

Memories, friends, timing drive wish for second home

Wanna Get Away? Part 1

The beach-condo pipedream traces back to June, but really to my childhood, a big idea with a miniscule chance.

Though I tried to snuff the daydream of buying a coastal getaway, the whale of an idea kept surfacing. What was I thinking? Second homes are for other people. One home is more than I can handle.

Be careful what you wish for.

In June, my husband and I sold a condo that we had bought for our youngest daughter for her to live in while she attended grad school. That sale resulted in something exceedingly rare in our lives: available funds. Here was money that for once didn't need to go toward a child's tuition, or housing, or orthodontia, or bail, or some other form of child support. The last kid had flown.

Meanwhile, several of our friends who live near us in the Orlando area, only an hour's drive from the Atlantic, were getting beach condos in the same way city dwellers buy country homes and those living near mountains get ski cabins. (Yes, I can hear you, Mom: "If your friends all walked off a cliff, would you?" I might.)

Yet one more driver was in play — my childhood. I grew up not on but near the beach in Southern California. As a teen, I spent my summers on the sand. Before I could drive, four quarters and the OCTD bus got me to and from Newport Beach, where I spent the lazy, carefree sum-



AT HOME WITH
Marni Jameson

mer days of my youth. The beach takes me back.

So, timing, friends, proximity, nostalgia, and those freed-up funds conspired to pull me under the ocean's influence like a riptide. When I could no longer keep this crazy dream to myself, one summer night during a rare inning when the Pirates were winning, I shared my idea with D.C.

He raised his eyebrows and matter-of-factly said words I loathe. "We'll have to look at the budget."

Like a good lawyer, D.C. is expert at directing me to his conclusions in a way that makes me feel like they're mine.

This time, however, I was ready. I had concocted a Marni-math scheme that showed how we could not quite break even if we bought a modest place that generated exceptional rental income through Airbnb.

The plan also had as part of the calculus that I would never ever in my whole life stop working. D.C. stayed quiet, which I took as the door opening a crack.

Then came a stroke straight from heaven. In July, our condo-owning friends, Chris and Cindy, whom I just might have

told about my pipedream, invited D.C. and me to spend a weekend at their condo to see how we liked beach life.

"We have selfish motives," Cindy confessed. "We want you to get a place."

"Let's go," I said to D.C. "Maybe we'll hate it."

We accepted the offer and lined up a local broker to show us a few properties. Enter Bob, soon to be known as Saint Bob. Little did Saint Bob know.

D.C. liked the getaway more than he wanted to. (YES!) We spent the next two months talking each other into and out of the idea by turns, while seeing properties with Saint Bob. We wanted a two-bedroom, two-bath condo with a straight-on ocean view (not one where you can only glimpse the ocean if you look out the bathroom window and crane your neck while on tiptoes) that was also popular with renters and in our price range.

Our first day out proved this would be impossible.

Over the next few months, we saw dozens of condos in person and online. We almost but not quite bought two and kept searching. Here's what we learned along the way.

- *Run the numbers.* Before we went condo hunting, we researched what expenses we would have to pay beyond the price of the property. Cindy and Chris kindly shared what they paid annually for insurance, property taxes, HOA fees, and utilities, as well as rental income less property management and cleaning fees.

- *Talk to your accountant.* Lev-

el-headed and conservative, my accountant is a great sounding board who has talked me out of many cockamamie ideas over the decades.

When I ran this one by him, his answer surprised me: "Go for it," he said. "It's a lifestyle. You will love it."

He added this caveat: "But make a pact. One year from the day you close the deal, if either one of you wants to sell it, for

whatever reason, sell it. It only takes one vote." Agreed.

- *Look under the hood.* Liking a property for its view, location and amenities is not enough. We liked a condo enough to want to buy it, but a review of the association minutes revealed that owners needed to pay a large assessment to retrofit oceanside balconies, which would entail a

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