually playing a part in our daily lives, but were only using it for storage. It wasn’t until my mother began regularly helping us with the girls that we began looking at the house more closely.”

At first Park’s mother, Kay, would stay in the guest room, but gradually everyone started looking at ways to increase available privacy.

It’s at this point that Sun Design Remodeling enters the story.

“A basement conversion is challenging,” said Sun Design’s Liz Lee-Sint, who guided the Park project from concept to completion, “especially when it’s going to be mainstreamed with the rest of the house.”

For Kay, the top priority was a suite with all the features of independent living, including a private entrance, a comfortable master suite and a fully functional kitchenette with dining for four.

On a separate note, the Parks envisioned a 195-square-foot family fitness center and a children’s play zone with custom built-ins.

Describing the finished décor as “modern Asian contemporary,” Tina Park stressed simple lines, soft tones and open visuals.

“It’s really the nicest place in the house now,” Park said. “And it satisfies so many different needs that it’s become our main gathering place.”

House and grounds reconciliation judged this year’s best Exterior Solution/COTY Grand award winner

As Monte Zaben tells it, the rear elevation to his 8,300-square-foot colonial in Fredericksburg was so sun-exposed it was uncomfortable sitting by the pool he had just installed the year before.

After researching several options, however, he stumbled on Sun Design’s portfolio of indoor-outdoor solutions, and set up a meeting.

Combining an extended radius that steps down to the pool with vaulted entrance way, the structure’s architecture is welcoming.

Tapered craftsman-style piers support a seam metal roof. Inside, three distinct activity zones flow together: an open-air lounge; a cozy poolside vista with a pair of wicker chairs; and an outdoor kitchen equipped with a traditional grill, a power burner and refrigerators. A second level grilling deck is now, likewise, under roof.

Happy with the outcome, Zaben said he enjoys the outdoor kitchen so much he was out grilling one of his specialties this past January. “We make regular use of the outdoor space on just about every seasonable day,” he adds. “It’s very much a part of our lives now.”

John Byrd has been writing about home improvement for 30 years. He can be reached at byrdmatx@gmail.com.

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Low Interest Rates Give Agents Optimism for Spring

FROM PAGE 3

“Assessments matter because the tax burden is increasing on homeowners in many jurisdictions, particularly Fairfax,” said David Versel, senior researcher with the George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis.

Another burden on homeowners who may be waiting to enter the market is lingering insecurity over the effects of government sequestration.

“I gear it to federal government spending,” said George Mason professor of finance Gerald Hanweck. “When is that going to bottom out? When it does and they begin to spend again, then we’ll see a pickup.”

Rex Reiley is looking for that to happen soon, hoping that Congress signs off on a new budget and that it eliminates or reduces Sequester cutbacks. “If that happens, think we’ll see a big boom, with everyone confident in their employment again.”

Longer term, Hanweck is encouraged by an “up-surge in technology entrepreneurship” in Northern Virginia, as well as the development of the Inova research campus in Merrifield for attracting pharmaceuticals and biotech. But that impact on the real estate market could take years to notice, he said.

In the short term, he expects house prices in Fairfax County to fall slightly, forecasting a 2 percent drop in the median over the next few months in existing and new homes, a great opportunity for first-time

buyers who qualify for low-interest loans.

“Agents have a right to be optimistic,” said Hanweck. “At same time, they’ll have to work real hard to make the optimism pay off, selling about 97-98 percent of the listing price. That’s going to certainly drop, it’s just a matter of pricing.”

In Lorton, Ron Kowalski has observed steady sales overall in the last month, about one per day for the 22079 zip code as a whole. The “move up” segment of houses priced \$500,000 to \$800,000 has lagged behind the “low end” (under \$500,000) and upper tier (\$1 million and above).

He’s confident that increasing inventory coupled with the interest rates and “lenders loosening standards a little” will continue to help with affordability and drive sales into the spring, especially with first-time buyers.

But, he said more of his clients are researching properties on the internet before they meet with him. And that’s having a mixed effect on whether they decide to make a move or not.

“They’re getting a lot of information,” he said, “but so much is filtered through what they want to look at. There are both sides to the story. People focus on the one that sold super high or low. My issue is a lot of the information is self-directed.”

Kowalski doesn’t mind buyers or sellers coming into the market loaded with their own data; he’s just happy they’re there.



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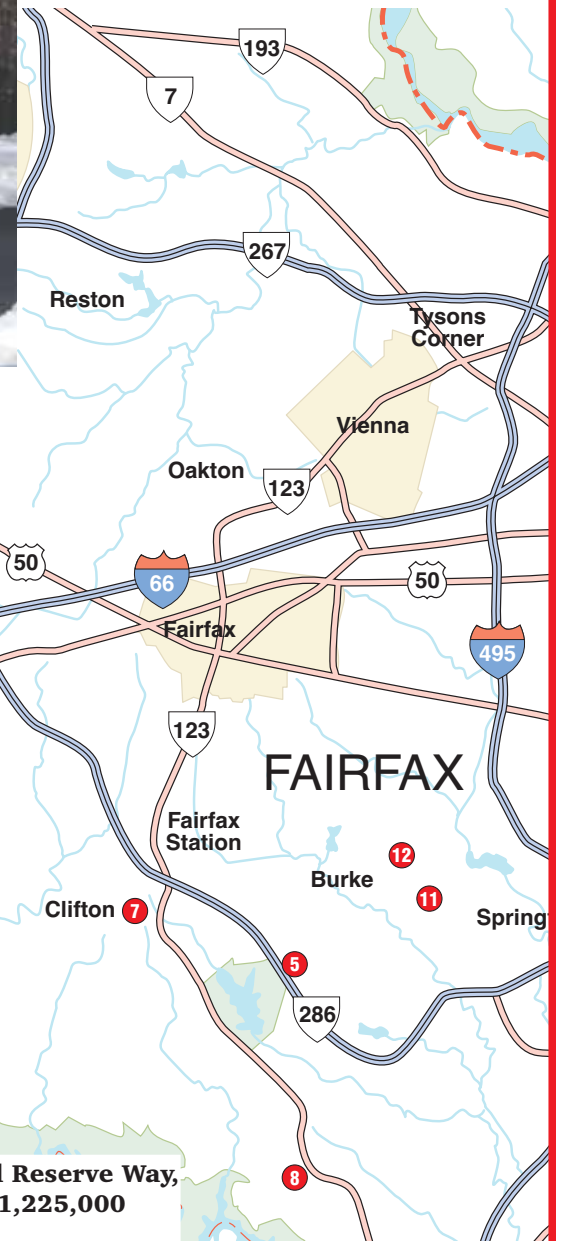
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THE CONNECTION

January, 2015 Top Sales

2 7063 Balmoral Forest Road,
Clifton — \$1,415,700



3 12510
Yates Ford
Road, Clifton
— \$1,300,000



8 8740 Mountain Valley Road,
Fairfax Station — \$1,047,500



4 9407 Old Reserve Way,
Fairfax — \$1,225,000

Address BR FB HB .. Postal City Sold Price .. Type Lot AC PostalCode Subdivision Date Sold

1	12995 WYCKLAND DR	6	8	2	CLIFTON	\$2,100,000	Detached	5.00	20124	WYCKLAND	01/16/15
2	7063 BALMORAL FOREST RD	5	5	3	CLIFTON	\$1,415,700	Detached	3.00	20124	BALMORAL GREENS	01/23/15
3	12510 YATES FORD RD	3	2	0	CLIFTON	\$1,300,000	Detached	15.62	20124	PEPPER MILL FARM	01/08/15
4	9407 OLD RESERVE WAY	5	4	1	FAIRFAX	\$1,225,000	Detached	0.27	22031	PICKETT'S RESERVE	01/09/15
5	6511 BURKE WOODS DR	6	5	2	BURKE	\$1,150,000	Detached	0.83	22015	BURKE LAKE MEADOW	01/26/15
6	13102 BELLE COTE LN	5	4	1	FAIRFAX	\$1,100,000	Detached	0.83	22033	OAK HILL RESERVE	01/15/15
7	11311 CHAPEL RD	4	4	1	FAIRFAX STATION	\$1,060,000	Detached	5.00	22039	WOLF RUN HUNT	01/05/15
8	8740 MOUNTAIN VALLEY RD	5	4	1	FAIRFAX STATION	\$1,047,500	Detached	5.91	22039	HAMPTON HILLS	01/13/15
9	10687 YORKTOWN CT	3	4	1	FAIRFAX	\$1,005,000	Townhouse	0.05	22030	JAGUAR/YORKTOWN	01/06/15
10	5105 BEBE CT	5	3	1	CENTREVILLE	\$802,000	Detached	0.17	20120	FAIRLAKES CROSSNG	01/26/15
11	6114 GARDEN RD	4	3	1	SPRINGFIELD	\$729,000	Detached	0.19	22152	LEE-BROOKE	01/16/15
12	5413 MOUNT GREENWICH CT	4	2	1	BURKE	\$715,000	Detached	0.23	22015	SIGNAL HILL	01/15/15



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