

Current mortgage rates, 15- and 30-year fixed, conforming

D.C.

**2.78** **3.55**

Md.

**3.02** **3.73**

Va.

**2.90** **3.62**

SOURCE: BANKRATE.COM

## DECOR

# Sectional sofas can be a room's friend or foe

By Merlisa Lawrence Corbett  
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

Sectional sofas can conquer or create furniture layout problems — but whether it becomes a room's friend or foe depends on scale and orientation.

"With a sectional, you're maximizing the amount of people you can gather with relatively less amount of furniture," said Jose Gutierrez, a design consultant with BoConcept furniture in Georgetown.

When it comes to style, sectionals are not for everyone.

"Sectionals are most successful in rooms that are conducive to casual, informal events, such as TV- or movie-viewing," said Lori Graham, of Lori Graham Design and LG Place. "They are not as conducive for formal entertaining because typically sectionals are deeper and more difficult to navigate in formal attire."

Gutierrez said people should consider two things before buying a sofa: the overall room dimensions and how the sectional will be used.

"Some customers want to use the sectional as a room divider in a big open plan. They want to create a little definition between the dining room and the living area," Gutierrez said. "Others actually like to integrate both spaces. In that case, you orient the sectional to bring rooms together."

A large U-shaped sectional in the family room, facing an open kitchen, creates one great room. That same



PHOTO COURTESY OF LORI GRAHAM

Sectional couches bring comfort, style and function to a space, even solving layout problems such as dividing great rooms.

sectional, positioned with its back to the kitchen, divides the rooms.

When using a sectional as a divider, Gutierrez discourages placing the furniture at an angle. "To set a sectional at an angle, you really need a lot of space, because otherwise you create negative areas in a room that are not well-utilized."

Instead, he recommends orienting the sectional toward a focal point. This could include breaking up a sectional, if finished on all sides, to include two focal points, such as a fireplace on one wall and a television on another wall.

To pull this off, the sectional

must allow for the end-piece to go on either side. "That way you can orient toward the fireplace one day and toward the other way when you gather to watch TV," Gutierrez said.

Most sectionals that include connector hardware on the sides are limited to one configuration. Others, like the Carmo sectional from BoConcept, are modular with pieces finished on all sides. This allows more options for rearranging, including being able to flip a chaise from one side to the other.

When considering a table for the sectional, Gutierrez suggests rounded edges or a round table for

a tight space. "Because then you're not contending with a tight corner to make a tight turn if you're getting in or out of your sectionals," he said. Otherwise, "it's a matter of style and functionality."

Sometimes, sectionals simply do not fit. Graham, who lives in Washington, cautions clients to measure each piece of a sectional and confirm it can fit through doorways, stairwells and elevators before purchasing.

"D.C.'s rowhouses tend to often have such challenges on most pieces — but certainly, larger-scale pieces like sectionals," Graham said.

# Home supply continues to shrink in Jan.

By Dean Bartoli Smith  
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

Buyers still do not have a lot of homes to choose from as the Washington metro area prepares to slide into what usually is an optimistic spring market.

"Inventory is the story of the spring," said David Howell, of McEneaney Associates in McLean.

Inventory is so low there was not one townhome for sale in all of Arlington County in January, Howell said.

Metropolitan Regional Information Systems data for January showed active listings are down 42 percent over last year in Washington, 37.1 percent in Northern Virginia, 36.7 percent in Montgomery County and 22.3 percent in Loudoun County.

"And it isn't just total inventory," Howell said. "There aren't as many new listings coming on the market either."

Corey Hart, of RealEstate Business Intelligence, reported there were more than 4,000 fewer active listings at the end of January than a year ago, the lowest January total on record.

Howell said, in general, inventory is tightest for attached homes priced at less than \$500,000 and really tight for those at less than \$300,000 in every property type across jurisdictions. There is about a one-month supply of inventory on hand.

# Custom-built aquariums bring nature's beauty indoors

By Linda Lombardi  
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

Custom aquariums come in wide variety of shapes and sizes and can be a stunning way to bring some of nature's beauty to a room.

"Acrylic, and to a lesser extent glass, is very malleable, and any design you can conceive of that will hold water can be made [into an aquarium]," said John Holland of aquarium design company Blue Region in Silver Spring.

Holland has created tanks using everything from 150-gallon rectangles to an 8-foot-high, floor-to-ceiling cylinder. A big part of the process is creating a healthy environment for the fish. A high-end saltwater fish tank requires five or six operating systems, includ-

ing ultraviolet sterilization, protein skimming and mechanical filtration. Freshwater tanks are simpler.

"Most people think that aquariums are just boxes of water, but in fact there's a lot more to it than that. They are basically living, breathing things," Holland said.

With careful installation, the extensive machinery needed for a large aquarium can be placed where it will not detract from the aesthetic — sometimes under the tank. But Holland recommends finding a remote location, such as a basement or garage. Maintenance for these tanks may require a professional service.

Before setting up the tank and equipment, homeowners need to choose between saltwater and freshwater fish.

"There's a continuing prejudice and myth that freshwater fish aren't as colorful, when in fact there are quite a few species of freshwater fish that are fantastically colorful," Holland said, naming cichlids from Africa and Central America as an example.

Another popular option is a coral reef tank, which can be populated without affecting the endangered coral reefs along the U.S. coast.

Rather than buying corals taken from the wild and then bleached, there now are attractive artificial alternatives or living corals farmed in the ocean specifically for the aquarium trade. Some saltwater fish, such as the popular clownfish, now are captive-raised as well.

As a design element, architect Miche Booz, of Brookeville, Md.,

said aquariums can be used in either a sculptural or a functional way.

It simply can be a piece of art, "an object of curiosity and beauty that's interesting to look at," Booz said.

Another approach is to incorporate an aquarium into something that you already have.

For example, Booz designed a bathroom with an aquarium as part of a wall partitioning the room in two. He surrounded it with cabinets that both conceal the equipment and provide storage.

The aquarium's design must consider the well-being of the fish as well as the decor, one reason that Holland works with a minimum tank size of 150 gallons, generally starting at a cost of \$15,000.

Holland said a smaller tank cannot maintain a stable enough



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN HOLLAND, BLUEREION.COM

Fish tanks can be added to nearly any room in a sculptural or functional way.

environment, and he is as concerned about the animals as he is about aesthetics. "I measure success in fish that live for years," he said.