

FOCUS

MARKET NEWS
Paula John



GOING UP...



Nervousness about the economy and the housing market has prompted an increasing proportion of borrowers to opt for fixed-rate deals. Figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders reveal that 59 per cent of all loans taken out in April were on a fixed-rate basis, up from 54 per cent in March. And anyone considering a fix right now should act quickly. While the average fixed rate paid by a borrower with a 25 per cent deposit last month was 6.27 per cent, experts warn that two-year deals could soon exceed 7 per cent as prices are set to rise on the money markets where lenders get their fixed-rate funds.

GOING DOWN...



The number of new homes built in the UK this year will plummet to around 100,000. This is 70,000 fewer than last year and the lowest annual figure since 1945. This will put paid to Gordon Brown's plans for a boost in house-building - he had promised 240,000 new homes a year in order to meet the target needed to accommodate the 3 million new households expected by 2018. The Government last week urged housebuilders to take a long-term view, but with dwindling short-term demand for new homes, firms are cutting back drastically to protect their margins.

GO FIGURE...

0.7%

Could it be true? Some good news about the housing market appeared to emerge last week: the house price index produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government claimed average property values inched up 0.7 per cent in April - a 4.9 per cent increase over a year. This contradicts the longer-standing indices from Nationwide and Halifax, both of which showed decreases that month (by 1.1 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively). The DCLG index takes the most time to compile, so the figures lag behind both other indices, which showed more dramatic price falls in May. Maybe not such great news after all.

Paula John is editor-in-chief of Your Mortgage

THE RENOVATION GAME

WOODVALE, FOREST HILL, LONDON



What's for sale?
A semi-detached, double-fronted Victorian house with masses of kerb appeal and an ample garden. Currently divided into two one-bedroom flats, it could be restored to its original state as a four-bedroom home, or you could modernise the flats.

How much?
Offers in the region of £435,000

What's needed?
Underpinning the property is a must. It's estimated that £130,000 would cover the structural work, the cost of converting it into a single home and all internal restoration. Refurbishing the flats will only cost around £80,000. There is space, at the side and rear, to build an extension and accommodate an additional bedroom in each of the flats.

Profit potential
Its location within London will guarantee this house is extremely popular in the housing market. As a single unit you could expect at least £620,000, while the flats would be worth between £275,000 and £310,000, each.

BEN NAYLOR

Presidential Properties: 020-8676 6292

The best advice at a tiny price

This summer Britain's top architects are offering their expertise for next to nothing - in aid of charity. **Ben Naylor**

asks them to share their top tips, golden rules and tricks of the trade



Master at work: Richard Webster, one of the architects involved in the scheme, outside a property near Chudleigh, Devon, that he designed from scratch. He says of the house: "The existing structure was a dilapidated chalet in woodland. We got planning permission to replace it with a new-build. The owners were very ecologically conscious so no copper or lead was used in the build. Large glass areas and roof lights on the first floor helped create a bright, airy space. The whole project, including labour, materials and fees, cost £600,000." *SWW*

The credit crunch has hit the housing market like a bus. The experts' prognosis is that there will be no long-term damage but for the meantime it needs lots of rest and absolutely no activity. While it lies dormant, waiting for interest rates to fall - and mortgage lenders to stop being so miserly - prospective buyers and sellers are in something of a stalemate, both sitting uncomfortably in their present positions but determined not to budge. Canny home-owners are realising that they have to work with what they've got. But, if you're unconvinced by your partner, who is poised sledge-hammer in hand, adamant that they know exact-

ly which wall is a supporting one, then The Royal Institute of British Architects (Riba) has the answer in its Architect in the House scheme, which offers an affordable, risk-free alternative. The initiative gives home-owners the opportunity to have an hour's consultation with an accredited architect in exchange for a minimum donation of £40 to the housing charity Shelter.

'WE OFTEN KNOW OUR HOMES NEED CHANGES, BUT IT CAN BE DAUNTING TO TAKE THE PLUNGE'

"We often know our home needs changes," explains Susan Prasad, President of Riba, "but how to start and what will it cost?"

It can be daunting to take the plunge and many of us simply never get around to it. This scheme is a great way to speak to a professional about design potential and discover what works best. And thanks to the architects giving up their time, Architect in the House is a great way for the profession to raise money to help people struggling to find a place to live. Since its inception 12 years ago, AIHH has raised more than £700,000 to help house some of the 90,000 families living in temporary accommodation across the UK and the estimated 600 people thought to be sleeping rough every night. The current economic climate makes the charitable aspect even more important, with repossessions becoming more common as people struggle to keep up with mortgage payments.

There are 600 architects taking part in this year's AIHH and each is expected to make 10 consultations, matched with consultees dependent on their area. Individual requirements are typically varied, with participants seeking advice about building additional floors, saving space, or ways to become more eco-friendly, but there is no selection criteria so if you just feel like a change and are in need of some inspiration, it's still a great idea.

One previous participant Emma Goldman, 28, was in such a situation. "I have a one-bed flat in Tuffnell Park. I had been thinking about knocking down the wall between kitchen and lounge

RICHARD WEBSTER
A partner in Webster Sheryn, Richard (pictured opposite) was notably involved in the redevelopment of West India Quay in the Isle of Dogs in east London.

What should I look for when buying?

A home needs to satisfy a multitude of functions, but I would always look for a home that you can adapt or personalise to suit your own particular needs. Often the location and plot is more important than the building, as this can always be remodelled.

When should I consult an architect?

If you want to create a home specific to your needs. A good architect will understand the client's needs and aspirations and translate these into coherent three-dimensional spaces.

What's popular at the moment?

Good architecture should not be trendy or fashionable, it should



Always look for a property that you will be able to adapt to suit your needs

be timeless. Energy efficiency is now key to all new buildings and new innovative construction methods are commonplace. The resurgence of timber frame and the use of pre-fabricated timber panels will soon make traditional masonry construction a thing of the past.

RICHARD WEBSTER'S GOLDEN RULES:

1 Don't jump at the first idea that you have. Generally the longer you spend on the design and consideration of options, the better the end result will be.

but didn't know where to go and didn't want to get ripped off. After I signed up on the Riba website, the architect came round, talked me through the possibilities and explained it would be fairly simple to remove a large section but still be within building regulations. There was no pressure to go through with anything and it was a friendly environment," said Goldman. "At the time I didn't have the money to do it but I'm saving up now."

As with all amazing bargains,

To sign up to the scheme, go to www.architectinthehouse.org.uk

JANE DUNCAN

Jane established Jane Duncan Architects in 1992. She has been vice-president of RIBA since October 2007.



When should I consult an architect?

If you are planning to spend a lot of money on a property, you should discuss the project with an architect. Architects can assist with a review of the property, investigate the local planning constraints, help you determine your brief, programme the work and then manage the project for you.

Can I knock down walls without an architect's advice?

For very small alterations and extensions, you may not need an architect - a good builder will be able to help you. Small structural alterations, such as knocking out a wall between living spaces, should be done with the advice of a structural engineer. For anything bigger I'd recommend employing an architect or surveyor.

How do I bring more light into my house?

The average terraced or semi-

detached house can usually be completely changed internally. The creative use of free-flowing space by opening up rooms both horizontally and vertically, and



Architects can advise on how to make your home as light as possible

letting light penetrate through larger windows, strategically placed roof lights or well thought out use of glass and mirrors can make a big difference to the way a house feels.

What's popular at the moment?

A current trend is to make properties more sustainable. This can mean a number of changes, from adding renewable energy hardware to reviewing and improving insulation.

JANE DUNCAN'S GOLDEN RULES:

1 Be honest - tell your architect how much money you have to spend, what your "priority" list is and what your "wish" list is, and be prepared to compromise on quantity to achieve quality.
2 Look through magazines to see what you like, and show your architect - pictures can speak a thousand words about personal taste.