

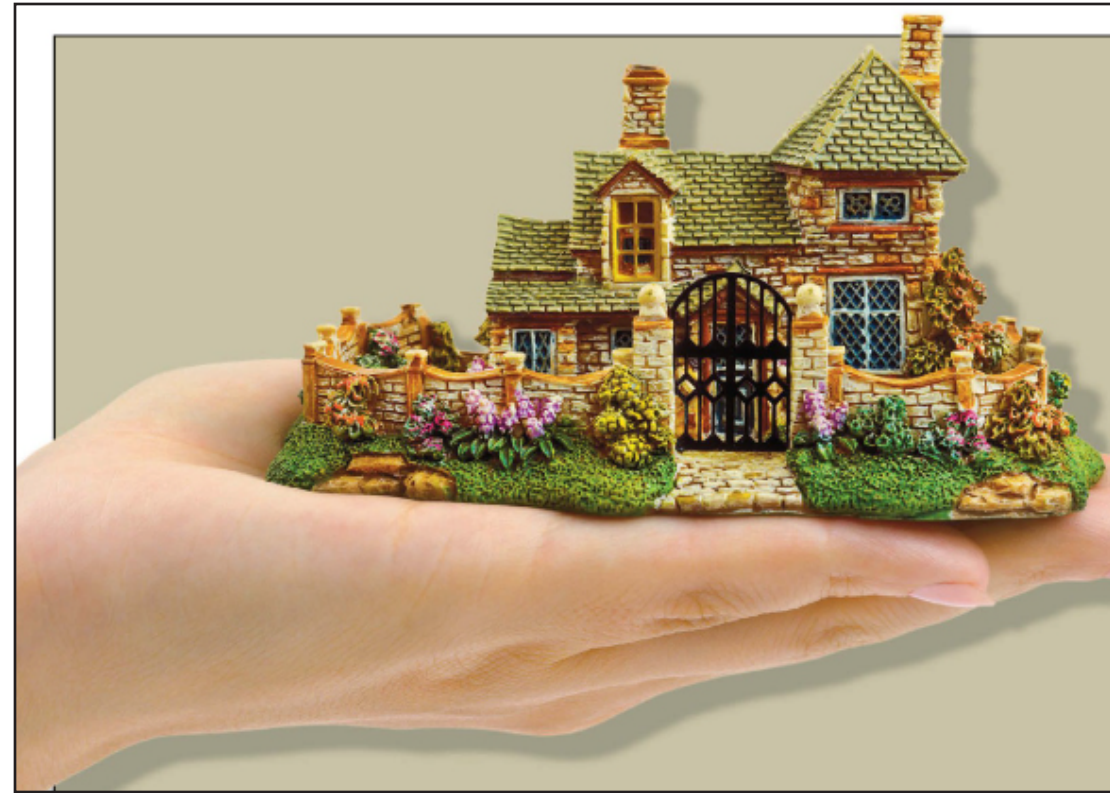
PRIME

MAGAZINE

Growing Pains

How to tell – and what to do
when your home no
longer fits your lifestyle

by: Felicia Levine



When it's time to relax and let your hair down, there's no place like home – unless you've outgrown your space. Then your once-peaceful sanctuary becomes an inescapable reminder of how much you need – or really want – to move.

There are myriad reasons people outgrow their homes: too much or too little space, family dynamics, changing life stages, proximity to work, the kids' schools.

How do you know when it's time to go?

"When a home no longer meets your specific lifestyle needs," says John Poletto, broker and co-owner of Nestler Poletto Sotheby's International Realty in Boca Raton and Delray Beach. "It calls for an introspective moment of coming face to face with where you are, and where you want to go.

"Sometimes it's a pretty easy decision. For example, when your home's bursting at the seams and you're tired of stepping on the kids' Legos.

"I once worked with two families sharing a 5,500-square-foot home," recalls Jesse Winner, broker/owner of JW Florida Real Estate Services, which serves Broward and Palm Beach counties. "It was so tight the children were using the walk-in closets as bedrooms."

More commonly, Winner encounters couples who have outgrown starter homes or who have parents moving in.

"They seek larger houses," he says. "In South Florida that generally means moving west, where they get more space for their money and there are more quality schools. They'll stay in that family home until the kids go to college, at which point they'll downsize because their needs change."

And that's when they often move east, says Realtor Rose Sklar of Coldwell Banker, who serves Weston through Fort Lauderdale Beach.

"Baby Boomers and empty nesters want culture and boating, and they start looking at the new beach highrises with tons of amenities," Sklar says. "They no longer want to deal with big houses and hurricane shutters. They'd rather go on vacation and not worry about it."

The trend echoes Sklar's own story. She and her husband and business partner, Dean, live in a Weston Hills golf-and-country-club community. While he enjoys it, she admits she's growing restless.

"I like to walk, eat and shop, and I'm a very social person," says Sklar, whose children, 18 and 21, are both in college."

Though she'll wait until her kids graduate – just in case they need to return to the nest."

I see this as a recurring issue," Sklar says. "Graduates don't get jobs after college and have to move back home. This is why many parents wait to move."

For some people, staying put is not a choice, but a necessity. Their options might include renovating, remodeling and adding backyard structures to use as home offices or craft studios.

Or they can hire a professional organizer. Michelle Worthington of Worthy Spaces in Boca Raton helps clients purge unnecessary items and reconfigure spaces for optimal livability."

It can certainly be stressful to people," says Worthington, who often works with newlyweds merging two families – and all their belongings – into one house. "There's a lot of compromise on style and who gets to keep what."

If you're considering a move but are not quite ready to take the plunge, consider dipping a toe in the water."

People are buying little places out east so they can have fun, while still keeping their homes," Sklar says. "I'm going east to see if I like it down there."

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