

Valley of the Sun Real Estate Update

February, 2006

Chilling news

We've had some cool nights over the last few weeks, but here in the desert we're never too far away from the hotter time of the year. As we approach another scorching Arizona summer, there is some news about air conditioners that you might want to know about.

First, the good news: air conditioning units are becoming more efficient. AC units are measured according to their Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio, or SEER rating. Since 1992, manufacturers have been required to build units that have a minimum SEER rating of 10. As of the end of January, that threshold has been raised to 13 SEER, a 30% improvement in efficiency. (Of course, manufacturers are always free to exceed this standard.) The more efficient units will be more environmentally friendly than the old ones, and will also save consumers money on their utility bills.

In Arizona, you would think that it would be hard to find a downside to anything that helped keep us cooler, but there is a bit of bad news that you should know about. Industry experts anticipate that the existing stock of 10-SEER units will be used up by the middle of the year. Spare parts, by federal law, will be available for many more years, but if you need to replace your whole AC unit, you will likely be getting one of the newer models.

Here's the catch: your new 13-SEER unit may be larger and heavier than your old unit. If you have a ground-mounted unit, you may need to pour a larger concrete slab to hold it, and if you have a roof-mounted unit you may need to add more trusses to support the weight. Even if you only need to replace your condenser, you may find that modifications are required to your old Freon lines, evap coils, air handler, or other components. Clearly, these items could substantially increase your total replacement costs.

If you maintain a home warranty on your home (which is customary when you buy a new home) some of

these costs may be covered by your warranty company. However, not all warranties handle these claims in the same way, so you would do well to contact your customer service rep and verify the details of your coverage before beginning a replacement project.

It is possible to get an updated home warranty plan even if you have never had one, or if you have let an old policy expire. If replacement costs are an issue for you, either for your air conditioner or other major systems in your home, give me a call and I can help you investigate the options.

On the Home Front



Taran's first birthday is coming up, and he gets more adventurous every day. He's not walking yet, but he loves to push his dump around the yard and go exploring. Usually he aims for the tasty dirt behind the blocks.

Jill & I haven't been very adventurous recently, but we're looking forward to a snowboarding trip to Lake Tahoe soon. I wonder what Taran will think of his first ride in a sled?



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Recipe of the Month

Laurie's Chocolate Nemesis

My aunt made this for us over the holidays, and it has several virtues. First, it gives you a reason to go out & buy a springform pan, a handy thing to have. Second, it lets you use a cool technique called the bain-marie, a two-pan water bath system to evenly cook the cake. Most importantly, it's an incredibly rich chocolate treat! Note: this cake needs to chill overnight after cooking, so be sure to make it the day before you plan to serve it to your guests.

½ cup water 2 sticks unsalted butter, cubed
 1 cup sugar, split 7 large eggs
 1 lb good bittersweet chocolate (70% cocoa or more), shaved or crumbled

1. Grease bottom & sides of a 9" springform pan. Dust sides only with flour and line bottom with parchment paper. Preheat oven to 325°.
2. In a large saucepan, heat water & ½ cup sugar over medium heat until sugar completely dissolves. Add chocolate and butter, stirring constantly until melted. Remove from heat and cool for 15-30 minutes.
3. In a large bowl, beat eggs with other ½ cup sugar using electric mixer until mixture thickens and triples in volume (at least 8 minutes). With wire whisk, fold chocolate mixture into egg mixture until completely blended.
4. Wrap springform pan with tin foil to prevent water from leaking in. Pour batter into pan. Place filled pan in a large roasting pan, and add enough boiling water to cover springform pan halfway up the side. Bake 30-35 minutes, until edge begins to set & thin crust forms on top.
5. Remove from water bath and cool on wire rack until cake is at room temperature. Cover and chill overnight in refrigerator.
6. 30 minutes before serving, remove cake from pan, running a sharp blade around edge to loosen cake. Turn it upside down on a plate to remove parchment paper, then turn right-side up on cake plate. Garnish with fresh whipped cream and sliced fruit or berries. Makes 12 or more servings.

Culture Corner

Quick reviews of some recent favorites

Food: I had a good meal at the **Blue Adobe Grille** recently. The dark, cool & quiet interior is a pleasant departure from the hustle & bustle of the surrounding area (Country Club south of University) and the décor of saltillo & wood, accented by a hammered-copper bar, is a great accent to the New Mexican-style menu.

Movies: We watched **Bowfinger** on DVD the other day—it's been on my list for a long time, and I'm glad we finally got to it. Steve Martin stars as a no-name producer trying to make a film, with Eddie Murphy as the big-name actor who unwittingly becomes the star of the movie. It's a satire, but a gentle one, poking fun at various Hollywood stereotypes and the battle between image & substance, while still celebrating the joy of movies

Food: It's getting harder & harder to find a good roast beef sandwich, but **Jason's Deli** (in Chandler & Scottsdale as well as several other states) gets it right. The rest of their menu is good, too, and you can even eat healthy if you want to. Baklava for desert never hurts my mood, either.



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