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Gabe's HOUSECALLS



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Folding screens from the 1920s are back in style



Two-to-four panel folding screens were seen in many showrooms at the recent furniture market in High Point, N.C.

Folding screens can make a bold visual statement in a room. Home-decor writer Sally Falk Nancrede says the revival is a big deal because screens provide color and pattern to those who don't want to commit to patterned furniture. Prints come in hundreds of colors. They also come in every price

range, from the \$46,000 hand-lacquered Eileen Gray Brick Screen to attractive screens at Crate and Barrel and the Pottery Barn that sell for \$250 to \$500.

A popular size is 76 inches wide by about 6 feet high and with four panels.

The \$4,485 two-panel screen from Barker Furniture features walnut parquet and leather. It's 4 1/2 feet wide and 5 feet high.

The tax advantages of owning a home

It's that time again when Uncle Sam picks your pocket for taxes and, if you are writing out a check this year, you might want to ask yourself if a nice, fat mortgage interest deduction would come in handy next year.

For many people it certainly will. Mortgage interest is tax deductible. This means it is one of the expenses that reduces the amount of income on which you pay taxes.

Many, if not most, people who do not own houses, also do not itemize their deductions. That makes sense because if they added up all their potential deductions, the deductions would not be greater than the standard deduction. In 2011, the standard deduction for single people is \$5,800. The standard deduction for married people is \$11,600.

The beauty of the mortgage interest deduction is that it allows you to deduct all the interest you pay on your home loan. During the first years you pay on a home loan, nearly everything you pay is

interest -- up to 75 percent of your payment. That nice deduction can reduce the taxes you owe, while allowing you to live in the house you want.



In this economy, owning a home also offers you some subtle protection from inflation. Inflation is an increase in the general level of prices for goods and services over time. So when you notice that it costs you more money to buy the same things, that is inflation, according to investopedia.com According to inflation-data.com, in 2011 inflation was trending

well over 3 percent while mortgage interest rates were the lowest in history at about 4.3 percent (30-year fixed.)

If you buy a home this year, and inflation continues to increase, you'll soon be paying off your home with cheaper dollars. Food will cost more; luxuries will cost more; rent will cost more. But your mortgage is going to stay the same.

Meanwhile, inflation will also have some effect on home prices, forcing prices up. Right now, in most parts of the country, home prices are low because there are a lot of houses on the market and fewer buyers than five years ago. That means, right now you can get a lot of house for fewer dollars. In coming years, however, as the supply of houses for sale decreases, the pressure of inflation plus a reduced supply of houses, will force home prices up. In 10 years, your home purchase today will be a bargain and you will be living in a home you love while paying prices locked in the past.

It's like being a financial time traveler.



ASK THE EXPERT

How to Help Your Appliances Last Longer



Q Last year, we short sold our home. We are now renting a home owned by a realtor with a two-year lease. We would like to buy the home. How do I ask for a rent to buy option?

A Just ask the owner. Some real estate agents have bought several homes at bargain prices, usually homes that had been foreclosed. If this is the case with the home you are leasing, the real estate agent might be willing to sell.

Rent-to-own purchases, also known as lease-to-own or lease purchase are a lease combined with a option to buy the property within a specified period, usually three years or less, and at an agreed-upon price.

These agreements are used more than ever before for two reasons. First, many home buyers can't meet the higher qualification standards set by mortgage companies. Second, sellers may be able to get a satisfac-

Does it seem to you that appliances don't last as long as they used to? Appliances and home systems that once hummed along for generations now seem to flame out in a decade.

Every winter we pray our 13-year-old HVAC system will make it through to spring. Our dryer died after 11 years, and we repaired our refrigerator three times before it reached its 12th birthday.

Rob Carpenter, owner of a Mr. Handyman franchise in Maryland shared some insider tips with us that will help you extend the life of your home appliances and systems way beyond their warranties.

Refrigerators that last

Refrigerators blow out when doors don't close tightly, straining motors that work overtime to keep food cold. To test your door seal, close the door on a dollar bill: If the bill slips, you've got a problem that will require appliance maintenance.

Magnetic strips embedded in gaskets around refrigerator doors make doors close snugly, but they routinely wear out and should be replaced or re-magnetized every couple of years. If you're handy, it's a DIY job (\$50). If messing around with the refrigerator door is beyond your pay grade, call a professional (\$125 and up).

Washing machine endurance

Loose change banging around your washer drum can cause dents, chipped paint, and rust, so make sure you empty pockets before washing clothes.

tory price using this plan. This is how it usually works.

* The borrower pays an option fee, 1 percent to 5 percent of the price, which is credited to the purchase price, according to mtgprofessor.com. The borrower pays a market value rent plus an additional amount that is credited to the purchase price. The fee, option period, rent, rent premium and purchase price are all negotiable.

*Some buyers use a real estate agent to negotiate the terms.

Also, maintain your washing machine by regularly cleaning or replacing filters that trap water sediment before it enters your machine. Filters, which look like thimbles, are located in the back where supply hoses attach to the machine. Remove the hoses and either poke out debris with a tip of a flathead screwdriver, remove and wash the filter, or replace it.

Dryers that keep on drying

In addition to regularly cleaning out your dryer's lint trap and exhaust hose, inspect the exterior vent — hot air must escape your house unimpeded.

Make sure the hinged exterior vent pops open when the dryer runs. If it doesn't, open the cover and scrape out lint with the end of a hanger or dryer vent brush (\$13). If your vent is louvered, clean slats with an old toothbrush.

Reliable garage doors

Who knew garage doors aren't supposed to creak and groan when they open? That sound indicates that moving parts are rubbing and the motor is working harder than it should. To keep your door opening smoothly and quietly for years, every month coat the springs, hinges, and rollers with light machine oil.

Toaster thoughts

Darkly toasted bread will burn out your toaster two years earlier than lightly toasted bread. So if you can live with lightly crisp rather than almost burnt, you'll get a few more years out of your toaster. Just saying.

* If the purchase option is not used, the buyer loses both the option fee and the rent premiums that were paid.

* Buyers prefer a longer option period because it gives them more time to accumulate savings, repair their credit and qualify for a mortgage. But this can backfire. If they are never able to buy the home, they lose their investment.

* The contract can be nullified if the buyer fails to pay the rent or doesn't maintain the property.



Super Cars

Who needs a ticket to have some Super Bowl fun? There will be plenty to do in Indy as the city gears up for February's Super Bowl XLVI.

The big game, Feb. 5, promises to be the biggest Bowl on earth, featuring zip line rides over the city, a Super Bowl village, and, of course, Super Cars.

Unveiled Jan. 27 were 32 Super Indy racing Cars, each painted with the logo of an NFL team and one extra painted with the Super Bowl XLVI colors.

Visitors will be able to find the car representing their favorite team and have their pictures taken with the cars. The cars will be on display from Jan. 27 to Feb 6.

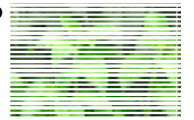
If you do want to see the actual game, it might be too late by now. The 73,000-seat Lucas Oil Stadium is mostly sold out and city hotels are full. Tickets were selling at \$1,000 each.



The year of herbs and roses

The National Garden Bureau has joined the Herb Society to name 2012 the Year of the Herb.

To help gardeners, the herb society offers its top 10 list. Gardening expert Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp says these three are easy to grow from seed: basil, chives and dill.



The next seven can be purchased as plants at garden centers: Greek oregano, bay leaf, rosemary, common thyme, parsley, common sage and lavender.

Whether they are planted in a large garden, small garden spot or in pots on the balcony, the taste of fresh herbs make common dishes more appealing.

The International Garden Society names 2012 the Year of the Rose. In some cultures, the plant is in the same category as basil and thyme. Rose petals are edible, and seed heads (hips) are used in teas and natural vitamins. Florist roses are not a good choice for these purposes. Jim Long, author of How to Eat Roses, recommends organically grown heavily-fragrant old-fashioned varieties.

You knew it had to happen: voice-controlled TV

Television set manufacturers are racing to develop voice recognition systems for TV sets, set-top boxes and related products. They want to do away with remotes.

At Nuance Communications, the world's largest supplier of voice recognition technology, they predict that many device makers will ship products that understand voice commands either this year or next.

Microsoft has the lead with technology developed for Kinect, an Xbox peripheral with cameras, motion sensors and sensitive microphones. After waking up the system by say-

ing Xbox, subscribers to Microsoft's \$60-a-year Xbox LIVE service can search for shows, movies and games by speaking to Microsoft's Bing search engine.

More than 3 million Comcast subscribers have downloaded an app that turns their smartphone into a remote control for the company's Xfinity broadband service.

Comcast is looking at adding voice-control features to the app, according to Bloomberg Businessweek.

The biggest challenge is making software smarter. Kinect users are limited to preset commands, and iPhone 4S users often hear Siri tell them, "I don't understand."

Another problem, if all electronics within earshot responded at once, it would be a nightmare.





Featured Properties

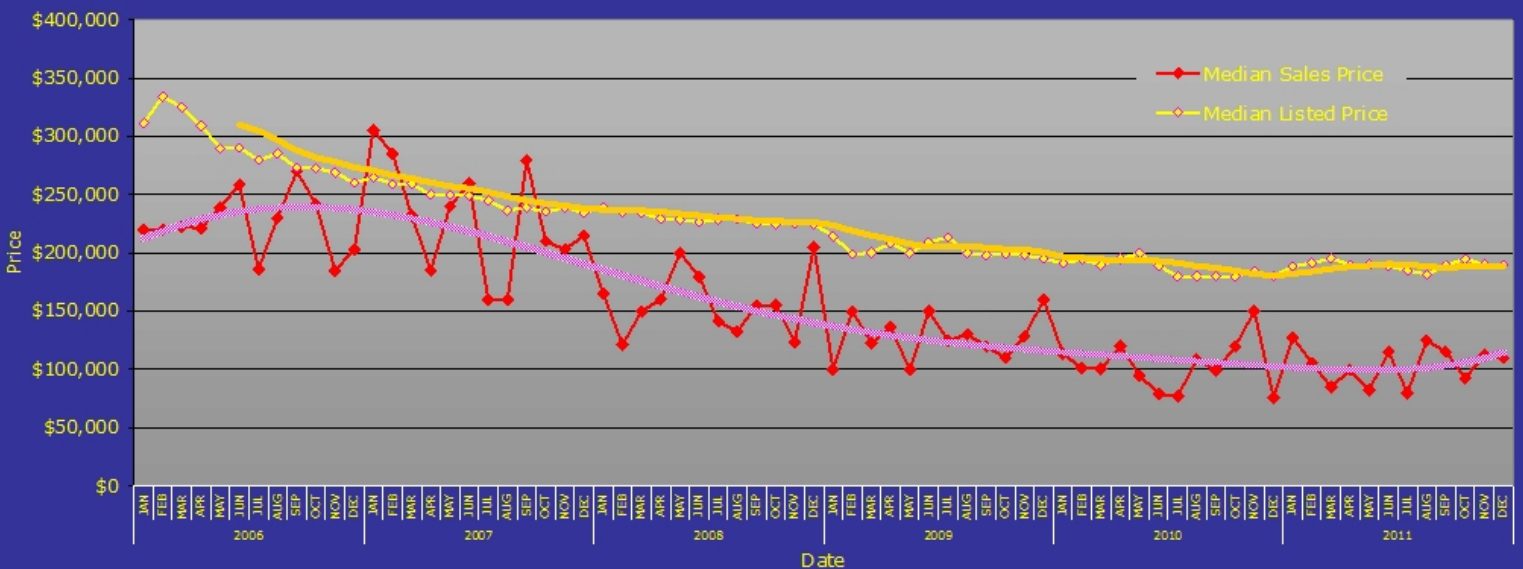
Enjoy living in paradise! Build your dream home on this pristine ocean front lot on the east side of the Spinnaker Point subdivision. With 100' ocean front, you will enjoy panoramic views and cool ocean breezes. Across the street is Spinnaker Point, a small gated community on the Indian River with potential for dock space rental or purchase. Close to shopping, restaurants, downtown Stuart and Jensen Beach. Minutes to 95 and the turnpike. \$950,000



Wonderful opportunity to enjoy a newer 4 bedroom lake side home in an upscale gated Palm City community. 2005 DiVosta concrete construction with over 3000 sq. ft. under air. Spacious master suite upstairs with a connecting junior suite that can be a nursery, office, or a 5th bedroom. Two additional bedrooms on 2nd floor (one oversized - and possible to split in to 2 for a 6th BR). Utility room is conveniently located upstairs. Modern kitchen with breakfast bar and dining nook overlooking the screened lanai with hot tub (stays) all with serene lake views. 8' doors throughout. Low HOA fees. Oversized garage can accommodate large vehicles or possibly a boat. Conveniently located close to schools, public boat ramps, shopping and turnpike.

Reduced to \$370,000

Martin County Condo Price History



View the complete set of Martin County graphs at: www.TreasureCoastFLHomes.com



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