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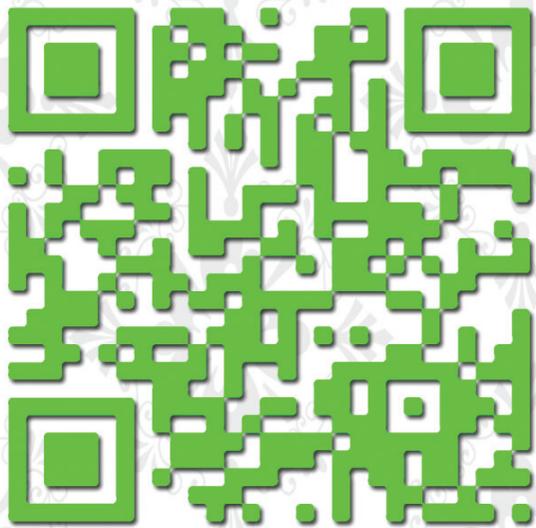
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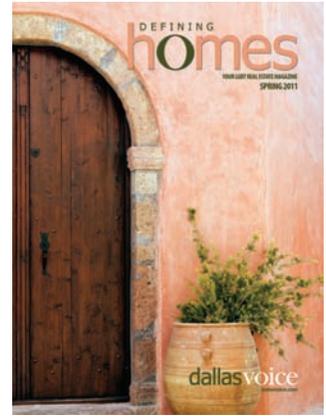


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[THE QUESTION]

# Ask the experts

As Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and a number of other social networking sites are more and more prevalent in everyday life — professional and personal — we wondered whether the trend is effective as a marketing tool in the real estate industry as a marketing tool. Area agents put in their two cents worth on how the trend works, or doesn't work, for them in their work.

Vice president of real estate services for Prudential, Steve Shatsky has presided over classes on the use of social networks in business. He discusses, at length, how the trend has worked for him and the strategies behind using the networks.

Now we're just waiting for all of them to accept our friend requests.

## Steve Habgood

*Hewitt & Habgood Realty Group*

Social networking is an important component of an overall marketing effort. It helps keep us connected with our friends, family and clients on a personal, individual level. We don't use it to push all our new listings or open houses. It's more of a pull marketing rather than push marketing effort. Brian Bleeker on our team is especially effective in using it to keep connected and informed about what's going on in his circle of friends and clients.



Steve Habgood

## Mike Grossman

*Re/Max Urban*

Social networking is not a tool to sell real estate in my opinion. It is an effective way to stay in "personal touch" with customers, clients, friends and acquaintances and to inform them of emerging trends, market conditions and updated information regarding real estate.

## Jack Evans

*Ellen Terry, a division of Ebby Halliday Real Estate*

Just today, I received an invitation to join a new group: "Realtors on Facebook." The purpose of the realtor group so far has been to let member Realtors know about new listings and buyer needs (looking for something that is not active on the market).

## Bob McCranie

*Texas Pride Realty*

I have different fan pages for the 20 or so towns I work in. I advertise those pages and invite other people to put content on those pages. I get people who aren't even friends to participate and solicit buyers and sellers.

## Jere Becker

*Pinnacle Experts Group*

For investment houses I am looking to sell or rent, I use it to market the property, especially now where there are so many buyers looking for seller financing and don't use the services of a Realtor. Video is going to be the preferred medium for viewing properties and the link is easy to put into social media. To find clients who want to sell, I use it to market my services. Also, real estate is evolving into a consulting business where my clients pay only for the services they want.



Jere Becker

## Steve Shatsky

*Prudential Texas Properties*

Social networking is not a "new" tool. Agents on the cutting edge in building business and effectively marketing their clients' properties have been using it for several years now. In fact, any agent today who does not have a social networking strategy as part of both his/her business and marketing plans is missing a critical component.

I have been successfully using Facebook to create visibility for listings and draw attention to open houses. I have also used Facebook to connect with and strengthen my relationships with clients. Real estate is a business of relationships and Facebook allows me to communicate and get to know my clients even better, while it allows them to get to know me better, as well.

My Dallasism.com blog has served multiple

purposes. It has provided a search engine optimized platform to promote my listings to prospective buyers searching for homes on the Internet. It also allows me to provide monthly market reports for all the Turtle Creek highrises to prospective buyers and sellers searching for information on the Internet.

Dallasism.com has introduced new clients to me and my market expertise in the Turtle Creek area.

Lastly, I have blogged and been an ambassador for ActiveRain (an international real estate networking and blogging website) for more than three years. My blogging as a member of the ActiveRain community has allowed me to develop relationships and a nationwide network of real estate agents who refer business to me and with whom I network to share marketing and business ideas. This has been invaluable, allowing me to gain insight into new trends and innovative technologies, giving me a competitive advantage over agents whose networking is confined to only a local level.

*Shatsky is vice president of real estate services, Dallas office manager for Prudential Texas Properties. He has recently taught classes on the use of blogging and Facebook in real estate at several locations across the DFW area for the MetroTex Association of Realtors. He was a panelist on the topic of real estate blogging for ActiveRain at their RainCamp-Charlotte event last fall, and will be speaking on a panel covering the topic of short sales at the Prudential Real Estate sales convention in San Diego in March.*



Steve Shatsky



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[NEIGHBORHOOD]

# Frisco a go-go



## LGBT homeowners find affordability key in this northern 'burb

By Jef Tingley

Inside the Dallas "bubble," Frisco is often only thought of as the quickest place to get an IKEA fix. (After all, who doesn't need a *Väte Kvartal* to call their very own?) But scores of gay North Texans call Frisco home too, and not just for the proximity to Swedish furnishings and meatballs.

The town is at the end of the Dallas North Tollway and spans 69-square miles. Frisco's population reached 119,738 in January with a median age of 34 and a median household income of \$101,574. If the Kinsey 10 percent theory holds true, that means there could be as many as 12,000 LGBT people living there.

We caught up with a handful of them to see what day-to-day life in this city to the north is really like and what drew them in.

"We primarily moved to Frisco because the homes are so affordable," says Natalie Amberson, who lives in a 1,700 square foot home in North Frisco with her wife, April, and their two dogs and cats. "Our mortgage is only \$100 more than our rent was [in Oak

Lawn]. We also very much wanted dogs and decided that we would not take on the responsibility of canine ownership until we had a yard for them to play in."

Fifteen-year resident Clarence Stiles agree. "We knew the area was growing and would have good resale value."

Stiles and his husband, Jon Wienk, share their one-story, ranch-style home with their six dogs. But affordable living aside, all of those interviewed concurred that their budding suburb's strong sense of community makes Frisco so desirable.

"Frisco has grown as a city and a community tremendously over the last 10 years, but [it] does its best to keep that small town feel," says James Nunn, a 12-year resident who lives with his partner, Chris Moss, and their two dogs in a 2,200 square foot home abutting one of Frisco's many popular green belt areas.

To help keep Frisco's LGBT community connected, Nunn became involved with the group Frisco Pride, which meets weekly in a variety

of different social settings. The group, which has been in existence since 1999, recently relaunched a new website (FriscoPride.com) and Facebook page to help ease communication among its members.

Jeanne Sharon Rubin and her wife Lisa Rose Mashigian are Frisco Pride members and active with another local group that fosters the LGBT community, the Collin County Gay & Lesbian Alliance. The couple also volunteers for Youth First Texas Collin County, which is based in Plano but works with youth in Frisco. As part of their volunteer efforts, they arrange a monthly fundraiser in Frisco benefiting Youth First Texas.

Rubin and Mashigian have lived in their 2,900-square-foot home in Frisco's Panther Creek Estates for six-and-a-half years. "We were the first to build on the street, and I had Lisa get out the hammer and drill so we could put up the rainbow flag," says Rubin. "We wanted everyone to know that we were here first."

Natalie Amberson and her wife April find comfort in both the bustling growth of Frisco and the still quiet part of the small town.



But Rubin is quick to add that they have found a diverse and welcoming community with a homeowner's association that puts on events throughout the year, book clubs, neighbors who will dog sit and lend tools. And if the weather is just right, spontaneous block parties happen.

And while their life may seem rooted in Frisco, getting there was more of a compromise.

"I was never moving to the suburbs, and Lisa was never leaving her home in Plano," says Rubin. "I came to the suburbs kicking and screaming, but I really do love Frisco."

Natalie Amberson echoes that statement. "I feel by living in Frisco, I get the best of both worlds. There are plenty of restaurants and shopping. Being a sports fan, I enjoy attending the minor league games, [but] most of all I actually enjoy driving by the cattle and farmland. Frisco has grown significantly, but every day I look at the green land and animals; it brings me a sense of peace."

Clearly the suburb is more than just an Ikea destination for that affordable bookcase. Gay folk might find themselves drawn to the modern community and shopping for a home to put that bookcase in. Or at the very least, adding just a little more "pride" to the affordable and friendly city of Frisco.

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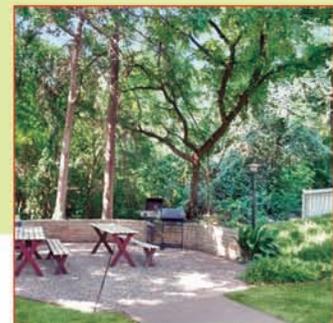
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Contemporary Styling for a Comfortable Life

# Welcoming home

Cora Sue Anthony comes back to Dallas as the new host of HGTV's 'Real Estate Intervention'

By Andrea Grimes

Cora Sue Anthony knows that if homeowners don't engage her home-staging services the first time around, it won't be long before they're back. They always come back—usually after the first price reduction on a home that wasn't dressed to sell.

"Paying for a staging will always cost you much less than your first price reduction," says Anthony, the new host of HGTV's revamped *Real Estate Intervention*. It's not exactly an 'I told you so!' coming from the sugar-voiced real estate expert, it's more of a mother-knows-best line. After all, says Anthony, "I got a TV show, didn't I?"

Today, Anthony lives in the San Francisco Bay area and works almost exclusively with high-end listings, helping investors flip homes as fast as possible, as well as advising home owners on how to spruce up drab or cluttered homes that discourage buyers from signing on the dotted line. Whether it's new cabinet faces or an imagined little girl's room, aesthetic changes make all the difference — especially in an unfriendly economy.

"In this market, things that used to be high end are still the same house, just \$200,000 or \$300,000 less," explains Anthony.

A lovely property and a good location just don't do it any more. Sometimes it takes that "new house smell," from a fresh coat of paint to secure a sale.

For *Real Estate Intervention*, Anthony will come home to Texas to get Dallas properties in ship-shape. She's come a long way from her roots in South Dallas, where she was born over a Christmas vacation. "I'm truly a Christmas baby," says Anthony, whose passion for holiday décor—and a little luck — got her where she is today. When her children, who are now 16 and 20, were small, Anthony dolled up a table at a Christmas cookie exchange at their school, where she also designed the sets for their class plays. Seeing her decked-out cookie table, a fellow mom told Anthony about home staging.

Today, her daughter works as a stylist on



Cora Sue Anthony hails from South Dallas and returns to the city with the revamped 'Real Estate Intervention' on HGTV. Anthony will help redo bad design as people put their houses up for sale.

*Real Estate Intervention* and helps her mom look her best while she's making over homes, appealing to buyers' emotions as well as their pocketbooks is key.

Starting with a good location—"location, location, location always applies," she says — and a house that doesn't need much serious plumbing or foundational repair, Anthony can "tear down a wall or two" and make cosmetic changes so that buyers can really envision themselves living in a particular home.

"People want the most bang for their buck," Anthony says.

Because in this down economy, even the best houses won't sell unless they make buyers feel something.

"Everything I do has to do with evoking an emotional response," she says, whether that's decorating a kids' room in a family neighborhood or turning a second bedroom into a home office in up-and-coming neighborhoods that attract young professionals.

Sometimes, serious cosmetic changes have to happen in a mat-

ter of days or weeks, especially when Anthony works with investors flipping properties.

"They're still trying to get every penny," she says, but staging can make the difference between a house that sells almost immediately and one that languishes on the market. And Anthony knows she can get the job done.

"If we get them to fall in love with the house, they'll buy it."

## Need an intervention?

Believe it or not, some gay couples do not have that fabulous design gene in them. And if they are trying to move out of one house and into another, that lack of genetics will bite them in the rear. Do you fall into that category? Well, you may just have an out.

Not only has HGTV's *Real Estate Intervention* been revamped with new host Cora Sue Anthony, the show is on the lookout for applicants to be part of their show — or really, in need of their intervention to turn that house around and sell it.

"We are looking for all kinds of homeowners," publicist Avelino Pombo says. "We love to feature diversity and not only would we want to feature same-sex couples, but any other family that represents America. Whether it's a family of six, a blended family or even a "modern family." We want to see it all on the show."

Although the show has collected all the submissions for this new season, Pombo urges couples to apply. After reviewing the applicants, the network will offer the top four in Dallas a much-needed design step in.

"We'll definitely return to Dallas for another season because the city gets lots of real estate exposure," Pombo says. "With the new talent, newer edge and more design, Dallas is a prime place for the show."

Whether all you need is a decluttering or a paint job, or something major like a stunning bathroom or a brighter kitchen, Anthony and the rest of the *Real Estate Intervention* crew can help out. You may not even want to move after they are done.

And LGBT families and couples will have to come out of that design closet if they aren't

matching the throw pillows to the flecks of matching color in the curtains. Oh how the gays pride themselves on one a spectacularly designed home.

Right? "Well, same-sex couples seem to infuse that," Pombo says.

— Rich Lopez

For more information, visit [HGTV.com/on-tv/be-on-HGTV](http://HGTV.com/on-tv/be-on-HGTV)



[READY TO SELL]

# First impressions

The Make Ready Group takes care of all those finishing touches before your house goes on the market — and more



By Rich Lopez

**A**partment dwellers are all too familiar with the dreaded make ready preparations when moving out. Whether it's making sure the baseboards are pristine or the oven actually works, everything has to be in tiptop shape for that next renter.

Apply that idea to that home about to go on sell and the task grows exponentially. But don't fret — this is where The Make Ready Group can step in.

"We focus on the whole make ready aspect of helping Realtors out," says founder Steven McFarland.

So basically, someone can do all this for you. That in itself can be a much needed relief from the already stressful duty of selling a home. But McFarland reminds that the property owner remains completely accountable for the house and any issues it may have — especially if it's to sit vacant while on the market.

"Although the upkeep can be farmed out to an agent, the owners of that property are responsible for everything," he says. "Sometimes a bank will own a property but they will usually have a property preservation dispatch that covers everything in the home like maintenance, repairs, landscape. Even the structure is maintained."

The Make Ready Group grew out of working on apartments, but evolved because McFarland was also a Realtor. He began seeing how much time was getting taken up just preparing a home when he could have been selling. Now, he and his company focus solely on homes and specialize in not only preparing a home for the market, but also taking some burden off the agents.

"They really want someone to take over that responsibility," he says, "And we specialize in that."

Much like that property preservation crew, the Make Ready Group are the people that will handle the same issues. With McFarland com-

Steven McFarland, inset, and his company The Make Ready Group can prep any homeowners just in need of home services but not necessarily selling their homes.

ing from a real estate background, he knows all too well the importance of having a picture perfect house.

"We do anything to a property that needs to be done. Our philosophy is that the land must be maintained," he says. "The buyer is the consumer and they will buy what they like."

With Texas having such extreme weather, McFarland warns of certain precautions. The Texas heat is a given, but with major ice and snow storms over the past two years, he says the smallest measures can reduce major catastrophes.

"With the cold weather like we just experienced, you always want to winterize the pipes," he says. "Drain water from the pipes and heater and make sure the water is secured going into the property. And drip the faucets. *Nobody* wants the pipes to burst. I've seen water pouring out of the ceiling and it just destroys."

On the flip side, he recommends safety when it comes to heat. As summer gets over 100-degree temperatures, McFarland advises that no matter what, at least two people should tend to the duties should one suffer from heat stroke.

"People tend to insulate the attics in the summer, but it gets so very hot in there," he says. "So two people are a must. Otherwise, people should really have some good ventilation going through the house and sometimes it's just as easy as putting a box fan in."

But one item stands out that a buyer will have much concern over.



prep any house before it hits the market. The company also offers services to cus-

“Heating and air is a biggie,” he says. “A place that sits vacant for a long time with the heater or air conditioning off needs to be checked to see if it’s working properly.”

McFarland has advice for the people who opt to do the make ready themselves, because there are those few willing to take it on. With his experience, McFarland immediately knows what to look for that needs his services. But ultimately, the goal is to make the house presentable and he says that can start easily with a new coat of paint, a “royal cleaning,” adjusting doors and patching holes in the wall.

“You want it ready,” he emphasizes. “Nobody can see a flaw when they walk in.”

Just don’t think the company is only for sellers. They provide home services throughout Dallas and have moved beyond the city limits tending to homes in Frisco and Southlake. But McFarland’s also noticed a recent trend in his maintenance orders.

“Oh yeah, you don’t have to be selling the property to use us,” he says. “Even if you have a commercial space, we can do the job. We have individuals with the proper skills for most any job. And we’re familiar with lots of areas around town, but as of late, we’ve definitely been getting more orders from the LGBT community in and around Oak Lawn.”

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# Better to have than have not

Having total peace of mind or ... how buying a home warranty was the best decision I ever made

By Steven Lindsey

It's 106 degrees outside and after five days of scorching heat, there's no relief in the forecast for at least twice that long. A few margaritas, frequent dips in the pool and sleeping directly under an air vent become key to survival (or at least essential to staying comfortable, if I'm to be a little less dramatic). But what happens when disaster strikes in the middle of the night?

That's exactly what occurred a few years ago one record-breaking July. The house my partner and I share isn't large by most standards, but its high ceilings and open floor plan make it necessary for us to operate two air conditioners for several months of the year. So when we awoke in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat, it was not a good sign.

An arm raised up to the vent and the verdict was clear — the air conditioner was not cooling. Instead it was blowing like the hot, stale-coffee breath of an old man. Something was seriously wrong. We tossed and turned until morning and called for help. Within the day, a repairman fixed a compressor, replaced a spark plug or gave the whole system a rotate-and-balance (not really sure of the technical terms), and it was good as new. And for only \$60.

That's only because we had a home warranty, though Sharon Harrison, president of Nations Home Warranty, based in Dallas says "residential service contract" is a more accurate description.

Shortly after air conditioner No. 1 was repaired, air conditioner No. 2 went out and had to be completely replaced. No amount of oil changes or new shock absorbers was going to bring this one back to life. Two days later, we were the proud parents of a brand-new air conditioner. Retail value, \$1,600.

It's scenarios like these when a home warranty can really benefit a homeowner.

"Most people don't budget for household repairs," Harrison says. "We may set aside money for car repairs and health care, but generally people don't wake up on Jan. 1 and decide to put money away for their homes."

Harrison says the biggest ticket items that she has to replace are air conditioning and heating systems, but the worst repeat offender for her is swimming pools.

"I spend an exorbitant amount of money on swimming pools because water and motors don't work nicely together," she says. "When I look through my profit and losses at the end of the year it is always those blasted swimming pools. They're always on the blink!"

So if you own a pool and don't have a home warranty, it may be worth considering. At Nations, adding on a pool costs a mere \$160 per year, which I can say from personal experience is less than even the most minor single repair to a pool.

For most people, a home warranty is included at the time they purchase a house, which is especially important when buying a pre-owned home.

According to Jenni Stolarski, a Realtor with Briggs Freeman Sotheby's International Realty, "They're not required, but I rarely see a contract come through that doesn't have one. It's one of those things that's become de facto."

In her experience, the only downside can be certain home warranty companies trying to always repair rather than replace, and that can get frustrating if the company seems unwilling to shell out the money for a new appliance, for example.

Harrison, however, is dedicated to keeping her customers for life and pledges to do whatever she can to make her customers happy. However, people need to understand exactly what a home warranty does replace, whether using her company or another.

"Home warranty companies are responsible to repair or replace equipment that has broken. If there is damage that results from an appliance breaking, that is not covered. That's where home warranties and homeowners insurance go hand in hand."

And that's a powerful combination for peace of mind. Last year, a pipe burst in one of the air conditioning units in our attic



and damaged the ceiling and walls in three rooms of our house. The insurance agency covered the \$20,000-plus in damages, but the home warranty came through to repair the actual air conditioning unit, which would've been an additional \$700 out of pocket otherwise.

Some people may be tempted to drop their warranties after years of not needing them, but Eric Pratt, owner of Taddy's Pet Services, has kept his home warranty service for 12 years and swears by it. His biggest replacement was also an air conditioning unit.

"Bingo!" he exclaims about the very expensive item he had replaced.

He says the only downside is paying for the warranty on the years when you don't use it at all, but when you do need it, the benefit can more than make up for the difference.

"Just keep track of who they are sending out," Pratt says. "Check out reports on the [service] company, if there's bad reports, call your home warranty company and ask for someone else to do repairs. If there's

someone you have liked in the past, ask if the same vendor can help on the issue you are having."

Finally, it's important to note that home warranties don't have to be purchased at the time of buying or selling a home. They can be obtained at any time and rates can be as low as \$30 to \$40 per month, but it's important to read carefully what is covered so there are no surprises. Sometimes you need to add on a supplement for certain appliances, like washers and dryers, or those pesky pools. Termite and pest treatments can be options, as well as a green plan like Nations offers. Through that program, they'll replace appliances with more energy efficient units, such as tankless water heaters to replace broken traditional water heaters.

Really, home warranties are as flexible as you need them to be. And for a little extra peace of mind when it comes to one of your most valuable assets, a couple dollars a day might just be worth the additional expense.

# There goes the neighborhood

One pocket of an Oak Lawn neighborhood gets a pick-me-up

By Rich Lopez

When a spot goes vacant in a neighborhood, people may speculate about what happened. But as the set of public housing buildings known as the Cedar Springs Place Addition was getting marked as a vacated spot by the city, the residents across Kings Street at Montebella weren't worried about the dreary, empty spot — they were excited.

"Most people are excited about the fact that there will likely be rebuilding," Steve Nall says. "A more updated look will make a big difference and definitely be more appealing than what's there now."

Nall is the listings agent and developer representative for the Montebella, a property that has taken older apartment buildings and converted them into condos with all the modern luxuries inside the charm of an older building. Montebella is one of several complexes in that heavily wooded pocket of Oak Lawn that has turned its not-so-pretty spot into a welcoming oasis of a neighborhood. And the revitalization excites Nall

"To see it go from vacant apartments to becoming community has been one of the best things and it's been so interesting to watch it change and grow," he says. "I think we were first in this area doing the revitalization or rebuilding of area."

Five years ago, Nall came on as the developer's rep and oversaw the conversion of Montebella. The space breaks down into buildings with similar structures but unique designs to each. The first phase was to redo the buildings closest to the street and after gutting them out to the bricks and studs, they were essentially rebuilt with a sleeker interiors. They kept the original hardwood flooring but freshened up the look with granite countertops, stainless appliances and one thing that couldn't be beat — trees. A canopy of live oak trees cover the main drive of the complex, offering a nest of green to cozy up in. The complex has two more buildings to finish and they will all have been completely converted.

For Nall, this project is one of several happening in this area. Kings connects a residential area between Cedar Springs and Maple roads and provides easy access to a number of crucial spots close by such as Love Field airport, UT Southwestern and also the development of Maple Avenue thanks to Crow Holdings.

"I would describe this neighborhood as transitional, but the new stuff happening in the area is great," Nall says.



Montebella, top, is in the final stages of converting to an all-condo complex. The Cedar Springs Place addition across the street is slated for demolition.



Steve Nall, above, walks through a conversion project in Montebella which has been part of the revitalized community in the area

The Dallas Morning News' Steve Brown wrote recently about Crow Holdings and its expansion down Maple Avenue that started with the old Parkland venture. Established businesses such as Herrera's and Sunshine Laundry have embraced the newer, better Maple and relocated to better fit into the project.

Additionally, Kroger's has been looking at the Elliott's Hardware site for a potential spot to open a Signature location close to the new DART Green Line at Maple and Denton roads. New condos, new stores, new public transportation all amp up the area nicely. So what about that vacant spot across from Montebella? No real word yet, according to Nall, but buzz seems to be brewing.

"Well, it has everyone's attention here. Especially when they started painting the "v's" (for vacant) on the doors," he says. "We hear that various developers have eyed the property."

Morning News reporter Kim Horner wrote, "The Dallas Housing Authority has moved almost everyone out of that part of a public housing complex on the edge of Oak Lawn. The agency plans to demolish the 220 apartments built in 1942 that look like rundown military barracks and replace them with new units."

This means good news for Montebella. The buildings are stark and scary even. A facelift couldn't change the look, but an entirely new development will — as well as fit in better with the developments of late.

"It's an interesting mix of old and new here and I think that's what draws people in," Nall says. "We're glad to see the new restaurants and other complexes. The land is being better utilized now and yet still has some of the feel like original Oak Lawn area."

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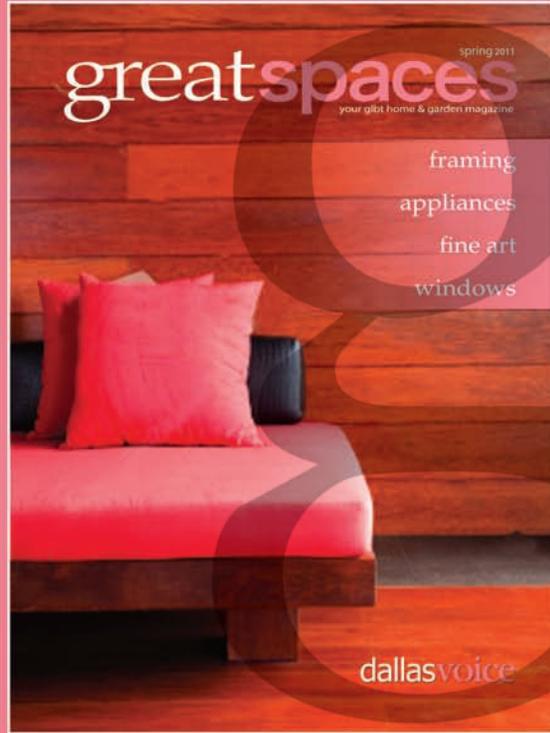


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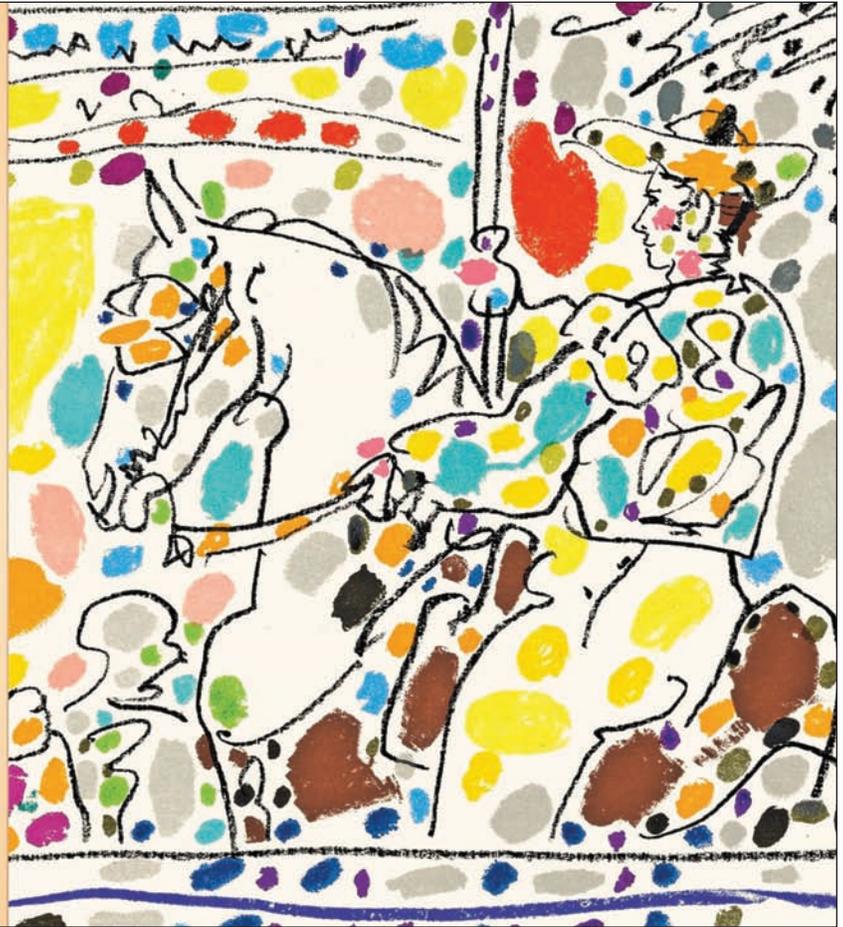
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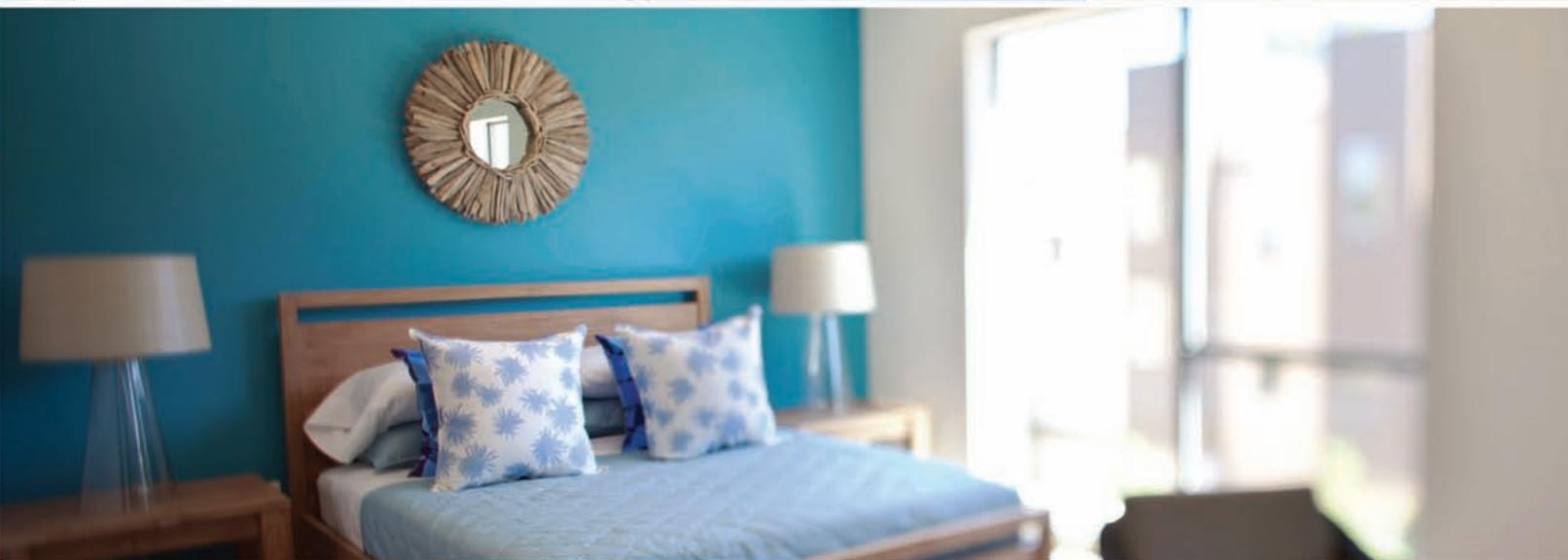
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