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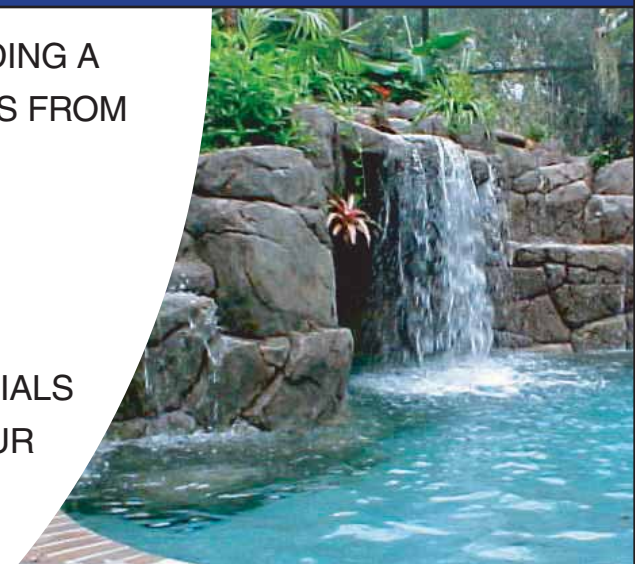
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Home & garden

Spring is here, so spread some cheer!

It's that time of the year that residents start preparing for summer, spending more time outdoors—or just bringing the outdoors in. Daylights are a great way to do that and one Pleasanton company offers unique lighting that warms the home. When people think spring, they often think flowers and greenery. The Livermore Amador Valley Garden Club will be holding their annual plant sale next month, offering an array of plants below nursery prices. Our focus in this issue is on a special home in the downtown that holds a key to Pleasanton's history. The Robinettes own the former Orloff house, which was built in 1940. They've restored it to its former glory, with some added bonuses that weren't available during that era—such as a movie screening room and granite countertops.

It just comes natural

Energy-efficient windows and skylights will brighten your home 5

Let's gather in the garden

The Livermore Amador Valley Garden Club welcomes you to the passion for planting 7



No harm to its charm

Downtown home, circa 1940, maintains its historic look 8

Putting the 'ah' in spa

Create a relaxing backyard oasis with a hot tub 15

Editor: Janet Pelletier

Art Director: Shannon Corey

On the cover: This cozy sitting room off the master bedroom is one of the few changes Chris and Alan Robinette have made after buying and preserving the historic pre-World War II home of the late Ed and May Orloff on Division Street in 2002. The house, built in 1940, is on a spacious lot and was one of the last few homes on the street as Division headed northwest to join Hopyard and what then was mostly marshland and hop fields at the edge of Pleasanton. Photo by Shannon Corey.

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Natural lighting saves money and warms up a home

Energy-efficient windows, skylights are gaining momentum

One of today's most popular home design features is more natural light, flooding through windows and dramatically flowing through skylights. And the options are endless.

As the green building and remodeling movement gains momentum, energy-efficient venting skylights that offer no-cost passive flow of air are getting more attention from architects, designers and homeowners.

Natural lighting can add brightness and warmth to any home and is a feature Realtors look for when selling a home and prospective homebuyers desire.

Kitchens are prime spots for venting skylights. There, they utilize their natural chimney effect to exhaust moist, heated air and cooking odors from the home.

And the trend continues in bathrooms. According to a National Home Shopper's Survey conducted by the National Association of Homebuilders, 65 percent of homebuyers request skylights in their bathrooms, where privacy is of the utmost importance.

For a modern twist on the standard daylighting products, consumers have been checking out Solatube tubular skylights, which are sold in Alameda and Contra Costa counties by Pleasanton dealer, Solabrite.

The tubular product comes in a variety of styles and options. Walk into the Solabrite studio at 5729 Sonoma Drive, Ste. H, and you can see the products at work in both an office, residential and bathroom setting.

Solabrite President John Izzo said he's seeing more people looking into Solatube

products for a number of reasons.

"Cost—it's one-third to one-fourth of the cost of a traditional skylight," Izzo said. "The quality is also a factor. It spreads light throughout the space as opposed to a skylight, where it just shines downward."

Solatube products are also functional for various roof designs, as opposed to skylights, he said.

Izzo said the lights screen out harmful ultra-violet rays, which means they also won't allow heat to seep through. The lights will not fade carpets, wood floors, or furniture, he added.

Solatubes can be run through floors, added sales director Bill Creasi, meaning a basement can have a skylight connected to the first floor of a home.

A number of special options can also be added, such as amber-colored filters which add a warmer hue to walls, and switches that adjust the level of preferred light.

Izzo said while the lights are appealing to a wide variety of people, they are especially popular with seniors, people who work at home, and more recently, people who are environmentally-conscious.

Adding Solatubes to a home can save the homeowner 20 to 30 percent off of their energy bill, he said.

Pricing varies, depending on special options such as lens filters and vents. Solatube products range from about \$350 to \$950, depending on whether the customer chooses to install it themselves or pay for installation.

—Janet Pelletier, (ARA Content)



An alternative to traditional skylights is the use of tubes to vent in natural sun light.

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Good times bloom with garden club

Livermore Amador Valley Garden Club meets the first Tuesday of each month

by Emily Atwood
photos by Shannon Corey

Gardening is a tried and true hobby that has many devotees in Pleasanton, as evidenced by the well-established Livermore Amador Valley Garden Club.

The group of about 70 to 80 members meets once a month to discuss various topics relating to gardening and hear from a guest speaker. Past speakers include authors and local gardening enthusiasts, like Dolores Bengtson when she discussed gardening in Tanzania, Africa at the March meeting.

Sally Leighton, publicity chair for the club, said it's a good place for people in the area to get information about gardening. The group goes on several field trips as well, with past trips including the Fioli Center in Woodside, Calif. and all the way up to Napa.

Subgroups, such as one for herbs and another for floral arranging, meet once a month. Garden club members also maintain various gardens around the area, including one at Camp Arroyo in Livermore and the sensory garden behind the Pleasanton Senior Center.

The club's annual plant sale is coming up April 5 at the Amador Valley High School parking lot, 1155 Santa Rita Road.

"It's a major fundraiser for the club," she said. "There are hundreds of plants for sale below nursery prices because they're grown and donated by club members."

What attracts so many to the hobby?

Leighton said she enjoys it because of the personal satisfaction of planting a beautiful garden that enhances her home's yard.

"And it also helps a home's value," she added.

The group meets at Alisal Elementary School, 1454 Santa Rita Road, at 7 p.m. the first Tuesday of each month, except on election days. The club welcomes newcomers. To learn more, call Leighton at 417-8809. ■

Garden inspired

The fifth annual Bay-Friendly Garden Tour will be held April 27, showcasing 30 private and public gardens throughout Alameda County. Pleasanton, Dublin and Livermore gardeners adapt traditional landscapes with drought-tolerant perennials better suited to the valley. Backyard farmers across the county grow harvests of fruit and vegetables and keep goats, chickens and bees. All Bay-Friendly gardens employ natural gardening practices.

The free, self-guided tour will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Registration is required and can be done online at www.BayFriendly.org or by calling (510) 444-SOIL by April 15.





Built in 1940, this unpretentious, yet charming house on Division St. has kept its historic charm.

Preserving the past

1940 home changes owners but not its charm

STORY BY JEB BING • PHOTOS BY SHANNON COREY

Alameda County District Attorney Tom Orloff should be proud. The home where he grew up at 690 Division St. near downtown Pleasanton looks much the same as he remembers it after his parents, Ed and Amy Orloff, built it in 1940 and lived there the rest of their lives.

Even the large “social room” on the lower level where Tom, his sister Linda and their parents frequently entertained continues to be the place where the home’s new owners, Chris and Alan Robinette, spend much of their time. It’s the perfect spot for major get-togethers like for the Superbowl, for “girls’ night out,” and the occasional men’s poker game. After all, it’s the only room in the tri-level house that has a TV, with the room now boasting eight special-order lounge chairs and a wall-size DLP projection screen.

The Robinettes, who moved to Pleasanton from Orange County in 1985 and lived in Pleasanton Valley, bought the Orloff home in 2002. Alan and Chris, who own Windowology at 4225 Stanley Blvd., wanted to live close to work and within walking distance of downtown. Working with Real Estate Broker Mike Carey, they found the Orloff home on the market after Amy Orloff’s death and bought it for \$820,000. Its market value today is close to \$2 million.

The Orloffs built the original 2,500-square-foot home for \$10,000, “which in 1940 was an unbelievable price to pay for a house at the edge of Pleasanton,” Alan Robinette said. Although the Division Street bridge was in place, Division Street and



The living room looks much as it did in 1940, with a quarter-sawn oak floor and darker walnut inlays. Besides new wall finishes, the only change was to place marble over the original brick-front fireplace to make the room more formal.



The Robinettes' dining room looks that same as the Orloffs left it, although Alan Robinette added the unique cabinet (right photo), which was hand-made from one piece of wood in Scotland in 1937.



The Robinettes removed a wall that once separated the kitchen and this breakfast room facing onto Division Street, adding more light and space.

Hopyard Road going northwest were narrow two-lane streets that ended in marshland and hop fields beyond what is now Valley Avenue.

Ed Orloff and his next door neighbor Howard Hansen were part of the families that owned and operated two dairies under the Hansen-Orloff Dairy name—one at the corner of Black and Santa Rita and one on Hopyard Road. The two families provided milk for Bay Area residents from 1919 to 1947. In 1947 the dairies were divided into two separate operations by the partners. Both dairies eventually ceased operation and were sold for development.

"Howard Hansen, who still lives next door, told me that he started selling off his part of the land when the state said he had to give some up to make way for the construction of I-680," Robinette said. "So you can see we're talking about a lot of acreage."

For the Robinettes, the Orloff home was unique because it was a high quality home that had been extremely well maintained, and yet had not lost its original charm. Often when older homes go on the market, Robinette said, they have either been neglected so that their original historical value is

gone, or these homes have been "improved" with non-period elements, so much so that there's little left of the original house to see.

"For us, here was a home always owned by Ed and Amy Orloff, who built it, and maintained it," Robinette said. "Little was changed from the day they moved in. Chris and I have worked hard to keep it in just that same mint condition, changing only a few parts of the house to meet contemporary needs while embracing period elements wherever possible."

The changes included placing marble over the brick fireplace to add additional formality to the living room, replacing the kitchen linoleum floors with stone tiles, and changing the wood countertops in the kitchen and laundry room with honed granite. The original lighting fixtures have been restored, and additional period fixtures from the 1930s have been added. Even the cupboard door knobs and drawer handle details were important to the Robinettes. When additional cabinets were added, they searched exhaustively to find original matching hardware.



Kitchen window sits above the original Kohler cast-iron farm sink and the original cupboards.



Granite countertops and Travertine tile floors have replaced the original wooden tops and floor linoleum. The granite was sanded down to remove its shine to help keep the kitchen's vintage look.

► Continued on page 11

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(Above) The lower level of the Orloff home is where the Robinettes have brought in 21st century upgrades, with eight recliners that face a wall-size theater screen (lower right) and a long counter for refreshments and snacks at the other end.



Master suite opens onto a step-down sitting room with a walk-in closet and large bathroom that the Robinettes added.



A dial phone like the one the Orloffs used hangs on hallway wall outside the master bedroom.

Preserving the past

► Continued from page 9

“Oh, and we tore off the many layers of wallpaper in the kitchen and a few other rooms, painting most of those walls instead,” said Chris Robinette. “That was quite a job. Wallpaper in those days was glued on to stay. Interestingly, though, with each new sheet we unpeeled, we found a written date by the person who hung the paper, so it was history being discovered in the process.”

The Orloffs slept in a master bedroom at the top of the second level of stairs, with Tom Orloff in the other upstairs bedroom. Their daughter Linda Orloff had a large bedroom on the main level, which the Robinettes made into a master suite by adding a sitting room, a walk-in closet and a large bathroom with a Jacuzzi tub and walk-in shower. Before that, the Orloffs had one full bathroom upstairs and a half-bath on the main level off the

laundry room which, in 1940, was a luxury few homeowners had.

Walking into the house from the main Division Street entryway, the spacious living room is on the right with the formal dining room on the left and the kitchen beyond it. The Robinettes removed a wall that once separated the kitchen and a breakfast room facing onto Division Street, and have upgraded the appliances, yet kept the original Kohler cast-iron farm sink and the original cupboards, although they have been refinished.

Walking towards the back of the house, the kitchen opens into a large mud room that was once the laundry room. The new laundry room occupies what used to be a storage room towards the rear. Swapping the rooms created a more effective use of space.

Outside, brick-like pavers have replaced the large asphalt driveway that serves both the original two car garage and a second larger garage and storage area the Orloffs



With closet space a premium in most 1940-era homes, the Robinettes make use of every available wall, including adding this drop-down ironing board and granite-topped counter, using original cupboards, doors and hardware.

► Continued on page 13



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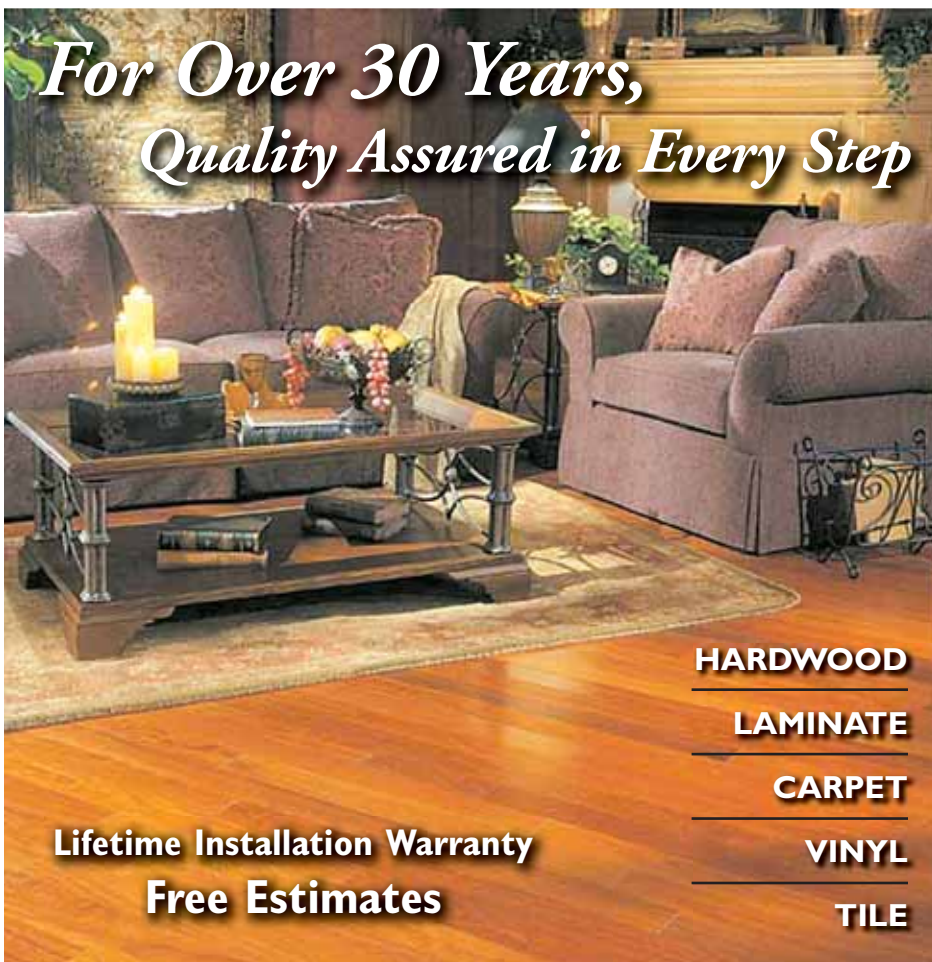
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The Robinettes use the same covered space that the Orloff family used for years for their own warm weather parties, although with modern convenient upgrades. The 1940s backyard swimming pool was refinished, but otherwise looks the same in the nearly half-acre lot.



Preserving the past

► Continued from page 11

used in their dairy farm business. The Orloffs also put in a swimming pool, which the Robinettes refinished but otherwise looks the same. The Orloffs also held frequent backyard barbecues, and now the Robinettes use the covered space for their own warm weather parties, although they've added a larger gas grill.

Downstairs—the lower level of the Orloff home—is where the Robinettes have brought in 21st century upgrades. A wall-size theater screen dominates one end of the room; a long counter for refreshments and snacks the other. Chris Robinette said their daughters, who graduated from Valley Christian School in Dublin, have held many birthday and after-school parties and other social get-togethers there. The Orloffs also were known to have frequent social events there and the room was a favorite gathering place for the Orloff family.

A look around the old Orloff house also

shows many added special window treatments by the Robinettes who, after all, are professionals at this. They've owned and operated their Window-ology business for 16 years where they design, sell, manufacture and install custom window treatments for homes and businesses. The Roman window shades that passers-by can see in the large, curved bay windows that front on Division Street can be electronically lowered and raised with a push of a button.

The Robinettes are members of the Pleasanton Chamber of Commerce and are life members of the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Society (the Museum On Main). Examples of their work can be seen throughout Pleasanton, namely the wood toned blinds along with the drapery at the Pleasanton Library. Their work is also on display in a majority of the restaurants in downtown Pleasanton, as well as in many homes and businesses throughout the Valley.

The Robinettes can be reached at their Window-ology business at 462-1207 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. ■



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Hot tubs provide a relaxing outdoor paradise for homeowners

by Janet Pelletier

In just a few short weeks, a number of Pleasanton residents will be in the market for a new spa.

"The sun comes out and it happens," said Mike Briones, owner of the Pleasanton Pool Center, 5513 Sunol Boulevard.

Many look to add features and added bonuses to their homes, especially considering the effects of a slumping housing market. But aside from adding value to a home, people like spas as sort of a getaway from the stresses of everyday life.

"People like to see that environment, a little oasis environment with a nice warm spa to get into, where you can look at the stars, relax, unwind," Briones said. "It's a big added value to a backyard or even a social place. My kids are in ours all the time—as many as they can fit in it, it seems like."

The spas fit well into the type of customer who is looking to create an all-inclusive outdoor hangout.

"People who have pools and spas tend to use their backyard a lot more," Briones said. "Between the barbecue, the pool and the spa, there's a lot of backyard theme parks going on. You have the whole kitchens being added, the barbecue, the TVs."

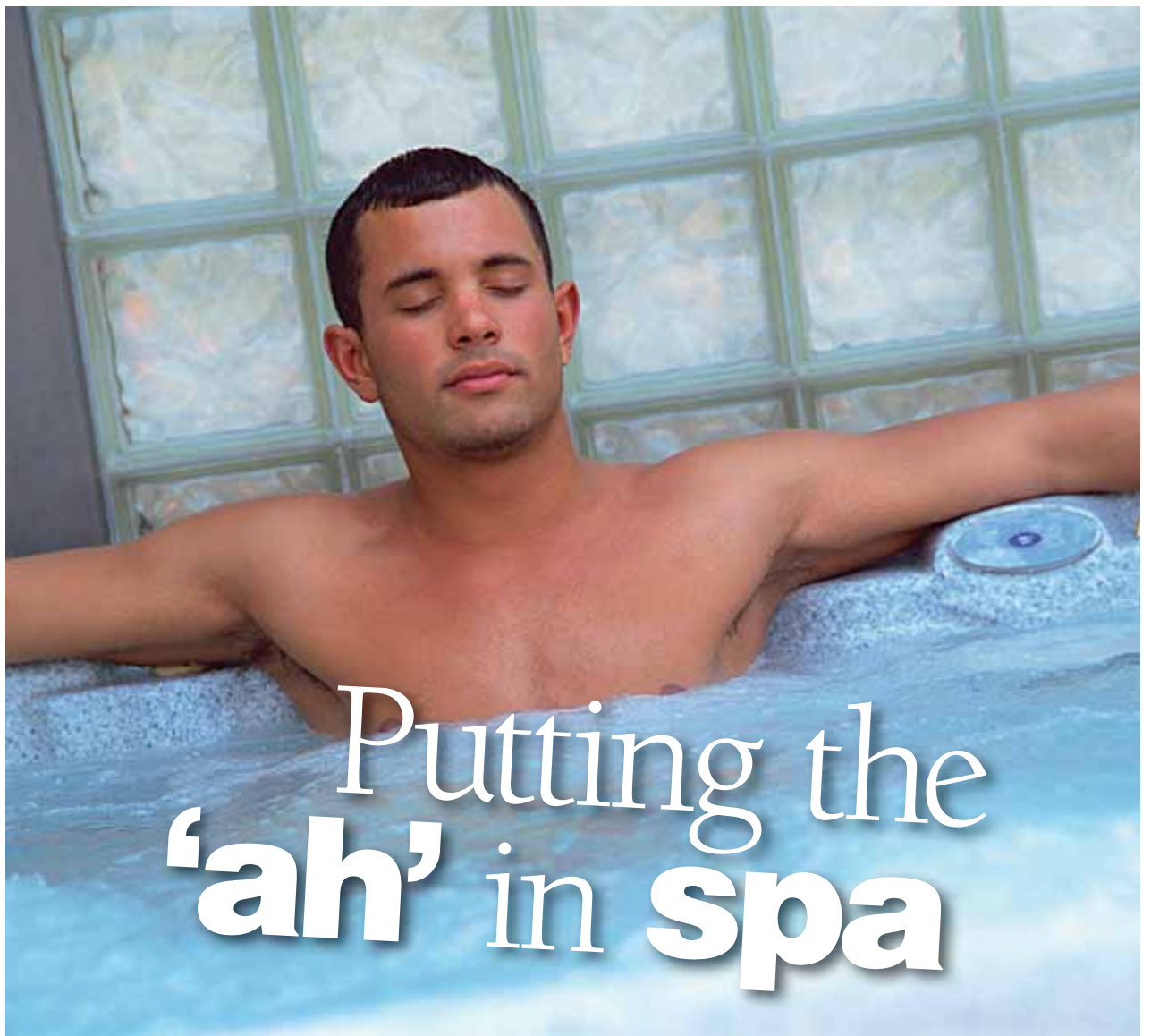
One trend Briones said he has noticed is a push for more energy-efficient hot tubs, which tend to use up a lot of electricity to keep a cozy temperature.

"There are new multi-speed, variable speed pumps that are very energy-efficient that are being mandated to be put in," Briones said.

While the cost to run spas can be a deterrent for some interested buyers, Briones said manufacturers are working to make them more cost and energy-efficient.

Depending on what you're looking for, spas can range in price from \$2,000 up to \$10,000. Most select hot tubs that are somewhere in the middle, Briones said.

Special features to a spa include surround sound speakers, a pop-up TV, waterfall and LED lighting. Briones recommends that spa owners add landscaping elements for visual appeal, such as a trellis, lighting and plants. ■



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