

# HOUSECALLS



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## Hardwood Flooring Choices

There are a number of choices to be made when you are replacing existing flooring with hardwood.

Prefinished hardwood requires less installation time and effort. Unfinished floors can be sanded and stained to the color you



want, now and later.

Engineered hardwood has thinner pieces of wood layered on top of each other. For those concerned with high humidity, engineered hardwoods expand and contract very little as opposed to solid hardwoods.

## A House Remains a Great Shelter from the Storm

Knight Kiplinger, editor-in-chief of Kiplinger's Personal Finance, reminds homeowners and home buyers that an investment in a home provides not only a sanctuary for you and your family, it also remains a great tax shelter.

The ability to deduct property taxes is "the last great tax shelter" and you get a tax break on a large part of the profits if you decide to sell in the future, Kiplinger says.

Kiplinger speculates that for some years to come, home values will not rise much more than the national level of inflation. Values will still rise but they won't skyrocket, he says. That means that, unlike in the bubble years, when you buy a house now, you can't expect to make a huge profit if you sell the house in a year or two.

But speculating in

real estate is not the most important thing homebuyers are looking for. Rather, they visualize the place they want and search for more comfort, convenience and enough space, a home where they can relax and raise their families.

Some look forward to living in the same home for many years. They dream of holiday gatherings in the homestead with their children and

grandchildren.

A home is the largest investment most people will ever make and it is the most desired investment. Fortunately, thanks to the modern mortgage system, people don't have to save for decades to afford a house.

Low mortgage interest rates give the practical minded another reason to move forward with housing plans. While the average 30-year mortgage

interest rate is about 4.17 percent, some mortgage companies are offering even lower rates. While rents rise every year, fixed mortgage payments stay the same.

Some retirees want to age in place, that is, keep their home for years after they retire. Others want to downsize. If less space is what they want, that problem is easy to solve.





**TIM MCBRAYER**

**ASK THE EXPERT**

**Q.** We want to buy a home but wonder if this is a good time to do it. I think it is, but what can you say to convince me?

**A.** It's a big step, and you're right to consider it carefully.

If you have a secure job that won't require you to move out of town in the next few years, buying is a good choice.

If you can afford to buy the home you want without cutting back on living expenses or saving for the future (after you get settled), buying can be a good move for you.

If you want a lot of home for your money, this is a great time to buy. Home prices in most neighborhoods are low when compared to what they were a few years ago, and 30 year mortgage interest rates are at their lowest point in 50 years. If you can afford a 15 or 20 year mortgage, the rate will be even less.

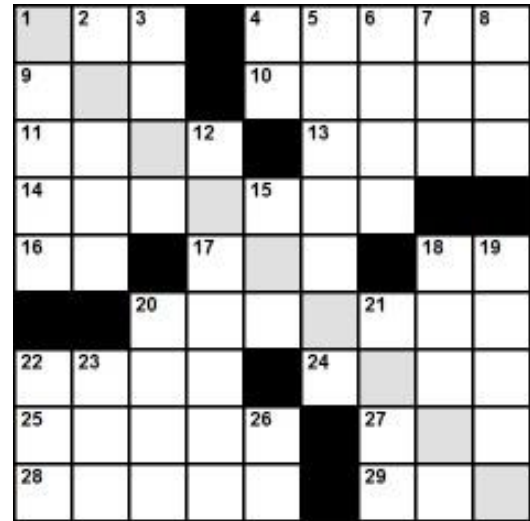
**Checking the Price**

When you find a home you want, you can do a little homework yourself to see if the price is currently right. Or I can make the calculation for you. The price-to-rent ratio is essentially the value of a

**Winter Fun Place Puzzle**

**Across**

- 1. I came, I \_\_\_, I conquered
- 4. Thespian
- 9. \_\_\_ out, barely manage
- 10. Mary Tyler \_\_\_
- 11. Musical group
- 13. Three feet
- 14. Violent downpour
- 16. In operation
- 17. Social gathering
- 18. Dr. \_\_\_, film
- 20. Slicker
- 22. Pious platitudes
- 24. Drunkards
- 25. Relative
- 27. 100 square meters
- 28. Designer's forte
- 29. Negative

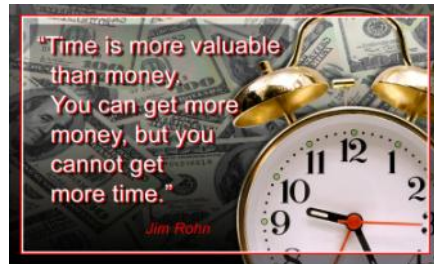


The title is a clue to the word in the shaded diagonal.

**Down**

- 1. Brawl
- 2. Rubber capital
- 3. Low dam
- 4. Morning: Abbr.
- 5. Demureness
- 6. Just right
- 7. Hockey great
- 8. Casino choice
- 12. Relating to the eye socket

- 15. Sinuous swimmer
- 18. \_\_\_ glycerin, drug
- 19. Assault
- 20. Merely
- 21. Zen Buddhist riddle
- 22. Composed of former Soviet states
- 23. Formicary occupant
- 26. You and I



home divided by the typical annual rent for something similar in the same area. If home prices rise faster than rent does, buyers are less likely to buy. As the gap narrows, owning becomes more appealing.

During the housing bubble, it wasn't unusual to see numbers in the 20s and 30s. Today the ratio is down to 14 or 15 in most areas (the ratio in Oakland, California, and is still 36 and it's still 26 in Portland, Oregon).

How to calculate price-to-rent ratio

Say you are interested in a home that has a price tag of \$200,000.

On checking the house-for-rent ads in the newspaper, you find that a similar house could be rented for \$1,000 a month.

To arrive at the ratio, you divide the asking price by one year's rent, \$12,000. You quickly find that the ratio is 16.67.

At this point, you could realistically offer \$180,000 for the property, which would bring the ratio in line at 15.



## A Winter Treat: Ice Carving and Snow Sculpture

As cold weather descends, an artistic phenomenon occurs, ice carving competitions and the fun of snow sculpture.

Ice sculptures range as far as the artist's imagination. Some are replicas

of existing structures while others emerge from the world of fantasy. They are usually carved from large blocks of ice formed from pure, clean water with dyes added for colored carving

Ice carvers in competition use chisels and handsaws and, if rules allow, power tools.

Central Idaho hosts the McCall Winter Carnival from January 28 to February 5 with artists creating huge ice

sculptures. Those who come to admire them can also get free skiing lessons.

Snow sculpting lends itself more easily to the amateur but professionals attempt more intricate figures and enter competitions.

An International Snow Sculpting Competition takes place in Breckenridge, Colorado beginning on

January 25. The show attracts competitors from China, Spain, the Netherlands, Russia and Canada. The competition leads up to the Ullr festival honoring the Norse god of snow.

If you are interested in snow sculpturing, here are a few tips.

- \* Pile up a mound of snow as big or small as you desire. Some pack a barrel and empty it out as a starting point.
- \* Use an item such as a hoe or shovel to remove the excess snow to form an outline of your sculpture.
- \* Smooth your creation using a smaller object such as a spatula or beach shovel.
- \* A spoon or even barbecue utensils can finish the details of your art.
- \* When your masterpiece is finished, spray it lightly with the hose allowing the sculpture to freeze and be preserved for a time.



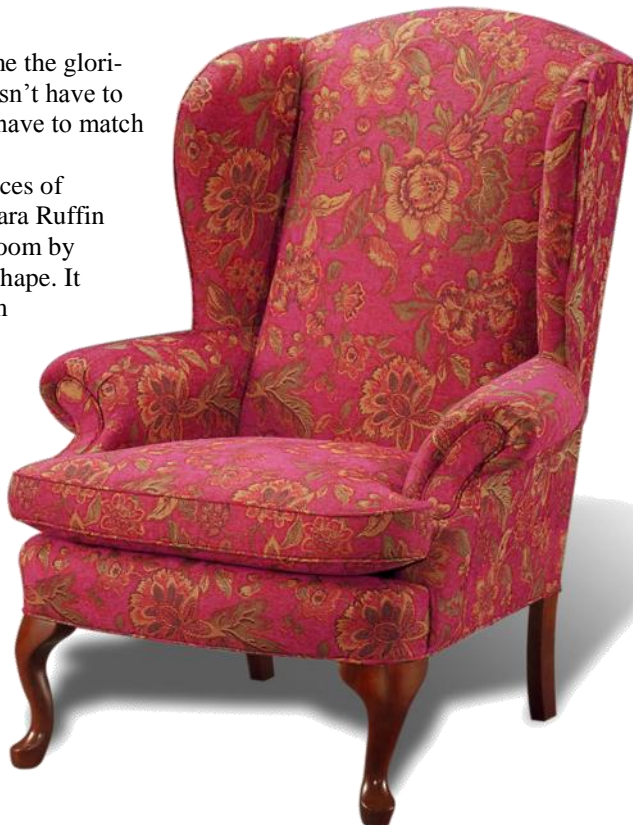
## Complete Your Living Room, with a Wing Back Chair

The wing back has become the glorious occasional chair that doesn't have to be used in pairs and doesn't have to match the sofa.

Doing what few other pieces of furniture can do, decorator Sara Ruffin Costello says it wakes up a room by offering a jolt in height and shape. It kills the boxy symmetry from which boring living rooms suffer. They work especially well in contemporary homes.

There are many choices. There are smaller-scale wing backs (visit [johnderian.com](http://johnderian.com) for examples) and larger, more traditional Americana pieces, which can be upholstered in a solid color or a pattern (see [georgesmith.com](http://georgesmith.com)).

For the man cave, or



rooms with more space, the seamless and fluid take on the wing back and ottoman is the Grand Papillo from B&B Italia. It has a very modern look.

The first wing back chairs were designed to protect the lord of the castle from drafts. Over the centuries, the basic style endured.

Wing backs had their heyday in the 17th and 18th centuries as British gentlemen's chairs. The new Hugo chair from Bernhardt is a 21st-century version with button tufting, nail trim, tailored lines and a low seat.

It's beautiful, but if you and older guests have trouble getting out of a low chair, you might want to think twice about this one.



# JANUARY

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**On .72 Acre Lot With 3 Car Garage**  
**Gourmet Kitchen, 2 Story Great Rm**  
**w/See-Through Gas FP**  
**2 Story Foyer Lrg Bonus Room 1st**  
**Floor MBR, Sun Room, Hearth Rm,**  
**Game Room, Formal DR, Office**





<<<< **My Listings as of January 1, 2011** >>>>

N Raleigh 6,536 Square Feet on 1.16 acres. 4BRs, 4.5 BAs, Gourmet Kitchen, Family Rm w/Stone FP, 2 Story Great Rm w/FP, 1st floor Master Suite with adjoining study, huge W-I-C, Large Bonus with web



**\$1,785,000**  
[www.5201Wynneford.com](http://www.5201Wynneford.com)

4,700 SF 4 Bedrooms 3.5 Baths On .72 Acre Lot With 3 Car Garage Gourmet Kitchen, 2 Story Great Rm w/See Through Gas FP 2 Story Foyer Lrg Bonus Room 1st Floor MBR, Sun Room, Hearth Rm, Game Room, Formal DR,



**\$500,000**  
[7704KensingtonManor.com](http://7704KensingtonManor.com)

3,430 Sq. Ft. 4BR, 2.5 BAs in Historic Oakwood in downtown Raleigh. 3 Story, with bonus Rm and Guest BR and Full Bath on 3rd floor. Gourmet Kitchen w/ island. Family Rm w/ Gas FP, multi-level back



**\$610,000 Short Sale**  
[www.403Edenton.com](http://www.403Edenton.com)

North Raleigh Contemporary Ranch in Stone Ridge . 4,236 Sq. Ft. 4BRs, 3.5BAs . Updated Kitchen & Baths, Large Garden Rm, Formal LR and DR, Family Rm, Multi-Level Deck, Office, on .92 acre lot.



**\$525,000**  
[www.813ThatcherWay.com](http://www.813ThatcherWay.com)

North Raleigh home in Wakefield. 4BRs, 3.5BAs, 2 Story Great Room, Sun Rm, Gourmet Kitchen w/island, breakfast nook. 1st floor Master Suite with W-I-C, Separate Tub/Shower, twin vanities, back deck,



**\$369,900**  
[www.11904PawleysMill.com](http://www.11904PawleysMill.com)

1,500 Sq. Ft. 2 Bedroom Garden Home with 2 full baths, living/dining area with gas FP. Garden rm with tiled flooring. Kitchen with eating area, & under cabinet lighting. Comes with refrigerator and washer/dryer. 2 Car



**\$254,900**  
[www.4602LudwellBranch.com](http://www.4602LudwellBranch.com)

Wake Forest home off Burlington Mills Rd. 3,111 Sq. Ft. 4 BRs, 2.3 BAs. Kitchen has granite counter tops, island, gas cook top, double SS sink. Large Family Rm with gas FP. Living/ Dining area. Lrg Master



**\$234,000**  
[www.8705Poteat.com](http://www.8705Poteat.com)

In Falls Landing off Mitchell Mill Rd in N Raleigh off Hwy 401N. 2,220 Sq. Ft, 4 BR, 2.5BAs. Large Family Rm with gas FP, kitchen has lots of cabinet space, w/ island. MBA is large with separate Tub/Shower,



**\$225,000**  
[www.3222LandingFalls.com](http://www.3222LandingFalls.com)

