

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly Volume 04 Issue 25 Wednesday, February 16, 2011



A Tale of Two House Flips ...read on page OH6

Solar Ovens – From Lafayette to Kabul

By Sophie Braccini

Scharline Howell set the quesadilla on the solar stovetop 15 minutes before I arrived. When I was directed to the Howells' backyard, the cheese had melted and the tortilla was browning in the pan, ready to eat. On a nearby table, Jack Howell set up a solar oven he built 20 years ago and still uses today. The sun on this February morning was already warming the air and the thermometer set at the center of the oven read 300 degrees F.

100 such solar ovens, constructed

under Howell's direction for Budd MacKenzie's Trust in Education, will soon be shipped to Kabul, Afghanistan. (See www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0313/Budd-MacKenzie-a-Man-Consumed-by-his-Passion-for-Freedom.html or www.trustededucation.org/.)

About thirty years ago, Howell founded Morning Sun Press, a publishing company that he still manages part-time today. In 1978 he met Dan Halacy, who designed solar cookers that could

be built very inexpensively. Howell published Halacy's book, *Cooking with the Sun*, and built the solar cookers he still uses. "They last forever," says Howell, "as long as you keep them out of the rain."

"The stovetop cooker is made of cardboard, with a Mylar coating, an EMT pipe attached at the center with a floor flange, and a holder for the pan," explains Howell, "it is very easy to assemble, and weights only three pounds. We take it everywhere – for picnics and

on trips." Howell, who according to his wife is the cook of the family, says he can do anything in the cooker; pieces of chicken, potatoes, pizza, casseroles just like on a regular stovetop. The Lafayette resident thinks solar cookers are a great addition to an earthquake kit or emergency plan.

The oven is a slightly heavier construction that sits on a plywood frame. The sides are made of cardboard covered in Mylar as well. The center – the oven itself – is made of foam painted black to retain the heat. "The paint has to be a special non-toxic material," says Howell, "for the 100 ovens for Afghanistan, we got a special deal from Ecohome Improvement in Berkeley," Howell explains. "We use the oven for slow cooking food," he adds, "The temperature reaches 350 degrees after 40 minutes of pre-heating. It takes about 1½ hours to cook a whole chicken."

When he met MacKenzie, Howell knew he had found a new outlet for the oven. "At first I was too busy to think about it," says MacKenzie, "but I told Jack, if you run it, I'll support it!" MacKenzie took a trial sample of five solar cookers that Howell built to Afghanistan and after testing in refugee camps they decided to build 100. "People in camps are the least likely to be able to afford the wood that they use to cook and sterilize the water," says MacKenzie, "70% of their wood supply is consumed just to boil water. In a country that has 300 days of sun a year it is at least a very cost effective way to sanitize the water."



Scharline and Jack Howell cooking solar.

Photo Sophie Braccini

... continued on page OH4

Desperately Seeking the Following Homes in Lamorinda for Qualified Buyers!

These buyers have already viewed the current inventory and have not found the "right house". Do you have that house and are you thinking of selling this spring?

3 bedroom, 2.5 bath home in Orinda--buyer's physical requirements are for a single level updated home under \$900,000.

Call or email **Bruce Maxon** at (925) 253-2144, ibruce@comcast.net, CDRE# 00877963

4 bedroom, 2 bath, at least 2100 sq' with an ample yard, "big enough to throw a ball", in Burton Valley or the Trail Neighborhood of Lafayette. Buyers will pay up to \$1,100,000, possibly more if there is a separate in-law apartment or cottage.

Call or email **Pamela Halloran** at (925) 323-4100, pamelahalloran.com, CDRE#00936191

5 bedroom, 3 bath, at least 3,500 sq' with a flat yard for small children to play. Move-in condition, traditional style preferred \$1,400,000-\$1,800,000. Anywhere in Lamorinda.

Call or email **April Matthews** at (925) 200-0773, aprilmat@comcast.net, CDRE#01221153

4 bedroom, 3 bath, at least 3,000 sq' with good yard access for entertaining. Views are a plus. \$1,000,000-\$1,400,000. Orinda Country Club or Tahos area.

Call or email **April Matthews** at (925) 200-0773, aprilmat@comcast.net, CDRE#01221153

3 or more bedrooms, 3 1/2 baths, 3,000 sq', contemporary style with easy yard access for entertaining. \$1,000,000.-\$1,450,000. Orinda only.

Call or email **April Matthews** at (925) 200-0773, aprilmat@comcast.net, CDRE#01221153

3 plus bedrooms, 2 plus baths, level out yard in Lamorinda. Quiet street. Cosmetic fixer ok. Flexible timing. \$600,000-\$750,000.

Call or email **Karen Murphy** at kmurphy@villageassociates.com (925) 788-6322, CDRE#00699318

4 bedrooms, 3 baths, family room. 2800 plus sq'. Up to \$1.2 million in Orinda. Timing is flexible.

Call or email **Karen Murphy** at (925) 788-6322, kmurphy@villageassociates.com, CDRE#00699318

4 bedrooms, 2 baths, level out grassy yard in Lamorinda. Move in condition. Up to \$1.2 million.

Call or email **Karen Murphy** at (925) 788-6322, kmurphy@villageassociates.com, CDRE#00699318

Lovely young family looking for home in North Orinda with privacy, wooded feel, smaller yard okay, minimum four bedrooms, love mid century architecture - \$1,600,000 budget. Willing to do cosmetic work.

Call or email **Debbie Johnston** at (925) 285-8556, Djohn55524@aol.com, DRE#01203673

Growing family looking for home in Lafayette (first choice) or Orinda - want a great yard, like higher ceilings open floor plan, love a playroom, neighborhood feel a plus - \$1,500,000 budget.

Call or email **Debbie Johnston** at (925) 285-8556, Djohn55524@aol.com, DRE#01203673

If your property is currently offered for sale through a real estate broker or you are working with another broker, this ad is not intended as a solicitation. Village Associates is happy to work with your broker and cooperate fully, DRE License #01301392.

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Lamorinda Home Sales recorded

City	Last reported:	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	6	
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$585,000	
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,462,500	
MORAGA	7	
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$389,000	
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,348,000	
ORINDA	5	
LOWEST AMOUNT:	\$625,000	
HIGHEST AMOUNT:	\$1,300,000	

LAFAYETTE

3180 Camino Colorados, \$915,000, 4 Bdrms, 1935 SqFt, 1953 YrBlt, 1-11-11; Previous Sale: \$1,079,000, 06-29-05
3959 Cowan Road, \$585,000, 3 Bdrms, 1680 SqFt, 1952 YrBlt, 1-11-11; Previous Sale: \$1,070,000, 06-13-07
580 Francis Drive, \$650,000, 4 Bdrms, 2468 SqFt, 1967 YrBlt, 1-12-11
715 Las Trampas Road, \$1,462,500, 4 Bdrms, 3316 SqFt, 1959 YrBlt, 1-14-11; Previous Sale: \$925,000, 06-29-01
1163 Pleasant Hill Circle, \$825,000, 3 Bdrms, 1805 SqFt, 1948 YrBlt, 1-11-11; Previous Sale: \$450,000, 04-23-10
3142 Sandalwood Court, \$875,000, 5 Bdrms, 3782 SqFt, 1964 YrBlt, 1-24-11
1023 Sunrise Ridge Drive, \$1,245,000, 4 Bdrms, 3422 SqFt, 1998 YrBlt, 1-14-11; Previous Sale: \$1,579,000, 04-03-07

MORAGA

142 Cypress Point Way, \$760,000, 2 Bdrms, 1444 SqFt, 1973 YrBlt, 1-14-11; Previous Sale: \$905,000, 08-30-07
144 Greenbriar, \$695,000, 2 Bdrms, 2029 SqFt, 1986 YrBlt, 1-10-11
1047 Larch Avenue, \$725,000, 3 Bdrms, 1460 SqFt, 1959 YrBlt, 1-14-11; Previous Sale: \$717,000, 09-23-04
452 Millfield Place, \$827,500, 5 Bdrms, 2377 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 1-14-11; Previous Sale: \$725,000, 12-28-01
39 Miramonte Drive, \$389,000, 3 Bdrms, 1447 SqFt, 1964 YrBlt, 1-14-11; Previous Sale: \$651,000, 03-13-06
70 Miramonte Drive, \$415,000, 2 Bdrms, 1762 SqFt, 1964 YrBlt, 1-19-11; Previous Sale: \$40,500, 12-13-84
41 South Merrill Circle, \$1,348,000, 4 Bdrms, 3425 SqFt, 1990 YrBlt, 1-12-11; Previous Sale: \$1,615,000, 07-20-07

ORINDA

63 El Gavilan Road, \$625,000, 3 Bdrms, 2175 SqFt, 1953 YrBlt, 1-14-11
29 Knickerbocker Lane, \$895,500, 2 Bdrms, 2880 SqFt, 1978 YrBlt, 1-20-11
221 La Espiral, \$750,000, 2 Bdrms, 2087 SqFt, 1946 YrBlt, 1-14-11
383 Miner Road, \$1,300,000, 4 Bdrms, 3845 SqFt, 1954 YrBlt, 1-14-11; Previous Sale: \$1,701,000, 10-11-07
83 Muth Drive, \$982,000, 4 Bdrms, 1765 SqFt, 1961 YrBlt, 1-21-11

Lamorinda Foreclosures recorded

LAFAYETTE

1031 Sunrise Ridge Drive, 94549, JP Morgan Chase Bank, 01-10-11, \$1,004,500, 3422 sf, 4 bd

MORAGA

2129 Ascot Drive #19, 94556, Bear Stearns, 01-10-11, \$91,350, 432 sf, 1 bd
12 Josefa Place, 94556, Bank of America, 01-13-11, \$501,236, 1845 sf, 2 bd

ORINDA

44 Estabueno Drive, 94563, US Bank, 01-14-11, \$865,202, 1901 sf, 4 bd

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Solar Ovens – From Lafayette

...continued from page OH1

MacKenzie’s volunteers have been spending their Sundays working in Trust in Education’s warehouse. “The ovens are almost complete,” said MacKenzie, “the team still needs some handy volunteers.”

Howell believes that solar ovens are a great solution in many different environments. According to Sperling’s “Best Places to Live,” there are 262 sunny days per year in Lafayette, so solar ovens can be used 72% of the time, saving on gas and/or electricity. They are lightweight units perfect for outdoor and emergency cooking. In developing countries they are an inexpensive solution to the serious problem of indoor air pollution that some areas are crippled with – according to the World Bank, indoor air pollution ranks eighth globally among health risk factors, and fourth in developing countries (indoor air pollution is due to the use of low-cost, widely available traditional energy sources such as coal and bio-mass for cooking and home heating.)

The original book, “Cooking with the Sun,” by Beth and Dan Halacy, is out of print. Interested individuals can buy a solar cooker how-to booklet on the Morning Sun Press website at //home.ix.netcom.com/~jdhowell/ (go to Morning Sun Press Products).



Jack Howell (right)



The frame of the solar stovetop is made of cardboard
Photo Sophie Braccini



A family in a refugee camp

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tte to Kabul



it) constructs ovens with other Trust in Education volunteers.

Photo Budd MacKenzie



gee camp in Afghanistan receives a solar oven.

Photo Budd MacKenzie

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A Tale of Two House Flips

By Cathy Tyson

There used to be shows on cable television highlighting the process of flipping a house: buy a fixer-upper at a low price, do some improvements and sell quickly – making a profit on the deal. That was back in the day when it seemed like real estate prices in California, and elsewhere could never go down and there were actual buyers with, cough, bank-approved financing. The \$64,000 question these days is, has California's roller coaster real estate market hit bottom and can a contractor looking to quickly turn over a house make money on it?

According to Fannie Mae, the largest U.S. mortgage buyer, home prices

will probably start to gain in the third quarter of 2011. Dean Okamura, a realtor with Pacific Union in Orinda, agrees, "2010 was better than 2009 for the most part, values are not falling as rapidly as they were, but there is still a ton of Short Sales and a few REO's out there – both drag values south." He feels that good locations and values sell quickly and the market is picking up volume. Local home sale data demonstrate just that, for example in 2010 - 271 homes sold in Lafayette, compared to just 206 in 2009. Moraga saw a similar gain from 124 in 2009 to 167 in 2010, Orinda went from 166 sales in 2009 to 182 in 2010.

Is it possible to buy low and sell high? Two Lamorinda contractors are attempting to do that very thing – and are willing to take the risk to, hopefully, get the reward.

Contractor Robert Vallentyne purchased a very distressed property on La Espiral in Orinda. Carolyn Lacy and Stan Whal got in at the ground level on a home that had been declared a nuisance on Ruth Court in Lafayette. They had hoped to turn it around quickly, but a number of liens on the property stalled the project for months.

Vallentyne worked his way through the construction management program

at Cal State Sacramento while a young single parent. He enjoys transforming "the worst home in the neighborhood to the best." He describes the house on La Espiral as rotting away and the subject of numerous complaints. He purchased the property just before foreclosure with the help of some family members. By taking advantage of the lower area they more than doubled the square footage from 1800 square feet to 4000. The new "flipped" incarnation is completely different than the prior home. It now has five bedrooms, 3 plus baths, a wine cellar and a very spacious laundry room.

... continued on next page



Exterior of Ruth Court home in Lafayette before remodel.

Photos Cathy Tyson



Current view of Ruth Court house, construction should be completed in March.



Original La Espiral home in Orinda before flip.

Photo provided



Interior of finished remodel.

Photo provided

... House Flips continued

With three bedrooms and two bathrooms the house on Ruth Court that contractor Stan Wahl and partner Carolyn Lacy bought has approximately 1750 square feet. Wahl estimates the remodeling process will be complete in March. There were quite a few complicated liens on the property that had to be addressed before construction started. Wahl describes that process as, "herding cats." Wahl has completed six flips over the last two years and managed to make a profit every time, "it pays the bills" he said. Once the homes are all fixed up, "they sell quickly," he added.

"Our specialty is locating distressed homes in the Lamorinda area that can be thoroughly rehabilitated and put back on the market for a quick sale, slightly below market (price) so a family can enjoy the home, the neighborhood and the city," said Lacy. She hopes the scheduled replacement of the street this year happens sooner rather than later because, "it definitely needs it."

Contractor Jerry Isaacs of Moraga Remodel and Construction advises caution in house flipping: "While houses can be bought at very low prices, the possible profit factors still remain the same -and in fact are, in my opinion, even riskier than before. The carrying costs plus the remodeling costs and commissions are pretty much the same, and when the house is done and ready, there are just not very many buyers out there."

He continues to look at "fixer-uppers" but says nearly every single one pencils out as barely break even, "We can buy cheap, but we have to sell cheap." Jerry's advice: "If folks have the money to remodel, I believe now is a great time. We are all bidding jobs for less money than we have in years - the competition has become brutal. It's a perfect time for a first time buyer, or, families that want to stay put for a while."

Rob Olson, an experienced realtor also with Pacific Union, believes that flipping is more dangerous these days; the market is completely different than what it was from 2000 - 2005. Profitability depends on the amount of work needed, "Cosmetic fixer is the best way to go today. A partial tear down and major improvements can get expensive fast," said Olson.

He recommends buying the worst house in a great neighborhood at a low price for a successful flip. "It can be worthwhile; you can definitely increase the value of a property by sprucing it up - with paint, updating the kitchen and bathrooms, replacing windows - you should get your money out and then some."

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ORINDA



New Listing

20 Snow Court

Lg 5bd/3.5ba home in quiet, serene Lost Valley. Over 4200 sf, 2 fam rms, lvl play area, fenced veggie garden w/raised beds. Valley & Mt. Diablo views. Close to schools/shopping/commute.

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ORINDA



New Listing

37 Oak Road

Dramatic 5bd/4ba 5006 sf cust trad on beaut .68 ac lot among redwood & oaks. Lux mstr retreat w/frplc, updated kitchen, ofc/library, wine cellar for 1620 bottles & tasting room.

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ORINDA



New Listing

239 Sundown Terrace

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New Listing

136 Manzanita

Spectacular newly blt 4000 sf custom Santa Barbara style home seldom found in area. 4bd/3.5ba of incredible design & custom appointments. A world of charm!

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MORAGA



2092-2094 Donald Drive

Charming ranch-style duplex each with 2bd/1ba & 1-car garage. All dual panes, hdwd in LR, DR & kitchen. Pvt bckyd in wooded setting. Top schools.

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MORAGA



39 Sea Pines

Open floor plan, lg living rm, fam rm w/blt-ins, frplc & office area w/skylights. Eat-in kitchen w/slab granite, lots of storage. Borders 5th green of MCC. Great views.

Offered at \$730,000

MORAGA



New Listing

4 Sparrow Court

Charming as can be 4bd/2ba home w/hdwd flrs, French doors, dual panes, beaut updated bathrooms. Grt space incl sep fam rm, lovely brick patio, pvt yard. Cul de sac location.

Offered at \$795,000

MORAGA



20 Greenfield Drive

Lots of saquare footage, flexible floor plan, pvt lvl backyard, fabulous area for in-home office, convenient to elementary, trail, park. Wonderful home, great buy!

Offered at \$865,000

MORAGA



New Listing

7 Gloria Court

Updated 4bd/3ba on cul de sac with hardwood floors, Andersen sliders and an ideal in-law or teen set up. Lovel private play yard...move in ready!

Offered at \$899,000

MORAGA



927 Augusta Drive

Located at the end of a cul de sac this professionally decorated 4+bd/2.5ba home is most desirable. Privacy, views and an open space feeling make this a choice spot in MCC!

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LAFAYETTE



New Listing

1267 Laurel Lane

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LAFAYETTE



3919 So. Peardale Drive

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Offered at \$1,335,000

WALNUT CREEK



New Listing

416 Beacon Ridge Lane

Beaut updated approx 1800 sf w/fab newly landscaped garden/yard. Great location surrounded by rolling hills but nr Laf schools, shopping, hiking, good commute.

Offered at \$679,000

WALNUT CREEK



987 Monet Circle

4bd2.5ba built in 2000. High ceilings, loads of light. Convenient location close to shopping, commute, trails, etc. Elegant, functional home.

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WALNUT CREEK



New Listing

6001 Horseman's Canyon Drive

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