

Homebuyers Discover The Joys Of Renovation

By Syl Morrone, Contributing Journalist

Armonk, NY – What’s the bane of every homebuyer? It could well be the glitzy magazines that cater to them, with each page featuring the most beautiful and perfect rooms, yards, and exterior-everything that stirs their passions.

The result? When these eager homebuyers go out into the real world, they’re shocked to realize that the houses of their magazines bear little resemblance to the houses they’re being shown. So what’s a disappointed homebuyer to do?

“Simple”, says Armonk-based architect Richard Kotz, “renovate”.

Take for example, Lisa and Adam Friedlander. They had been looking for a home in the northern Westchester area for 4 years. Adam said, “We has specific needs in mind and couldn’t find anything approaching those needs. Finally, we were shown a property in Windmill Farms. The lot spectacular...trees, shrubs, well manicured grounds.”

“Yes”, Lisa interjected, “everything was perfect...except the house. It was very old-looking, nondescript colonial. It looked sorely out of place on such a wonderful piece of property”.

“The burning question at the time was tear down the house and rebuild it or keep the structure and build on added rooms to fit the Friedlander’s needs”, Kotz offered.

Like many new homebuyers, Adam and Lisa though small changes in the kitchen, for instance, would make them more satisfied with the house. But as ‘little’ jobs lead to ‘bigger’ jobs, the Friedlanders found the piecemeal business more and more frustrating. Maybe the only way they could get the house they wanted was to start from scratch.

“But when Richard drew up some plans for us”, Lisa explained, “We realized that the cost to build new would be really prohibitive”.

So after much deliberation among the Friedlanders and the architect, it was agreed that to build up from the base structure would offer the best results.

The Renovation was underway. “We gutted the interior down to the studs, replace all the heating and plumbing systems”, Kotz explained, “and we replaced all the exterior siding and windows. As if that weren’t enough, the property’s one-story garage was ripped to its foundation and resurrected as a 3-car garage.

The main attraction of the new garage was the easy access from the garage into the house, which replaced a long flight of stairs. Here the architect added a mudroom that served as a perfect transition between the garage and the kitchen. Plus it was the obvious choice for the washer and dryer to be placed.

The kitchen was expanded to include an island, where modern cooking appliances where installed. “And since we wanted to have an informal eating area in the kitchen, Richard built us a lovely breakfast room”, Lisa said.

This helped create a wonderful flow to the house. “Everything is exactly as we wanted it to be”, Adam added. “Richard helped us immensely, with his own vision matching ours very closely. He certainly knew how to modernize the house to make it functional and comfortable for us, without making the house look ‘renovated’”.

“Now when we drive past the house, with all its new impressive curb appeal, we can’t believe it’s the same place”.

Which only goes to prove what Richard says are the 7 things that make the perfect buyer/house marriage: location, location, location, vision, vision, vision, and, of course, renovation.

And that applies even in the worst-case scenarios, like when you discover the perfect piece of property, but the house on it has been destroyed by fire. Only a charred shell remains. You don’t want to tear down the house and start from scratch. And you certainly don’t want to just let that property go. So don’t. Think renovation and watch what happens.

Tom McKenna, a local builder reluctantly bought the house at the insistence of real estate broker, Helen Felton. Working with Richard’s plans, Tom converted the uninhabitable and charred house into a home worthy of its impressive vista.

In this case the charred remains were deceiving and had structurally affected only one beam. Without needing to concentrate on excessive and costly restructuring work, Richard converted this small, plain 4-bedroom ranch into an impressive colonial. Today the house features a gabled roofline, breathtaking master bedroom suite, huge working kitchen, breakfast room and a sunny family room.

As Helen Felton says, “For every home buyer, there are properties and houses that either ‘click’ or don’t. But for the very wise-and happy-homebuyer, the trick isn’t to look what’s there. But to look what isn’t there...yet. That’s the beauty-and the power-of renovation