

Thinking of Upgrading Your Kitchen or Windows? A Realtor Who Knows Quail Forest Weighs in On Which Changes Will Increase Resale Value – And Which Are Less Likely To

The topic for the September column is which upgrades and renovations to your Quail Forest home will add monetary value for immediate or eventual resale or for renting your house – and which are more for your comfort, enjoyment or to suit your personal taste. We interviewed Gabriella Barbarigo, who has been a realtor with Century 21 East Lake Realty in the Boot Ranch Shopping Plaza for 11 years. Not only has she showed and sold many homes in East Lake Woodlands, and Quail Forest in particular, she has also purchased, renovated, lived in and sold a home in an East Lake Woodlands cluster community, though not Quail Forest. Barbarigo emphasizes that her comments are her own opinions rather than her company's.

In future months, we hope to have columns in which Quail Forest residents describe their renovations or upgrades, with photos (names and addresses need not be included). Volunteers are welcome! Email Eleanor Cicerchi at ecicerchi@gmail.com or call 607-382-1781.

Gabriella Barbarigo, a realtor with East Lake Realty for 11 years and a former owner in an East Lake Woodlands cluster community, has one word of advice when it comes to considering upgrades or renovations to your Quail Forest home: “Visual.”

“Aim for enhancing the visual appeal of your home,” she stresses, “especially the interior. By that I mean upgrades to your kitchen, bathrooms, floor coverings and even doors to rooms.” These improve first impressions and stand up to further scrutiny. Of course that is barring any urgent repairs or replacement needed to your air conditioning/heating system or dead trees that are a threat to your house.

Few homeowners will be able to make all the changes suggested here, or even a few of them. But one spectacular room, perhaps a kitchen or master bath, will broaden the appeal of your house. So will a coat of interior paint, preferably in a neutral color.

In Quail Forest kitchens, focus on the cabinetry, countertops, lighting and appliances, Barbarigo advises. Many residents have refaced their kitchen cabinets with painted or wooden doors and added contemporary hardware. The kitchen cabinets that were original to the houses 35 years ago have not withstood the test of time, at least in the real estate market.

Replacing Formica counter tops with solid surfaces, such as granite, Corian, Caesarstone or other will add to the value of your home, she states. “Anything but Formica.”



This resident built a tray ceiling, with a fan. Lighting is concealed in the tray molding. Cabinets have been refaced. Countertops are granite.

The original dropped ceilings with florescent lighting are also a deterrent for many prospective buyers. “Taking down the Plexiglas and fluorescent fixtures will open up a kitchen and add value,” Barbarigo stresses. Replacement options include a tray or box ceiling with recessed downlights, track lighting, flush-mounted lights, perhaps a ceiling fan. Florescent lights can be concealed within a tray ceiling, adding soft overhead light. Some people also add lights mounted below the cabinets to make work areas brighter. As for kitchen appliances, “You don’t need to spring for stainless steel. There are many other options.”

In bathrooms, removing the original small bathroom tiles and replacing them with larger tiles, travertine, marble or stone adds resale value, as does swapping out a Formica vanity top for a solid surface material (granite and other). Replacing Plexiglas panels above the vanity helps,

too. Walk-in-showers with glass doors and decorative tile features can add appeal to your house, Barbarigo continues, “but that is really a personal thing. Definitely avoid sliding doors on bathtubs.”

Listening to her customers looking at homes in Quail Forest for so many years has given her still more hints for the homeowner looking to add resale value. “Certainly, replace torn and stained carpeting or old linoleum with tile, wood or new carpeting, whichever you prefer. And try to get away from plain vertical blinds, especially if any are missing or stained.” Patterned blinds, Roman shades (which can be motorized if the blinds are wide and heavy) and Plantation shutters are “a better bet for resale value.”

Several homes in Quail Forest have an open floor plan, created by removing the entire wall between the entry way and the dining room or cutting the partition down to a low wall. Some residents have enlarged the opening between the dining room and kitchen as well, raising the opening to ceiling height – sometimes widening it, too. That allows the visitor to look right into the kitchen from the living room. “Having an open plan creates a feeling of spaciousness,” Barbarigo states, “and appeals to many buyers.”

When asked about whether low-e (energy-efficient) and impact-resistant windows or heat and glare reducing films or tints help with resale, Barbarigo returns to her emphasis on improvements that add visual appeal rather than upgrades you do not see. “Upgraded windows are wonderful if you are going to live in the house,” she emphasizes. They add to comfort and reduce both utility bills and homeowner’s insurance. Window tints or films that are both heat- and impact-resistant are also available and cost considerably less than new windows.

In discussions with various homeowners as this column was written, we learned that some buyers are quite knowledgeable about energy-efficient and impact-resistant windows and are looking for them (Impact-resistant windows are now mandatory in Oldsmar/Pinellas County for new construction and upgrades in clusters with more than two connected units). But replacing windows in Quail Forest houses is expensive: more than \$6,000 for one of the sliding doors we all have (if you want both impact-resistant and low-e) and as much as \$40,000 for all windows, depending on the style of the house and how many windows you are replacing. No wonder customers determined to have upgraded windows may pass on a house with single-pane windows. But this is far from the norm, says Barbarigo. Another factor to consider is that new windows have vinyl frames, which retain their color even in direct sun, and look better than faded aluminum window frames. “Of course, if you have an old or insufficient air conditioning system, take care of that first,” she adds.

Finally, raised panel doors instead of the solid doors original to the house and modern door knobs add to your home’s appeal to would-be buyers. Wider, decorative wall base moldings and crown moldings add to the “finish” of the house, Barbarigo adds, “but whether they improve resale is debatable.” The same can be said about adding half walls or kick plates to a



The Plexiglas in this master bath has been replaced with a box and recessed down lights.

lanai or enclosing it with windows. “These types of upgrades are really a matter of personal preference.”



Here the lanai has been enclosed in glass and air conditioning/heat added to make it a four-season room.

And as for landscaping, Barbarigo’s opinion is that Quail Forest’s landscaping “is very nice already.” Adding plants or decorative items around your house is best done to please you.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you plan any change that has an exterior view (replacing windows, sliders, exterior door, exterior lighting, patio/lanai changes),

please complete an Architectural Request Form (ARC) before you start any work. The ARC is available through Management & Associates, and on the Quail Forest Homeowner Portal (http://mail-exchange.mgmt-assoc.com/CaliberWeb2_MAA/default.aspx).

WE ARE LOOKING FOR MORE EXAMPLES. If you are particularly pleased with an upgrade to your house and would like to share that in the Quail Forest “Community Corner,” we welcome your comments. Please contact Eleanor Cicerchi at ecicerchi@gmail.com or 607-382-1781. You can help other Quail Forest homeowners make choices they will be happy with.