

Preparing Your Home for the Market

Even a minor facelift can increase the value of your home, bringing a quicker sale at a higher price. Consider the following suggestions, which include low-hanging fruit as well as larger projects that will increase the value and desirability of your home.

General –

- Minimize clutter! Move things like small kitchen appliances, cooking utensils, spices, toiletries, towels, etc. out of sight, unless they are presented in a visually pleasing, decorative manner. Remove magnets from your refrigerator and remove anything that you are storing on top of your refrigerator.
- Assess where your eye is drawn when you enter a room and whether that is the area that you want potential buyers to notice first. We often become desensitized to our own clutter. If you struggle to identify problematic areas, take a photo of the area. I didn't believe it until I tried it myself, but this is a great trick for pinpointing problem areas! Other options are to consult with your agent, ask a trusted friend for their opinion, browse organizing blogs for inspiration, or hire a professional organizer or home stager to assess the space. The National Association of Productivity & Organizing Professionals is an excellent source to find qualified professionals. The NAPO St. Louis website can be found at www.napostl.com.
- Include a variety of lighting, especially in kitchens, bathrooms, and basements where both high and low-level lighting serve a purpose.
- Make sure that your furniture is arranged in a way that opens the room up, making it feel more spacious. If possible, remove any extraneous pieces of furniture that disrupt the flow of the space and make the area feel cramped.
- If you have stained baseboards, consider a quick re-stain with a rag in order to fix any blemishes and give the room a more polished feel.
- Install new floor grates, outlets, switch and outlet plates throughout the house. Believe it or not, this makes a big difference in the general appearance.
- Always repair things that are broken, no matter how small they may seem. Buyers will notice these details, and multiple things in disrepair will give the impression that you have not been a conscientious homeowner. This may even lead to the assumption that there are larger underlying issues.
- Neutral décor and paint are incredibly important. You want potential buyers to be able to picture their own belongings in your home, and bold colors are more likely to clash with their furniture or tastes.
- One aspect that is often overlooked by sellers is the smell of their home. Even if your home does not have an unpleasant odor, burning candles or diffusing essential oils during showings can improve the atmosphere and memorability of your home.
- Carpeting is outdated and a major deterrent for most buyers.
- If your budget allows for it, take this opportunity to shop for new furniture. Get rid of your old furniture and stage your home with the new stuff that will improve buyers' impressions of your home.
- Pinterest and Houzz.com are great resources to use for décor inspiration.

Kitchens –

- A fresh, neutral coat of paint goes a long way. Again, avoid bold colors that may clash with potential buyers' furniture and deter them from making an offer.
- Hard surface counter tops are very popular. Consider installing granite, marble, quartz, onyx, or higher-end Formica.
- Upgraded cabinetry and handles add worthwhile value to your home. Recent trends include cherry, birch, walnut, and maple. Consider an espresso finish, which is a very popular trend right now. Oak cabinetry, especially with the medium oak finish that was popular in the 80's, is likely to turn away potential buyers.
- Stainless steel and black appliances are much more popular than the white appliances that were popular in the past.
- Flooring can be tricky because presentation and functionality are both important. Be sure to choose flooring that is durable and easy to clean. Stone tile and laminate that mimics stone tile are both popular choices for kitchens.
- Lighting makes a major difference in the atmosphere of your kitchen. It is best to include a variety of lighting or adjustable lighting so that the atmosphere can be adjusted accordingly. Oil rubbed bronze, brushed stainless, and aged finishes are the most popular options in the current market.
- Tile backsplashes are popular as well. Be sure to choose the size and pattern based on the rest of your kitchen. For example, if your kitchen has a modern minimalist look, a detailed backsplash can really stand out. If your kitchen has a lot of patterns incorporated into the décor already, you will want to avoid a detailed backsplash in order to minimize visual clutter. Installing tile backsplash is only a good choice if the rest of your kitchen has been updated recently. If your kitchen is outdated, buyers are likely to remodel it anyway, in which case removing the backsplash would be a hassle.

Bathrooms –

- Tile is the most popular flooring choice in bathrooms as well. Again, make sure that the style allows for easy cleaning, as rough textures can be high-maintenance and turn away buyers. One way to really make your bathroom stand out is to install a backsplash around the tub. That's right, backsplashes aren't just for kitchens! The most popular style is to surround the tub and stretch the backsplash all the way up to the ceiling, which improves the atmosphere as well as the functionality of the area. Keep in mind that small or patterned tile might make the area seem too busy, so choose wisely!
- Clear, *trackless* shower doors are the most popular option for showers. They make the bathroom feel more spacious, and are better at containing moisture than simple, traditional shower curtains. Frosted doors can make the room feel cramped, and shower doors on a track tend to accumulate grime in places that are hard to clean.
- Medicine cabinets are becoming less and less popular. If your medicine cabinet has a modern look and doubles as a mirror, it may not be worthwhile to remove it. However, if it has an outdated look or is extremely shallow, you may want to do so. Larger storage cabinets, especially with pull-out shelves, are increasingly popular and more functional. If you have a large master bathroom with unused space, installing a storage cabinet would improve the appeal and therefore the value of your home.
- Lighting fixtures can make a huge difference in the atmosphere of your bathroom as well. This is another scenario in which a variety of lighting options, both bright and dim, would be worthwhile. For example, brighter, even lighting is more useful when someone is applying makeup or shaving, but would not be relaxing while they are showering or taking a bath. Regarding the style of lighting fixtures, oil-rubbed bronze, brushed stainless, and accents of shiny chrome (which is less pricey) are popular. Avoid brass fixtures, which are no longer trending.

Basements –

- A finished lower level makes a huge difference in the value and desirability of your home. The finish does not need to be extravagant, but you want the basement to feel like a legitimate living area rather than a storage area. Drywalled ceilings have more aesthetic appeal, but high-quality drop-top ceilings can look nice and are oftentimes more functional since they allow access to ducts, plumbing, and wiring.
- It is important to include a variety of lighting options in basements as well, since they are often multi-purpose areas. Fluorescent lighting is inexpensive and a good choice for the main light source, but it is ideal to include **recessed lighting** or an adjustable option as well.
- Fake out the basement windows with floor length drapes to give the area a finished look and create a cozy space for the family to gather.
- A bathroom in the basement adds a lot of value to your home, especially if it is a full bath that includes a shower. Even if you are not willing to take on this project yourself, be mindful of any updates you make and how they will impact the ability for future owners to install a bathroom. For example, drop-top ceilings would make wiring and plumbing more accessible than drywall, which would need to be ripped out, re-installed and repainted afterward.
- If you are not willing to finish your basement entirely, a coat of paint on the concrete floor, upgraded windows, and/or upgraded lighting will be a worthwhile compromise.

Outdoor —

- The outdoor entryway to your home should be clean and decorated. Some welcoming outdoor décor will build the buyers' anticipation and make a great first impression. Be sure to power wash the area - no one likes walking through spider webs!
- If your front door is not in good shape, consider replacing or refinishing it. Bold colors are becoming more popular on front doors, but you do run the risk of choosing a color that potential buyers do not care for. A dark shade of red or blue is a safer bet than green, orange, or purple.
- Door knobs and locks are often overlooked by sellers but play a role in potential buyers' first impression of your home. If your agent has to fidget with a broken or misaligned deadbolt or door knob, it makes a bad first impression.
- Power washing can work wonders on the appearance of a home. It is a great approach to making patios, sidewalks, landscaping stones, decks, garages, and siding look as good as new without the trouble of painting or replacing. Be sure to do some research before you start spraying, as power washers are powerful and can do damage if used improperly.
- Decks in disrepair are a major turnoff for buyers and can cause issues with the building inspection. Addressing issues with the deck are an absolute necessity, unless you are willing to accept a much lower offer on your home.
- Repainting outdoor areas that are cracked or peeling will make a huge difference in the look of your home. You may also consider painting the garage or unfinished basement floor to give the area a more polished, clean feel.
- Make sure your lawn and landscaping is well manicured, and there are no weeds growing in the cracks of your sidewalk.

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