Time Flies: This Year Is The “Sleepless In Seattle” Movie’s 25th Anniversary

by Courtney Cooper, Seattle Afloat

Sleepless In Seattle changed the perception of our city forever when it was released twenty five years ago. “Sleepless” is the now famous Seattle floating home which is pointed out on every Ride The Duck Tour and sought after by tourists from around the world. It is the first thing new prospective clients ask us about when they are exploring purchasing a floating home. Although this iconic movie was also largely shot in other cities such as Chicago, New York, and Baltimore, for a quarter of a century Sleepless in Seattle starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan has been the first movie people think of when they think of Seattle. Released on June 25th, 1993, this was one of Nora Ephron’s first major directorial jobs and continues to be a huge sentimental nod to the 1990s Seattle lifestyle. In fact, in a July 8th, 1993 issue of Rolling Stone Magazine Nora Ephron says in regards to Sam played by Tom Hanks, “He goes from Chicago, which is your modern, work-driven urban environment, to Seattle, which is – let me tell you, after three days there with my husband, Nick says, “This is a city where people have chosen lifestyle over work.” And he’s right. There are cities like this all over America, full of people who are kayaking and living the good life.” At the time of filming, Seattle’s official population was 525,974 people. By contrast, the current 2018 population is 698,051 people.

Photo credit to ©TriStar Pictures/ Courtesy of Everett Collection

This sketch of Sleepless In Seattle house was taken from original sketches done for Jeri Callahan’s Staying Afloat book about our community used with permission from the Callahan family and the artist.

CONTINUED ON PG.2
Little Lago is a piece of heaven on earth in Portage Bay and this “little grocer” does a lot more than sell groceries! Those of us in Portage Bay found ourselves extremely fortunate in November of 2016 to have Little Lago finally open their doors! For months beforehand, they teased us with signs in the windows about what was to come. It was worth the wait and we suddenly find ourselves more on the map as a destination. Droves of residents from nearby Eastlake, Montlake, and other parts of the city flock in to experience this little piece of Italian charm that Little Lago has to offer. They offer bites all day long and everything is made with the obvious love of the process and end result.

Little Lago has already ingrained itself into our community with such things like tasting nights and other wine and beer maker events, plus really cool things like “Valentine Wine School” or “Italian Lessons At Little Lago”! Some of our favorite food items are the bagels, pizza, grown up grilled cheese, and their lasagna! My son loves their special potato salad and all the kids (and adults) love their gelato bar. This is our neighborhood hangout and we covet it! Little Lago is located at 2919 Fuhrman Ave E. You can call ahead and order, but it’s nice in this fast paced world to just go, put your order in, and slow down to take in the atmosphere.

Sleepless In Seattle is mostly a winter, even holiday movie, but it was infamously filmed during a very hot and sunny summer. In fact, it was filmed during one of Seattle’s very few actual droughts where it was so dry that the city imposed mandatory water restrictions. One neighbor’s recollection best describes the scenario: “It was so hot that summer, I can remember floating out in the lake in front of Sleepless in my swimming suit and inner tube, watching as they tried to keep all the actors, dressed in overcoats, scarves and boots, cool. And, they had to rig up special systems to make it rain -- no small feat at the end of a long dock. (One of the reasons we are so dependent on the fire boats). And, there was a lot of talk about either a filter, or film treatment to make the footage seem grey and dreary when it was actually extremely blue and sunny -- day after day after day. They were pulling their hair out.”

The dock in which the Sleepless house resides was completely transformed for the filming of the movie. I am very grateful for the fabulous account of it from one neighbor, “Our dock is particularly proud of our flowers -- we often had casual competitions over who’s looked the best. Well, the production crew had to pluck out all the summer stuff and replace it with evergreens. The original child actor wasn’t working out for whatever reasons, and he was let go; it took about a month to audition and rehearse the new kid. And, then they had to re-shoot all the scenes. It was supposed to be just a couple of weeks, but all summer long we were flowerless in Seattle.”

This weekend, I watched Sleepless in Seattle again. I still found it comical to watch the unbelievable Hollywood geographic creative leaps and would challenge anyone who thinks they can take a small boat from Lake Union to Alki Beach in the hour or two it seemed to take the characters in the movie. The trip would involve taking the boat all the way up to the north end of Lake Union, through the ship canal, and into the Ballard Locks as Lake Union is roughly 20 feet higher than the Puget Sound. You would need to then go all the way around Discovery Park and cross the ferry traffic to head down to Alki Beach in West Seattle where the characters Sam and Jonah played. Almost as unbelievable is watching Meg Ryan’s character Annie “follow” them in her rental car by going over the Fremont Bridge. For the last 25 years, I have largely thought of this movie as somewhat of a “stalker” film, but this weekend I changed my mind and found it to be charming and sentimental. All in all, the movie holds up.
Recall from a prior grump that most floating homes moored on the outboard half of long docks are on leases over land owned by the State of Washington and administered by the Department of Natural Resources (“DNR”). In cooperative moorages over DNR land, there is one “master lease” with the cooperative association for the entire area occupied by the impacted floating homes. In condominium moorages, there is sometimes a master lease with the condominium association and sometimes individual leases with the owners of the impacted floating homes.

Whether coop or condo, master or individual lease, what all of these floating homes have in common is that their moorage slips could in fact evaporate one day when the DNR lease expires leaving them the proud owners of really expensive wet firewood. There will never be open floating home moorage spaces available and the State of Washington will be under no obligation to compensate impacted floating home owners.

The leases tend to be for 10 or so years and while—so far—they have always been renewed, someone buying a $2,000,000 home in year 9—depleting their savings and signing a 30-year mortgage—may well feel some not-entirely-cowardly angst.

While the literal risk is huge, what is the practical risk of a DNR lease not being renewed? But first, my grumpy disclaimer: the following is totally generic information based on simplistic overgeneralizations. What’s more, neither you nor your client have an attorney-client relationship with me. We probably wouldn’t even share a taxi. That said and accepted in a binding contractual manner coupled with a release and hold-harmless, there are a number of mitigating factors which combine to make buying a floating home over DNR land not as wacky as it might at first seem.

Current DNR practices give the immediately adjacent landowner—in this case the current lessee—the first crack at the lease. Why on earth would you not renew the lease? Maybe if DNR asked for an astronomical rent increase. But current DNR practice ties the calculation of rent to the per-square-foot value of nearby real property as assessed by the King County Assessor for real property taxes, i.e. not DNR’s whim. Floating homeowners should expect to pay market rent—which will go up over time rather than down—but are not currently at risk of rent gouging by the DNR.

Moreover, even if DNR practices changed and they could put the land out for high bid, who would pay much for it? It is 150 feet from shore with shore access unavailable over private property. If accessed from the water for yacht moorage, the yacht owner would need to construct moorage facilities independent of the floating home dock, including getting water/sewer/garbage and electrical service. Odds are the rogue yachter would not be a serious competing bidder.

Now, let’s talk about the odds that Russell Wilson would throw a pass at the one-yard line rather than hand the ball to Marshawn Lynch.

Grumpy Phil Explains

Phil Miller is a local lawyer and self-proclaimed “grump.” We have enlisted him to answer some common legal questions that come up about houseboat life. If you have an idea or a topic that you would like Phil to cover, please email us at: ABOVEBOARDseattle@gmail.com

DNR Part II: Smoke in a Bottle

Molly’s Q&A with kids

By Molly Cartwright, Seattle Afloat

For our Q&A on this edition of AboveBoard, we asked a few kids their perspective about living aboard. You can’t get more honest than this!

What is your first name and how old are you?
My name is London and I’m 11 years old. AND I’m a nice guy.

How long have you lived on your floating home?
I’ve lived in my floating home 2 years.

What was the first thing you did after you moved into your floating home?
While we were getting our house painted inside, I pitched a tent to sleep in. We also made a time capsule and hid it in our kitchen. And I helped set up our new television!

What is your favorite thing about living on a dock in a house that floats?
My favorite thing is you can look over the water ... and going in my mom’s slow (electric) boat. I like to ride it to Ivar’s for lunch even when it’s a colder day because we can zip it up so we don’t get wet.

What is the biggest difference between living on a floating home and a land home?
One moves and the other doesn’t move.

What is your least favorite thing?
The parking.

Another interview on p6
While this has not historically mattered as much to the typical floating home seller, it is clear that interest in our unique properties has increased! Buyers are looking to our community as an alternative housing solution which is ironically more affordable to them these days when compared to the overall market.

Overall, the 2018 floating homes market looks promising so far! Demand and interest levels continue to be high and the floating homes community overall is a “hot” Seattle neighborhood. Buyers are looking hard for lower priced floating homes in the one million dollars and under range. These “entry level” opportunities are few and far between and heavily sought after simply because there aren’t any available.

No matter when you decide to sell your floating home, Molly and I would be delighted and appreciative to help you. We can show you how to best position your home among whatever competition exists on the market at the time that you feel is best for you personally. Thank you again for your support! - Courtney & Molly (SeattleAfloat.com)
Spring is Here!

Preventing your floating home for the warm weather season ahead.

Winter rains and cold temperatures can wreak havoc on your home and outdoor spaces, doing the work now to identify and address the maintenance issues can assure a safe and enjoyable spring and summer season.

I have outlined some recommendations below to ensure a safe and sound home for years to come.

Check your roof and windows

- Visually inspect roofing materials, skylights and vent flashing for damage caused by expansion and contraction that naturally occurs in the cold weather. Make note of areas that may require further attention and/or repair.
- Check windows and exterior doors for possible caulking replacement and/or repair. This should be performed now to prevent water seepage and damage.

Exterior painted surfaces

- Inspect and clean all exterior siding and trim for weathering and paint failure. Check for loose nails and make note of any damaged siding that may require further attention.
- What areas need to be scraped, touched up and/or repainted?

Floats and Barges

- When was the last time you had someone down there to do an inspection?
- Floats, logs or barge hull should be inspected periodically to ensure ballast and avoid issues with the floats. NO ONE wants that!

Outdoor horizontal spaces, decks and railings

- Inspect for moss build-up, warping and/or wet/dry rot. Again, make note of any damage you see that may require professional attention.
- Power wash to remove any moss or other organic material. Sand down any split boards and large splinters; repair or replace damaged sections with only pressure treated lumber products.
- Check fasteners – harsh waterside conditions can cause erosion and deterioration of screws, nails and specialty fasteners resulting in these important connections to loosen or even fall out after years of wear. Make sure everything is tight and secure.

Pumps, Utility connections, lines and connectors.

- If you have bilge pump(s) test the motor(s), switches and valves. Make sure pumps are adequate to remove water in an emergency. Do you have a manual back-up?
- If your home is built on a barge, this is a good time to make sure waste tanks are pumped and inspected.
- Utility connections – inspect to make sure they are still in good condition and there are no signs of cracking or wear. Is everything tight and secure?
- Mooring lines, cleats and connectors. Is your home connected to the mooring dock with chains or rope? If so, take special care to check, repair or replace these regularly to keep everything secure. Cleats and connectors? Let’s take this opportunity to make sure everything is tight.

Fire Safety

- Fire extinguishers in your home? How many? How long have they been there? These need to be inspected and/or replaced from time to time to ensure they function, should you need them in case of emergency.
- Smoke/CO detectors? Make sure batteries are replaced twice a year – remember the Spring forward/Fall back rule.

Insuring your floating home/ Updates and improvements

- The unique construction and design of your home makes insuring it much different than a home built on land; insuring your floating home correctly is important.
- Have you done any significant updates and/or remodeling to your home? Changes like this can affect the replacement cost of your home.
- Review your insurance coverage annually. Make sure you are familiar with what you have; find your policy documents and read them carefully. If you have questions about what is covered – ASK your insurance professional.
- Insurance-to-value or co-insurance clauses within your policy, will require the home to be insured appropriately and can have a major impact on claim settlement.
- Your insurance protects your largest investment. Don’t skimp and undervalue your home. Make sure your home is protected and avoid costly out-of-pocket expenses come claim time.

Some of the inspections and work described may require professional services. Some of you may not be comfortable inspecting the home and/or working on ladders. If so, check with The Floating Home Association, local Better Business Bureau or contractors’ association for recommendations and references. You will want to make sure you are hiring a licensed, bonded and insured contractor; a professional who is qualified and reputable to work on your home. Here is a link to the Washington State contractors’ website so you can check the contractor out before you hire them. https://fortress.wa.gov/lni/bbip/

Taking the time now, to perform the steps outlined above, will help you avoid problems and potential injury on and around your floating home.

Julie Ann Schroeder, CISR, Brown & Brown Insurance
Almost by definition living on a floating home means making the most of compact living spaces.

Small spaces that feel comfortable depend on many things, starting most obviously with not filling them with too much furniture or stuff. From there, I believe three factors primarily influence our enjoyment of small spaces—scale, spatial fluidity, and spatial variety.

**Scale** is our sense of an object’s size as measured against some standard reference. Think of a couch, and a piece of furniture about 7’ long and 3’ deep probably comes to mind. In a small space, if you use a couch that is somewhat shorter, say 6’ long, which fits well in the room, then it’s more diminutive scale against your mental reference of “couch” will help the whole room feel larger in relation to it. The same rule applies to all the other furniture—chairs, tables, rugs, etc. It is also important in small spaces to get the right size pieces so that each one has enough visual breathing room when placed together, without crowding each other or pinching your movement around the room. If you have to shimmy around the end of a table to get by, it will only draw attention to the inadequate space in the room.

**Spatial fluidity** is a modern approach to architectural design that opens up the traditional four-walled room to let spaces flow more freely from one to the next. That feeling of movement can be especially helpful to smaller spaces, especially if you can’t see the whole from any one vantage point. Many years ago I lived in a studio apartment that was only about 500 sf, but because the space disappeared around corners and behind walls it visually kept flowing and never felt static. The sense that a space keeps expanding past what you can see is a very effective way to help smaller spaces seem bigger.

Spatial fluidity need not all happen inside, either. Well placed windows or full glass doors can allow an interior space to flow outside and be just as effective, if not more so, in extending the visual flow of a small space beyond its modest confines.

**Spatial variety**, especially changing the ceiling height, can also be an effective way to enliven a small space. In the photo example shown above, the sloped wood ceiling helps define the living area from the dining space without having to separate them with walls. The exposed wood joists over the dining area are an attractive three dimensional feature that lets the relatively low ceiling plane rise into the cavities between them, and their 8” rhythm, which is half the normal spacing, plays with scale expectations to help that area feel bigger.

Small spaces can be a challenge to make feel really comfortable, but with editing discipline and attention to these key factors, they can be a delightful and cozy home.

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**Molly’s Q&A with kids, continued...**

Q: What is your first name and how old are you?
A: My name is India Grady and I’m 10 years old.

Q: What is your favorite thing about living on a dock in a house that floats?
A: My favorite thing is that there are a lot of other people that are really nice and it’s a great community!!

Q: What is your least favorite thing?
A: My least favorite thing is what a tiny living space it is.
Who loves to check out open houses? I’m sure most of you know the general public love to see those open house signs around Fairview, Westlake, and Portage Bay for floating homes. Be it locals or travelers, the foot traffic from open houses cannot be discounted. For each person who visits an open house is like a walking connection to someone else who could quite possibly be interested in buying one. Before holding a public open house, you’ll need to prep yourself and your home. Make sure you remove anything valuable and repair anything that could cause harm this way you’ll have more peace of mind in general.

So whether your home is unique, quaint, small, or big you want an open house to really showcase your home’s highest potential. You don’t need to spend a lot of money to do these five simple things.

1. **Experience**

   We want people to have an experience when they visit. Is a sunny day? Open those doors and windows. Is a rainy day? Turn up the heat, the fireplace, or whatever you got and make it cozy. Music always sets the mood. I have a few music selections depending on the home’s vibe to welcome people arrive instead of dead silence.

2. **Cleanliness**

   Shine those windows or hire a professional. It truly makes a difference. Clean those floors. Beds made, toilet seat down, and zero dirty dishes in the sink.

3. **Space**

   Clutter be gone! Let people see how useful and spacious your tiny home truly is. Personal items get put away like pictures and trinkets.

4. **Smells**

   Those plug-in deodorizes just don’t cut it. If you follow point #2 then the smell should be of a clean home. Baking cookies has always been recommend but I prefer lighting a woodsy smelling candle or fresh clove and cinnamon on low heat on the stove. Always wash your linens - towels and bed sheets - before an open house.

5. **Information**

   Be personable but not noisy or follow people around. Let them experience (pointer #1) the home at their own pace. They’ll come back to ask questions - and there always are questions! So be prepared to answer questions about the home itself, the dock, and even broader questions like the community and lifestyle. Know what both the personal property tax and real property taxes are for the home.

Now remember there is a difference between preparing your home for the market and hosting an open house. Obviously the larger scale repairs, upgrades, painting, and inspections should occur before listing it, if necessary. We work with the very best to get these types of checklists complete before we list your home.
We're not strangers to the fact the Seattle housing market is unique. For 16 consecutive months, Seattle has led the nation in home price increases – the longest of any area since 2001. You own a home, but now what?

Mortgages rates are rising while Seattle home inventory remains low. Home equity, the difference between what’s owed to the bank and the market value of the home, hit a record high last month in Seattle thanks to fast rising home values. If you own a floating home, the inventory to demand ratio almost always seems tighter than your land-locked neighbors.

Many owners find themselves living in their ‘five year home’ for longer than planned, as low inventory and rising prices persist. “A million dollars today doesn’t get the home you wished for five or seven years ago,” said David Raney, Senior Vice President and Residential Lending Manager at Sound Community Bank. “Now is the perfect time to evaluate your financial position including mortgage debt, loan structure and home ownership objectives.”

Raney speculates, “Perhaps rising interest rates will finally lessen buyer demand, creating a softening effect on our local housing market.”

So what to do right now? Whether a second mortgage, a cash-out refinance, securing construction financing while rates are historically low or refinancing out of variable rate, “it all depends on your goals,” Raney says. “Do you want to blow out a wall, open up the kitchen, modernize the common areas, or tackle some deferred maintenance? These are all possible by evaluating your equity position.” These projects also add value to your home – which makes sense if you are contemplating a sale in the future.

With the changes in tax code and the threat of rising interest rates now is the perfect time to schedule a review with your tax advisor and trusted mortgage lender. Perhaps you remodel a portion of your home and enjoy it for the next year or two, all while adding value and putting your equity to work. For you floating home hunters, “The perfect home is out there!” Raney encourages.

Sound Community Bank is a Seattle-based community bank, providing personal and business banking services to the Puget Sound region for the past 65 years. Schedule an appointment with a Loan Officer at www.soundcb.com or by calling 206-448-0884.

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