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# St. Croix Real Estate *reviews*

Featuring Real Estate Market Updates and  
Local News of St. Croix, USVI

**FEBRUARY 2012**

## Frederiksted Hosts Blues Cruise Festivity

When the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise docked in Frederiksted on January 25th, the little seaside town put up a stage and threw a party. Frederiksted is known for that sort of thing. The Blues Cruise has called five times and each time the island has hosted an event in its honor. Celebrity blues artists from the ship take the stage on land.

After midday music in the West End beach bars and at the Blue Moon on Strand Street, Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights kicked off things on waterfront stage. The line-up included R&B Connection, Chris Klein and the Boulevards, Coco Montoya, Shemekia Copeland, and Lowrider Band, which headlined with all its old War hits from yesteryear.



Shemekia Copeland brought the crowd to its feet. In her shimmering spaghetti-strapped dress, she belted out the blues and was proclaimed "The New Queen of the Blues!" (All due respect to Ms. Etta James.) And, although the rain came down, everyone continued to dance right through Lowrider's last song.

"We can throw a party where *everyone* is going to have fun!" said local promoter, Charlie Campbell, aka Chicken Charlie. "We are suited to these things more than any other place in the Caribbean."

Hats off to Charlie Campbell! Not only did he help orchestrate the event, he dreamed up the idea years back, convincing Roger Nabors of the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise to call here in 1996. When Bonnie Raitt came with the ship the following year, says Campbell, "We were on a roll!"

The Department of Tourism helped sponsor the event; Frederiksted Economic Development Association supported it.

## Message from Amy...

2012 looks like the year we islanders get pushed out of our comfort zone. Then again, it may be the year that we rev up our brainstorming powers and re-energize our creative instincts. We've been cozy for decades, knowing that the oil refinery was there to ensure employment and make generous donations to our schools and civic organizations. Hovensa has been behind St. Croix 100% of the way. When it announced the closing of the refinery last month, the island was stunned. But I understand from Dr. K, who practiced here, that "the Chinese character for *crisis* is the same character as for *opportunity*."

And St. Croix is not a hang-dog sort of place. Our residents can rally; we're a resilient lot.

For 45 years, the refining industry shared the island with tourism and the combo worked well. Now tourism must spread its wings, take the limelight. Even before the Hovensa announcement, our Department of Tourism had stepped up its campaign to attract visitors. It's successful Dive USVI promotion ran through the latter half of 2011, selling 3,605 room nights in the territory and earning \$1.1 million in tourism revenue. Then Tourism held a bash for Blues Cruisers last month. And have you seen that alluring national television spot?

Eco-tourism has caught on here. Along with rambling trails and lots of green, Discovery Grove offers island history and culture--from old-time Crucian storytellers to local naturalists. Camp Mount Victory, in the rainforest, has easy-living tents and pig roasts, Crucian-style. Sometimes you can catch the "Scratch" musicians, too.

Lonely Planet travel guide has named the U.S. Virgin Islands in their "Top Ten U.S. Travel Destinations for 2012." In fact, we hold the #1 spot on the list!

Onward ho.



Amy Land-de Wilde

*Amy*  
Amy Land-de Wilde, Broker/Owner  
Coldwell Banker Land-de Wilde Realty

## Hovensa Closes Refinery

On January 18th, Hovensa announced plans to shut down its oil refinery and function strictly as an oil storage facility in the future. Over the past three years Hovensa has lost \$1.3 billion. Losses have been attributed largely to the global economic decline resulting in a weakened demand for refined petroleum products. Add to that the new refining capacities of emerging markets and the low price of natural gas and Hovensa finds itself in a poor competitive position. But Hovensa is not alone—18 refineries in the United States and Europe have closed in the last three years.

While formal closure is expected by mid February, many employees will assist with the transition through July. After that, the refinery plans to retain 100 workers to run the storage terminal.

Formerly Hess Oil Virgin Islands Corporation (HOVIC), the refinery has operated as a joint venture between Hess Corporation and Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. since 1998. The second largest refinery in the United States, Hovensa is one of the ten largest in the world. It has been a cornerstone of the St. Croix economy since 1967, employing numerous workers and extending generosity to our schools and social services.

Known for having a highly skilled and well trained work force with talents valued across many industries, Hovensa will help employees through the transition with enhanced severance and benefit packages, including career coaching, financial planning and a job fair in March.

Tourism should not be affected by the shutdown.



## Discovery Grove—an Island Eco Retreat

Everyone knows that St. Croix offers sun, sand, sailing and beautiful Buck Island. We're all aware that our Crucian waters boast some of the most spectacular dive spots in the world, that triathletes from across the globe participate in our annual St. Croix International Triathlon and that our Agricultural Fair is famed

throughout the Caribbean. In a backstage sort of way, St. Croix has garnered a reputation for eco-tourism, too.

Take Discovery Grove. At the base of Blue Mountain and on the grounds of Estate Canaan, you'll find a charming set of bamboo huts and West Indian-style cottages amid 12 acres of an 18th-century sugar cane plantation. Giant bamboo stands and banana trees abound, as do brilliant red crotons. You can wander through the mango orchard or hike the sundry nature trails. There's pingpong, badminton and horseshoes.

"We really work hard to preserve the history and culture of the site, as well as its natural beauty," says proprietor Anne Wachtmeister.

Hailing from Boston as a lawyer and educator, Wachtmeister came to St. Croix with a goal "to create a place where school kids could come and learn about the island, and, in turn, learn about themselves." She sought a place where "history and nature came together to provide a truly relaxing space for guests." Wachtmeister, who promotes experiential learning and requires community service of her groups, welcomed her first group in 2007. Now school and church groups, families and solo travelers come from all over to be at home in nature there. Islanders celebrate weddings and family reunions there or simply check-in for a short retreat.

"Local folks tell me—and I really honor this—that Discovery Grove reminds them of what St. Croix used to be when they were kids and they could hike and play and walk through the gut," Wachtmeister says. (A gut is a water spill-off, frequently overgrown, sometimes harboring a waterfall.)

Always ask the locals!

(For more information on Discovery Grove, go to [discoverygrovestx.com](http://discoverygrovestx.com).)



## Your Kitchen Can Make or Break the Deal

Back in the seventies and eighties, real estate agents counseled sellers to bake brownies or chocolate chip cookies before a buyer visited. Allow the aroma to waft through the house and sing out "Home!" These days the advice is a variation on the theme: Update your kitchen.

"A kitchen can sell a house," says Carla Hill of Realty Times. She also maintains that "This one room is the showpiece of the house. You'll see it everyday and your guests will see it during most visits. This means buyers want homes with up-to-date kitchens."

And most buyers want a kitchen that's up and ready to go.

Modern open floor plans often bring the kitchen into the entertainment arena. The person wearing the chef's hat can contribute to conversation in the living area. The same goes for guests sitting at the island.

While you don't want to over-capitalize your house, you do want to know your competition. Check photos on MLS listings and bring your kitchen up to speed. Renovations can be as simple as painting cabinets, changing pulls, updating appliances or reupholstering stools. Or they may include bringing in stainless steel appliances or a granite counter top. (Faux-granite looks good, too!)

A kitchen is the heart of the home, as Ms. Hill reminds us. Many a hostess has said, "It was a wonderful party. Everyone ended up in the kitchen!"

# Feature Property of the Month

## 135 Cotton Valley

Charm and simplicity are the hallmarks of this comfortable and classic one-bedroom, 1.5-bath home with big water and hillside views out to scenic Buck Island and a desirable East End address. The old world yet tropical design transports and delights. Entire upper level is a spacious master suite but could be partitioned for other uses. Truly a unique island getaway with a private location on almost 2/3 of an acre and close to great beaches.

MLS #12-255.

**\$449,000**



## ISLAND PROPERTIES

### 20 Mt. Welcome

Partially renovated and ready for your finishing touches, this 2-bedroom townhome is convenient to Christiansted. New roof, floor tiles, paint and updated bathrooms.

MLS# 11-872 **\$141,000**



### 19 River

Lovely gently sloping Ginger Hills homesite in the popular gated Carambola community. The golf course view is serene and tropical. Clubhouse, swimming pool, tennis courts and

restaurant all on site. MLS# 12-168 **\$58,500**

### 101 Sugar Beach

Enjoy the space of a home with the conveniences of condo living including rare direct white sandy beach. This furnished 4-bedroom condo has it all including a big Buck Island view, and a beautiful, newly redone kitchen.

MLS# 11-2145

**\$395,000**



## February's DEAL OF THE MONTH

### 7 & 8 Betsy's Jewel

**BIG PRICE REDUCTION** on this eco-friendly estate totally powered by the sun! In a superb location overlooking the Caribbean and North-shore, with the beautiful hills and Sugar Mill, you'll find this rare offering—two plots and two homes. One is an architect-designed contemporary home, with 3 bedrooms, 3 baths, a staff room and bath, and a large pool with a newly tiled deck. The second house, built in 1990, has 2 bedrooms, 2 baths and captivating views from the long gallery. All set on a private 1.68-acres.

MLS # 11-235

**\$590,000**

## ST. CROIX REAL ESTATE MARKET WATCH

**CLOSED SALES COMPARISON : 1/31/10 - 1/31/11 VERSUS 1/31/11 - 1/31/12**

	2010-2011 SOLD	AVERAGE DAYS ON MARKET	AVERAGE SOLD PRICE	2011-2012 SOLD	AVERAGE DAYS ON MARKET	AVERAGE SOLD PRICE
Home Sales	100	294	\$462,873	102	281	\$434,843
Condo Sales	58	278	\$189,579	53	311	\$223,363
Land under \$39,900	32	300	\$30,463	25	267	\$26,512
Land over \$40,000	50	290	\$109,852	48	367	\$91,077
Commercial	8	212	\$333,750	12	432	\$771,690

Information from the St. Croix Multiple Listing Service

\* The average sales price and the average days on market could be skewed greatly by only one sale or because of the small number of annual sales.