



REAL ESTATE - ON THE BLOCK

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Rivanna perch: River 'hood offers green amenities

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Address: 119 RiverBluff Circle

Neighborhood: Woolen Mills

Asking: \$429,000

Year Built: 2008

Assessment: \$100,000 for empty lot; house currently not assessed

Size: 1,818 fin. sq. ft./96 unfin.

Land: 0.20 acres

Curb Appeal: 9 out of 10



Subdivisions make me snore. Each house is a cookie-cutter copy of the next— some painted white instead of beige, for variety. The environmentally friendly RiverBluff Circle is, well, a different kind of development. Houses with a boxy, modern look in warm yellows and greens are tucked around a circular drive at the end of Riverside Avenue, a mixed-income stretch less than two miles from downtown and adjacent to Riverview Park.

The bulk of the subdivision's 19 acres lies down by the Park. Left undeveloped, this floodplain land along the Rivanna River lets residents share common ground: a play area for kids, gardens, meadows, woodlands, and paths that connect to the popular Rivanna Trail.

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, I see a bevy of kids playing in the gardens in the back of a neighboring house, while

adults look on. I venture over to their backyard, thinking that RiverBluff residents will give me the real dirt. Tracy Hamilton and David Dusseau are only too happy to talk. And no, they're not a couple; David's just a neighbor who dropped by. It's that kind of place.

"Everybody knows each other, and everybody talks to each other," Hamilton says. The "tight-knit community" Hamilton describes is no accident, according to developer and architect Richard Price.

"That didn't happen by chance, it happened by very rigorous debates about what this place is going to look like," Price asserts. "Environment, beauty, modern [aesthetics]— it's all secondary to community."

Looking for a quiet place to raise a family or retire with like-minded people? Here's what you'd move into at #119: an

open, airy, sunny space with a modern vibe. The foyer opens up into a kitchen/dining/living area, with a Kenmore gas range stove, an island topped in black granite that doubles as a breakfast bar, woodland views, light maple flooring and cabinetry, and a cool angled roof that slopes down towards the big southward-facing windows that lead out onto a porch.



The windows help to heat the house in the summer when the sun is low in the sky, and the long overhangs keep the high summer sun from increasing your AC bill. According to Pineo, this is one of the passive solar features of the house, which was built to keep your energy costs down. (Tracy Hamilton says the houses are "very economical and comfortable to live in," and Dusseau agrees.) The house features solar panels for the water heater and is ready for photovoltaic solar panel installation, if potential homeowners are looking to shell out a couple hundred bucks per 120W panel.

The master bedroom is large with an attached bathroom and spacious closet. The room features additional storage near the ceiling— accessible via ladder à la Thomas Jefferson's bedroom at Monticello.

The room has two small north-facing windows high above the closet with views of leafy trees and sky. The north-facing windows give the room consistent lighting and a cross-breeze, according to Pineo. The south-facing windows are big and sunny but look onto the neighbor's houses. That's fine during the day if you're curled up with a book, but remember to draw those blinds at night if you're curled up with a special friend.

I prefer the grass-and-woodlands view of the downstairs annex. Outfitted with hookups for a bathroom, kitchen appliances, and a washer/dryer, the spacious living area— 210 square feet— could also be turned into an apartment and rented out to help with the mortgage. A family whose

earning potential puts them in the \$250,000-300,000 bracket could easily pay the mortgage if they rented this apartment out, according to Price. Which is exactly what Tracy Hamilton does at her own house, she says, because she couldn't otherwise afford it. This space could also be divided into two bedrooms or made into a den as your family expands, or as the kids go off to college.

Across the basement hall is another room that can be made into a bedroom or office, complete with bathroom hookups. The whole downstairs is floored with concrete— which sounds icky and industrial, I know. Except that it's not because it's stained a rich brown, which mottles beautifully on the surface making it look like expensive stone— only hipper.



All sorts of gadgets are already installed— from a central vacuum system to several ductless mini-split heat pumps hanging high on interior walls. Heating specific spaces helps cut down on energy costs, says Pineo. Plus, if you buy before the end of the year, you'll get a one-time 50 percent city property tax break for owning a home that's been rated 36 percent more efficient than current energy standards require for new construction. So what's the downside to living at RiverBluff?

"It's not fully developed," Hamilton notes wistfully. "We're still waiting for the road to be paved and people to move in." ■