



Tina & Mary SKULTETY JOHNSON

Dinner is Served: Tips on Dinner Party Planning

Ideally, a dinner party is a peaceful gathering of friends and family, where everyone can reconnect and celebrate the winter season in comfort and joy.

Realistically, however, hosting a successful dinner party requires careful thought and preparation. With this in mind, here are a few basic tips to pull off a party to remember.

- 1. Set expectations in advance.** By keeping your guests informed, you'll limit the inevitable surprises and unexpected conflicts that may arise. Let them know the type of food that will be served, the appropriate dress, the numbers and types of guests allowed (e.g. if they can bring children), etc. Include whatever details or bits of information you feel will make them most comfortable.
- 2. Prepare as early as possible.** By carefully planning far in advance, you'll save yourself a lot of unnecessary hassle and stress as your dinner party approaches. Think about your itinerary and then locate, purchase, and replace the non-food supplies, decorations, and dinnerware you're going to need as early as you can. A lot of these items are likely stuffed somewhere in a box in the garage and may be damaged or missing altogether. Also, consider sleeping arrangements if you have family or overnight guests.
- 3. Make your job a lot easier.** By taking steps to relieve some of your responsibility as host, you'll have more time to spend with your loved ones and guests. Consider a buffet-style meal in which guests serve themselves. Stock up on snacks and beverages your guests can easily access. If children are invited, plan fun activities specifically designed for them. And, finally, accept offers of help from others to save even more time.

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HOMES & MONEY

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Your Source for Real Estate and Finance Information!

Did You Know?

Did you know that US dollar bills are not printed on paper? They're actually printed on a 75% cotton and 25% linen blend. This allows bills to be creased up to 8,000 times before they tear.



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Mortgage News:

The New World of Real Estate

By Robin Paul, Mortgage Planner

Prior to the Great Depression, federal law gave banks the authority to terminate mortgages whenever they chose. In fact, a bank's only obligation to a borrower in this situation was to provide consumers with a notice instructing them to either pay off their loan in full by a certain date or face foreclosure. During the Depression, cash-strapped banks exercised this right en masse, and millions of borrowers ended up losing their homes.

This led to an entire generation of disenchanted consumers who were afraid to purchase a home that they couldn't afford to buy outright. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the government stepped in and created the Federal Housing Administration, and the 30-year mortgage was introduced. Back then, there were no hybrids, no HELOCs, no piggy-back loans, no ARMs. A 30-year mortgage offered only a small selection of set monthly payments from which to choose. It was that simple.

Worlds away from the post-Depression Era, today's real estate market has evolved into a truly complex creature. No longer just a dream, home ownership represents a full-fledged investment with a laundry list of options, benefits, financial and tax incentives - and quite a few challenges as well. However, with expert advice from an experienced mortgage professional, today's homeowners can properly and profitably manage their most important investment in any mortgage market cycle, despite sensational media reports to the contrary.

The following are examples of simple solutions available to homeowners who

might be caught up in an unexpected pitfall of a transitioning real estate market.

Interest Rates and Adjustable Rate Mortgages

ARMs and Option ARMs are one of the media's favorite subjects these days. Hardly a week seems to pass without some frightening headline about the painful impact that further interest rate increases could have on ARM borrowers once their loans reset.

In reality, there's really no reason to fear ARMs as long as you're working with a qualified mortgage professional. In fact, there are several ARM programs that make a lot of sense for borrowers in many different scenarios.

However, for those who have had, or anticipate having, substantial increases in their monthly payments, ask your loan professional if an intermediate ARM or a tiered fixed-rate program is right for you. Often, these loans can provide instant payment relief and limit one's liability until interest rates decline.

To ensure the full benefit of an intermediate ARM, you will want to carefully examine the terms of any pre-payment penalty to determine whether the up-front savings are worth the commitment.

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Rates:

30-Year Fixed	Low 6's
15-Year Fixed	Low 6's
5/1 ARM	Mid 6's
3/1 ARM	Mid 6's
1-Year ARM	Low 6's

These rates do not reference a specific loan program; rather, they reflect general market conditions, which are subject to change.



Ropa Vieja

The name of this classic Cuban stew is Spanish for "old clothes" because the beef is shredded like rags.

Ingredients:

- 2-3 lbs. flank steak, cut with the grain into quarters
- 8 cups water
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 6 whole cloves
- 1 cinnamon stick
- (1) 28 oz. can of whole tomatoes, drained and chopped
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper

Directions:

Generously season the flank steak with salt and pepper. In a large casserole, heat half of the olive oil until shimmering. Working in batches, brown the flank steak on both sides. Return all of the meat to the casserole, add water and one bay leaf, and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce to a simmer, and cook for 1½ hours. Transfer the meat to a plate and reserve 2 ½ cups of the cooking liquid, discarding the bay leaf. In the same casserole, heat the remaining olive oil and add onions and peppers. Cook for 5 minutes, add garlic, and cook for an additional 2 minutes. Lay cloves, cinnamon, and remaining bay leaf into a piece of cheese cloth. Gather the edges and tie with a string. Add the spice bag, canned tomatoes, and reserved cooking liquid to the casserole. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer for 15 minutes or until sauce thickens. Meanwhile, using two forks shred the meat, adding it to the pot as you go. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

All this meal needs is a little steamed white rice, and it's ready to be enjoyed.

A Word From The Road:

"Success is simply a matter of luck. Ask any failure."

- Earl Wilson

Mortgage News

(Continued from Page 1)

In the case of a tiered fixed-rate program, be sure to secure a cap rate that's lower than your current rate in order to maximize your overall savings. When choosing either of these types of loan programs, it's important to be sure that your loan professional has a deep understanding of interest rates and the real estate market. It will be their job to get you an even lower rate once the market turns.

Looking to Move in a Buyer's Market

Another favorite subject of the media these days is the housing market's transition from a "seller's market" to a "buyer's market" in the midst of rising interest rates. Many homeowners who are thinking about moving into another home or refinancing their existing mortgage are paralyzed with doubt as to what they should do.

In uncertain times such as these, expert advice is a true commodity. Unsure buyers and sellers should contact an experienced, resourceful loan professional with strong ties to successful real estate agents. Working together, a lender and an agent can create the kind of strategic marketing and buyer incentives that will save money and lower monthly payments. It's an unfortunate fact that sometimes real estate agents and loan officers don't communicate as much or as well as they could, so working with a mortgage team that has a strong history and a successful track record together will ensure the best results.

Utilizing Equity

Home equity has also become a subject of sensational interest to the mass media. Weekly headlines scream about declining home sales and values, leaving homeowners fearful of the liquidity of their largest investment. And, while no one can accurately interpret every nuance of the market and what the future will bring, history often leaves reliable clues, especially when it comes to its cyclical nature.

Simply put, there is nothing to fear about owning a home. Historically, real estate appreciates over time by an average of almost 5%-6% annually. In down markets, it's true that access to the maximum equity available is more limited. However, by obtaining proper advice from a mortgage professional who's able to work in conjunction with CPAs and Certified Financial Planners, homeowners will be able to ensure the proper management of not only their equity, but also their debt, short-term investments, and retirement savings.

The world of real estate has definitely changed since the post-Depression Era when 30-year mortgages became so prevalent in the US. What remains constant, however, is that homeownership is still the biggest, most important investment most Americans will ever make. With this in mind, homeowners who align themselves with a mortgage specialist have only the mass media to fear in this environment of change.

Please call us at 888.713.0202 to set up an appointment to review your current loan program. We have access to unique financing products that will ensure security and stability in today's changing real estate market. ■



Personal Funding:

Since our last issue:

Number of loans funded:

Dollar volume:

Year to date funded:

Dollar volume:

Thanks to You!

As always, we wish to thank our clients who are kind enough to refer more business to us. This quarter, our thanks go out to:



"According to the Recording Industry Association of America, what's the best-selling album of all time?"

Call in with your answer on our Trivia Challenge Answer line: The names of all those who call in with the correct answer will be put into a drawing. The prize: Dinner and movie tickets for two! You must call the number above to qualify.

Congratulations to WINNER NAME HERE, winner of last issue's trivia question:

"Which country's population eats the most chocolate per person?"

Answer: Switzerland