



CURB APPEAL... WELL-MAINTAINED HOME ATTRACTS BUYERS

In today's competitive real estate market, it takes more than a fair price and an aggressive agent to sell your home for top dollar.

The way your house looks affects your bargaining power as a seller. According to experts, a house that is well maintained and nicely decorated not only sells faster, but can bring a higher price.

But before you run out and hire a decorator or invest in wall-to-wall carpeting, keep in mind that it isn't necessary to invest a lot of money to spruce up your home. In fact, real estate agents advise sellers not to go overboard in redecorating or remodeling their home in anticipation of putting it on the market. For one thing, your taste may not coincide with that of the buyer, and some of the improvements you make may not increase the value or selling prices.

A deep and thorough cleaning of your home is one of the most important tasks you can undertake. Clean and polish all appliances, surfaces, cabinets and doorknobs. Have the carpeting professionally cleaned and wood floors buffed and waxed. If you have tile floors, make sure the grout is clean and free of chips or cracks.

Check all faucets, toilets and showers for leaks or drips. If you're including the refrigerator, washer and dryer in the sale of your home, make sure they're in good working order.

Clutter is a big turnoff for buyers, so it's a good idea to put away all knickknacks, trinkets and other mementos. This will make your home look more spacious and inviting. While the temptation may be to store these items in closets, that may not be the best place for them. Closet space is a big selling feature, and you want them to look as spacious as possible. Store extraneous items in the attic, basement or a commercial storage unit.

Often a fresh coat of paint will do wonders to enhance a room without costing much money. Nothing looks quite as fresh or expensive as a spanking clean white wall. Don't bother with wallpaper. Some sellers go to great lengths to make their home enticing, including playing

soft background music, lighting a fire in the fireplace or placing fresh flowers in every room. While this is a nice touch, it certainly isn't something you're expected to do.

However, selling a home takes effort on your part as well as your agent's. Keep the house as tidy as possible since you never know when it may be shown. Put away dishes, store old newspapers and magazines, and pick up toys and clothes. Always make the beds and, whenever possible, try to leave the premises when a real estate agent is showing your home.

Buyers don't feel as comfortable when they know the sellers are present and are more apt to take a cursory look. If you aren't able to leave the house, try to at least step outside or stay in one room. The worst thing you can do is follow would-be buyers from room to room. Leave the selling to your agent, the real estate professional.

Buyers get their first impression of a house the minute they drive up. If your yard is attractive and well manicured buyers will have a positive feeling about your home before they ever step inside. Conversely, if the yard is an eyesore it will be hard to erase that negative image from buyers' minds.

Experts advise sellers to give their homes "curb appeal." Keep hedges and shrubs pruned and the grass edged and mowed. Remove withering plants and replace with colorful, blooming flowers. Be sure to remove garbage cans, gardening tools, children's toys and other items that distract from the yard and could cause potential buyers to trip or fall.

Don't forget to clean the garage. While no one expects to find an immaculate garage, it should be fairly clean and orderly. Make sure you do a thorough inspection of the interior, paying close attention to broken windows, rotting wood and faulty wiring.

Finally, keep cars, boats and RV's in the garage or parked on the street - not in the driveway. You don't want your yard to look like a used-car lot.



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