

My Fabulous, Cream Puff Home

It's stunning, charming, sparkling and enchanting. No, it's not your daughter dressed up for her junior prom...it's a house. Each week I thumb through the real estate section and see ads that drip with adjectives so sickeningly sweet that one can go into a diabetic coma just reading them.

I live in an English colonial with a gambrel roof – a nice house, but nowhere as serious as that “mature house” with the gourmet granite kitchen that's selling for two million. My dream kitchen is a bit askew. The counter tops are scratched and stained from loving abuse. The refrigerator perspires frequently and the back burner is encrusted with burnt charcoal from cooking too many omelettes. My shelves are filled with knick-knacks that can only be reached with the aid of a chair or waste basket, whichever is in closest proximity. My dishwasher is temperamental. Sometimes, I have to coax it to work. If I slam the door too hard, it retaliates by flooding the kitchen.

Last week, I read about a “passive contemporary” with sliders, gliders, skylights and cutting-edge accessories. I am not sure what a “passive contemporary” even is but it sounds like it has psychological issues. My favorite cutting-edge accessory is a pair of scissors that has been in my family since the 1970s. The shower head in the contemporary guarantees to provide a rigorous massage. My shower head trickles and occasionally spits. As for the skylights, I used to have a hole in the roof, but it's been repaired. I miss lying in the bathtub at night where, if I angled my head properly, I could see the stars. And though, we don't live near the water, I do fall asleep to the lull of a babbling brook that is actually the sound emanating from a leaky faucet.

Another real estate ad that drew me in read:”designed for the millennium with a reverence for the past.” This is obviously for people who can't make up their minds. “Sequestered on a gently rising knoll” sits a “meticulously-cared for” colonial. It is “dripping with charm,” comes with hot tub and cabana and is “exquisitely and freshly decorated” on three “idyllic” acres with a “luxurious, functional heated swimming pool and southern exposure. At \$1, 5,000 it's a steal. It also has a mother-in-law suite in a separate wing which I admit, holds a certain allure provided the suite is in another state.

Do people rally talk like this? I called up a realtor to find out.

“I'm calling about the “bright, impeccably-maintained, adorable yet refined” cottage for \$2,600,000,” I said. “The one with the two powder rooms, 200-bottle wine cellar, full-figured master bedroom and the graceful tennis court.”

“You mean the darling little place over on Cross Highway?” she asked. “It’s the best buy on the market. “It’s a real honey of a house, the grand jewel of Westport. It has all the amenities including an eat-in bathroom, limestone tiled deck and,” she was becoming breathless, “it comes with a sun-drenched solarium, perennial gardens, a paneled mud room, and...manicured and pedicured lawns.”

“I’ve died and gone to heaven,” I said. “I’m also curious about the “walk-to-everywhere” house. Can you tell me: exactly *where is everywhere?*”

“Our walk-to-everywhere house is centrally located to facilitate all your needs. Walking is so important. We refer to this as our “cardiac-correct home. It even has an exercise wing with all the latest equipment and a built-in Jacuzzi plus an enchanting hermetically-sealed bubble for those occasional sick days.”

“Is it covered by health insurance?” I dared to ask.

The house with the five-person-spa, in-ground terrarium, green house for effect, and park-like grounds had me drooling. I phoned another realtor and inquired.

“This house is our top listing,” a perky-sounding woman told me. It’s graced by cascading wisteria and provides exceptional landscaped walks with superb guest facilities and a computer/study area. It’s a one-of-a-kind house with fabulous potential. All it needs is about \$300,000 worth of work.”

I was now so caught up in the experience, I couldn’t quit. I loved talking shop with these gals who sounded as cutesy and bubbly as the homes they were describing. I said I’d get back to them soon. I began viewing my home in a new light. It paled by comparison.

My house is not “picture-perfect.” It is not in “pristine condition” nor is it “sequestered away” on a cul-de-sac. It cannot be called “dramatic,” “divine,” or “scrumptious” but it is cozy and warm and it works for us. In our house, the great room was once called the den. We upgraded it to the family room, and before that it was the playroom which grew out of the Rec room and finally, a word eliminated from any savvy person’s vocabulary: the basement.

Our friends live in a house that is a realtor’s dream. It has a massive stone fireplace, vaulted ceilings, and historically-accurate moldings. It has a sculpture garden, a state-of-the-art theater and bucolic jet-stream baths. Their favorite topic of conversation is “additions.” These people know additions like I know my Ben & Jerry ice cream flavors. Their house has been added on so many times it now resembles Amtrak. When their latest annex was completed, to keep from getting bored, they built an environmental center with a

solarium, terrarium and an atrium. An architect once told me: “when I can’t remove a boulder in the middle of a lot, I build a house around it, plant a tree and call it an atrium. Then I sell it for a million bucks.”

Occasionally, I suffer from home deprivation. I miss having a waterfall overlooking a flagstone terrace, Olympic-size closets and a custom-designed, multi-level Bar-B-Q station. My “captivating view” includes my neighbor, Cynthia running out in PJs every morning to retrieve her newspaper. I often wish I could talk additions, too, but the only addition we put on our house were new gutters. Recently though, I bought a new garbage can and felt like Queen of the Manor. Next month, I’m thinking of purchasing a weed whacker and a Kelly-green garden hose to match the patches of grass that sprout up in between the moss.

Let’s face it: I’m just a simple girl at heart. I’m willing to bypass all the glitz for wholesome, carefree living in my “comely and cluttered” little dwelling. A realtor once told me: “I can show you a to-die-for Tudor that’s “edible, yummy, and tasteful.” It’s a real “cream puff of a house.”

“Sorry,” I said, “I don’t do desserts.”