

Homes go quickly in hot Heights market

By Flori Meeks | April 23, 2013 | Updated: April 29, 2013 2:23pm

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Photo By R. Clayton McKee/Freelance

Realtor Rich Martin says that the Heights intrigues homebuyers with a mix of homes of diverse styles and ages. This home at 625 Harvard in the Historic Heights South district is being renovated; the neighboring house is new construction designed to carry on the historic appearance.



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Realtor **Rich Martin** has lived in **the Heights** area long enough to see some major changes.

"When I moved here 20 years ago, it was a funky little neighborhood with old, eclectic homes," he said.

At the time, Martin's friends thought he was crazy to move to the area. Now the Heights-area homes are in more demand than ever, and new construction is thriving here.

"Home sales during the first quarter of the year, compared to last year, are up 20 (percent) to 25 percent," Martin said.

"Last year, a house for sale was on the market an average of 90 days. Now the average house here is on the market 45 days. Even that's an average. A lot of those houses are selling within a week."

The small two-bedroom, one-bath bungalows in the Heights once sold for \$250,000 to \$300,000, Martin said. Prices now start at \$300,000 to \$350,000.

As home sizes increase, prices rise to several million dollars.

Martin has been showing many Heights-area homes to people who work in the energy industry.

"Even if they will be in the Energy Corridor or know they'll

be in The Woodlands, they love the central location and the feel of the Heights," he said.

Kelsey Trom, who has lived in Houston for about a year, bought a Heights home on 13th Street in January.

"I love the variety of things to do in the Heights and the neighborhood feel right in the city," she said. "You get tree-lined streets, these amazing historic bungalows and great neighbors."

Now Trom and her family are renovating their 1905 **Queen Anne** cottage.

"We really want to restore it to the heart and soul of the Heights, these early 1900s homes."

When Martin moved to the area, it was not at all unusual to find great homes next to unattractive warehouses or dilapidated buildings.

"It was the good, the bad and the ugly," he said.

With new construction, numerous restorations and the creation of historic districts, the ugly is going away, Martin said, and residents have a better idea of what to expect.

The area also benefits from its location and a growing variety of bars, restaurants and shops.

"In the past, there was hardly anything to do here. In the last two years, we've gotten a dozen new restaurants. It's turned around. Where people moved to Montrose to live near restaurants, now they can move to the Heights."

When Martin moved here, most residents did not have families or sent their children to private campuses instead of public schools.

"Now there are more professional people in the area, and they've demanded better schools," he said.

Travis and Harvard elementary schools have received exemplary ratings from the **Texas Education Agency**, Martin said.

"The schools now are great. It's just been the last 10 years or so that families have been buying here."

Martin, who blogs about the Heights at www.richmartinhomes.com, describes the Heights area as the land between Interstate 10 and the 610 Loop, Durham and I-45.

The area comprises about 15 subdivisions.

Neighborhoods include Houston Heights, which once was the city of Houston Heights. This area between Studewood and Durham is known for strong residential involvement, the work of the Houston Heights Association and its numerous historic buildings.

Sunset Heights, Martin said, straddles North Main Street from East 23rd to the 610 Loop. Martin said this area is seeing quite a bit of new home construction.

Brooke Smith on the northeast side of the Heights is a little rough around the edges.

"There are some wonderful homes here and some junky ones," Martin writes in his blog. He also describes it as the next "hot" area.

The Woodland Heights, where Martin lives, has seen a number of home renovations and new homes built. The homes here date back to the 1910s and 1920s.

Norhill, east and north of Woodland Heights is one of the area's historic districts. Because of the growing interest in this area and the overall sellers' market in Houston, Martin is advising clients looking at Heights-area homes not to hesitate.

"We've looked at homes that would come on the market and get offers that first day," he said. "You have to jump on them quickly. Know the market and know when something great comes on the market. Be approved for a mortgage."

Martin attributes the sellers' market in the Heights to increasing land value. A few years ago, land was selling for \$40 per square foot.

"Now it's \$50 a foot, and there's nothing to be found. Builders are looking for vacant lots and homes to buy," Martin said.

The population that buys in the Heights runs the gamut, from first-time buyers to professional couples to mature couples who are leaving the suburbs and downsizing.

For **Mike Crowe**, the Houston Heights has been home for 16 years. He has owned four or five houses in the area over the years.

"The Heights retains its identity and its small-town feel," he said.

Crowe also appreciates the easy drive he has to city centers and airports.

He said living in the city does mean crime is a possibility, but no more than in other Houston communities.

"The concern here is mainly burglary and small thefts. People have to be vigilant about locking their doors and being alert," he said. "I'm not fearful, but I'm aware."

Another aspect he appreciates about the Heights is its community events, from home tours hosted by the **Houston Heights Associations** to arts and crafts shows.

"I think a lot of people here enjoy driving through the Heights to see what homes are going up," he said.

"There's something here you just can't duplicate in other places."