



IT'S WHAT'S OUTSIDE THAT COUNTS

If you're trying to sell your home, you need to wow potential buyers the second they drive up to your property. Here's how.

BY FRANCESCA DI MEGLIO

EVERYONE KNOWS A SLEEK KITCHEN WITH MODERN appliances and a spa-like bathroom can bump up the value of your home. But you can draw even more positive attention from potential buyers—not to mention your neighbors—by giving your house's exterior and front yard a face-lift. While the direct value of curb appeal can be argued, Michelle Carano, cohost of the HGTV series "Rip & Renew" (which airs Saturdays at 9:30am ET), says that a messy or uncared-for exterior can cause buyers to reduce their offers since they'll have to invest in landscaping and repairs.



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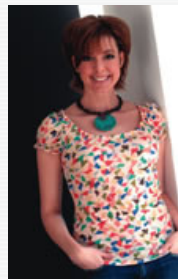
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Whether you're planning to sell or not, you should never neglect your home's façade. "You can see how much a house is loved by how well it is kept," Carano says. Show your abode some love with these tips for affordably enhancing its curb appeal:



CHECK THE ROOF

If the top of your house is caving in or has cracks and holes, go ahead and make the repairs, says Ruth Krinke, a broker associate at Colorado's Steamboat Real Estate, Inc. Your home's foundation and roof are extremely important because buyers and inspectors

will be keeping a close eye on them—and you'll get less money for your property if there is damage to either.

BE A DIY LANDSCAPER

If a landscaper is not in your budget, Carano says there are easy fixes you can make yourself. For starters, trim the edges of the lawn after you mow it to provide a finished look. Keeping hedges and bushes below the windows, which allows people to see in the house, is another simple solution. Adding mulch or stones around trees in the front yard brings in color, keeps in moisture and prevents weeds. Flowers are another nice touch, especially at entryways. Krinke suggests putting out seasonal and scented potted flowers because the fragrance is something buyers will like—and remember.

ADD A SPLASH OF COLOR

Carano suggests taking a drive around the neighborhood to get an idea of color combinations that would work for the exterior of your home. Then, test out your ideas on a major paint company website, where you can visualize—for free—available house and trim options. In addition to painting the exterior, you can also put a sealant on the driveway to restore that black-top look. If you can afford it, consider installing some lights to show off your landscaping.

TIDY UP

Before showing your home to a potential buyer, hide your gardening supplies in a garage or shed, get the toys out of sight and make sure there is no garbage around. Consider cleaning the sidewalk, driveway and exterior of the house with a power washer to remove mold, mildew and rust stains. Carano advises using the wide stream on the power washer because a forceful narrow stream could chip away paint and damage your home. She adds that cleaning and repainting the gutters with rustproof paint also helps remove wear-and-tear damage.

During the winter, remove snow from the walkways and the roof in a timely fashion. "You don't want snow to fall on top of a potential buyer," Krinke says. Caulk windows that might have condensation and repair broken ones. If nothing else, give your windows a good cleaning to make them sparkle.

REMEMBER THE BACKYARD

Potential home buyers will likely want to check out the backyard, and, according to Carano, if it's in bad shape, they may try to negotiate a lower price. So, make sure the deck is sealed and in good shape, and the deck furniture is cleaned and properly organized.

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Planning another trip?

Carano compares upping your home's curb appeal to adding stylish fashion accessories to your wardrobe. "It represents you to the outside world," she says. Do you want your house to be a great pair of designer shoes or some dirty, beat-up slippers? Chances are, a potential home buyer will go for the chic shoes.

PREP RALLY

Now that the exterior is ready, make sure the interior is equally impressive.

Sellers can't afford to overlook anything when preparing to show their homes. Once you've spruced up the outside, it's time to turn to the interior, says Ruth Krinke, broker associate at Colorado's Steamboat Real Estate, Inc. She offers some advice on how to get the inside of your home ready for the buyer.

1. Toss out your junk. "People's homes are simply too cluttered, so do a major clean up," Krinke says. Also, before showing the house to potential buyers, remove any items that you want to bring with you when you move. Sometimes, buyers insist on having the chandelier that you were planning on keeping.

2. Consult with a design professional. Consider having your home staged by a pro. For a price, companies will set up your empty home to look like something out of a design magazine. In a slow market, staging is a way to get an edge on the competition.

3. Use the power of smell. Bake cookies, arrange potpourri or burn scented candles before potential buyers walk through your home. Likewise, try not to cook strongly scented foods when you're expecting buyers, since people remember both good and bad scents.

4. Attend to the bathroom. Krinke strongly advises that you caulk the tub. It's easy to do and can mean the difference between a sale and no sale, she says.

5. Let there be light. Make sure you have good lighting throughout the house. Krinke has seen potential buyers ignore perfectly great homes because they were too dark.

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