

# FOR SALE SECRETS Liz Tomey

## QUICKLY SELL YOUR HOME FOR MORE PROFITS!

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Have you been considering selling your home in the near future? If you have, then it wouldn't be a bad idea to take a good long look at your home, using an unbiased eye.

After all, a clean, appealing, well maintained home has much better odds of selling, selling for more, and selling faster.

When looking at your house, the thing you need to keep repeating to yourself is that "first impressions are lasting impressions." This couldn't be truer when it comes to selling real estate.

However, this doesn't mean that you should take on a major renovation project just so that you can sell your property. Remember, there are no guarantees that you would recover the costs of an enormous overhaul.

Instead, take a more conservative approach, and have a look at the different cosmetic improvements that can be made for an overall improvement. These can include things such as cleaning, painting, refinishing, and other such efforts. These are the projects that don't require all that much capital, and yet they make an immeasurable improvement to the overall look of your home.

Before you take on any fix-up-for-sale projects, take on the mindset that you are sprucing up your home in order to sell it. Don't think of it as fixing it up for someone else. You're trying to create more of an appealing look than you are a perfect home.

If you fix up the house with a certain person in mind, you're limiting your market. Limiting your market will usually mean a slower sale, and a lower selling price.

So instead of tackling a whole mess of huge projects, just focus on making the home attractive, clean, presentable, and well maintained. Let the new owners do their own customizations.

This guide will take you all around your property and let you know the very things that you can do to get the most out of your sale, without having to dump huge amounts of time, money, and energy into repairs.

There isn't a realtor in existence that wouldn't tell you that one of the most important terms that you can learn when you're trying to sell your house, is "curb appeal."

Therefore, while you're sprucing up your home, it's wise to start outside, and work your way in. Begin by a good walk around the grounds to give yourself an idea of what you're up against, and then use these tips as a sort of checklist to get yourself on the right track.

If you take the effort to ensure that the outside of your home is appealing, then it will make certain that potential buyers will want to look at the interior as well. Therefore, it's obvious that you should work on the outside of your home for precisely that reason.

So let's get started with some tips you can use outside your home...

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## **Tidy Up Outside**

Take the time to walk around your property wearing good thick gloves, and carrying a garbage bag. Pick up every bit of refuse, yard waste, and other unsightly things, and throw them away. When the garbage is gone, then do another lap and remove all of the clutter outside. This can include things such as:

- Kids' toys
- Yard care tools (wheelbarrows, lawn mowers, weeding tools, garden hoses, etc.)
- Tools
- Bicycles

Depending on how you usually keep your property, this one effort can make a staggering difference to the outer appearance of your home.

## **Trim Shrubbery**

Shrubbery and other greenery that has an unkempt appearance can often be misconstrued as a sign of neglect, and gives a bad impression of your house overall. Prospective homebuyers who see shrubbery that has not been well maintained may not even be aware of their observation, but it will have an impact on the way they view your property as a whole.

If they do observe the unkempt shrubbery directly, they may make the assumption that the rest of the home has not been properly maintained.

Keep bushes and shrubs neat, and well-shaped, to give the overall impression that the entire property has been well cared for.

For that added touch, try to keep the shrubbery in line with the other greenery and outdoor decorations that you have on your property. This will be even more eye-pleasing from the street level, creating more interest.

Should the size of your shrubbery be such that it makes walking up to your home a challenge, you should consider taking them out. Shrubbery that is too large not only makes the home appear much smaller, but it also creates a hazard where safety is concerned.

This may also make prospective buyers think of it as a hindrance because they'll think of it as something that will need to be taken care of; this even before they've even entered your home.

It's a very inexpensive task that you can do yourself, and it shouldn't take more than a couple of hours of your time to get done. If you don't have the time, the ability, or the inclination to trim the shrubbery, don't just let it go. This can only risk losing a lot of time and money in the long run.

Instead, consider hiring a professional. This will cost approximately \$35 to \$45 per hour, but it will be well worth the small investment in the end.

With a bit of luck, you'll only need to do it once before your home is sold – a one time effort that will go a very long way.

### **Plant Some Flowers**

Flowers, especially bright flowers, can liven up the exterior of your home very inexpensively and easily. They needn't be expensive or exotic. Even the cheapest, easy-care, low maintenance flowers will do just fine, such as:

- petunias,
- marigolds,
- sweet alyssum,
- zinnias,
- bachelor's buttons

Your local garden center will be able to help you make the best choice for your location and purpose. Remember that annuals are cheaper than perennials, so they'll suit your purpose perfectly. Keep

in mind also that mixing bright colors like pink and yellow give a much happier appearance to the home than darker purples.

Flowers are an especially nice touch under windows, on porches, and in flower beds. They create a special level of warmth and depth, making your property appears cared for as well as enjoyed.

## **Landscaping: Mow the Lawn**

A property that has a well manicured lawn has one of the best chances at showing pride in ownership than any other outdoor technique.

For one thing, there is a large upswing in the priority that homeowners place in their outdoor living spaces.

Therefore, the landscaping of your front yard (especially) as well as that of your back yard should look its very best when it's selling time. Your landscaping will make a huge contribution to the resale value of your home, so make sure that it's doing its best to help you out.

In fact, studies have shown that when the landscaping of a home is in excellent condition, it can sell for about 4 to 5 percent higher, while homes with landscaping in very poor condition can sell for 8 to 10 percent less. That's a huge difference in the overall selling price of your home.

You might be wondering exactly how much time you should dedicate to sprucing up the landscape of your property. How much time and money is worth it for your sale?

Even if you put a minimal amount of money, effort, and time in to your landscaping, it will help you in selling your home, and perhaps even getting a boost in the selling price. Every effort you make will help.

However, don't overdo it. Remember that it's not a selling feature; it's only something to help the overall appeal of your property, so that the other selling features will be better appreciated.

You should keep your lawn mowed so that it is even, and neatly short. Keep it well weeded, as these will only appear as blemishes to your landscaping. Make sure to use a weed eater to do the edges, as this gives your work a superior finish touch.

If there are any “bald” patches in your lawn, buy a small bag of seed and care for the spot, filling it in. This is especially important if you have a dog who digs or who leaves “pet damage” where s/he does his or her business.

After you fill in the dead spots that your dog has left, make sure to water the areas after your dog “waters,” to prevent new dead patches from forming. Watering the areas will dilute the urine to stop it from burning the grass.

This effort makes an immeasurable difference in the overall neatness of the house, and the impression that it will leave potential buyers.

### **Keep Porches and Railings in Good Repair**

After taking a beating from the elements, and having worn from time, porch railings have been known to become wobbly. This is a safety hazard, to say the least, but it’s also very unattractive.

Railings that are loose can damage the steps to which they’re attached. This can only mean a higher cost for repairs that are made, in order to ensure that the steps are safe.

If your railing is a bit loose, have a good look at it. Many times all that is required is a tightening of bolts, and the railing is as good as new.

The majority of porch railings are attached with lag bolts; these are large screws with a head that looks like a bolt. Should these become loose, all you need is an adjustable wrench to tighten them (turning them clockwise...remember: leftie = loosie and rightie = tightie).

At times, if the railings have been screwed into the brick of your home, the sheath may have broken or worn down. If this happens to your railing, you need to replace the sheath. Don't worry; this is neither expensive nor costly. You can buy them at any hardware store.

When you remove the screws and sheaths to replace them, the railing will come off, so be sure you're ready to support it and then put it somewhere. You'll need a screwdriver and about twenty minutes to accomplish this task.

Once the new sheath is in place, just screw the railing back on. Make sure to test the railing for security when you get it on again.

If you are extremely challenged in the home-repair department, or if you simply don't have a moment to spare, you can always hire a professional to do the job. They'll cost anywhere from \$40 to \$100 per hour to do the job.

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## **Maintain Shutters**

Shutters can be a charming touch to any home. When they're well maintained and in good shape, they can add a warm, comforting touch to brick, stone, or just about any other finish.

However, if they're not well maintained, and are in bad shape, they are one of the fastest ways to make your home appear to be neglected; especially to prospective buyers.

Fortunately, they don't take a lot of skill or time to repair if they're looking a little bit rough. When it comes to the majority of shutters, a quick sanding and one or two coats of exterior house paint can make your shutters look as good as if they were new.

Though it might take a little bit of extra time, it's wise to remove the shutters from the house before you start sanding and painting them. You can make an excellent work table out of an old plank or door set up on two sawhorses.

Clean the shutters of any dirt with a clean rag, then give them a light sanding. Wipe them again, to remove the dust from sanding. Now they're ready to be painted.

You can either spray paint them, or brush on the paint; either will give a nice end result. They will need either one or two coats, depending on your preference, and the appearance you want to attain. Make sure that they've been allowed to dry fully before you reattach them to your home.

## **Touch up Painting**

A large number of houses are made out of brick, with small amounts of wooden trim. These wooden touches are usually located on porches and small areas on the ends of your home.

As time passes, these wood places have a tendency to become worn, with cracked and dull looking paint.

Give your wooden accents a touch up of paint and the entire exterior of your home will have a fresh new look.

Depending on how much wooden trim you have, once you purchase the right amount of exterior paint, it shouldn't take you more than two or three hours to finish this task.

Occasionally, you may need to sand the area before you can paint it. Sanding helps the new paint cure much better than if you'd applied it directly onto the old paint – especially if the previous coat had a cracked surface.

A palm sander is the ideal solution to getting this part of the project done quickly and easily.

Beyond the wooden points, have a look at the paint on the downspout, gutters, and anywhere else that has paint. None of these should be cracked, faded or peeling. If they are: repaint.

### **Make Sure Your House Numbers are Visible**

Though this may seem like a rather silly little task, it will make all the difference when it comes to selling your home. This isn't because potential buyers want to see clear numbers before they purchase your home – it's because they need to be able to find your home if they want to find out more about it, or have a look.

If a prospective buyer can't find your home due to a lack of visible house numbers, all of your other efforts to create lovely curb appeal may have been in vain.

If your house number is carved into the exterior surface of the building, be certain that it can still be seen from the street. If they are a struggle to see, and they are recessed into the brick or stone, simply paint the numbers a crisp, clean color, so that they will stand out.

A simple technique for completing this task quickly and easily is by using a cotton swab which has been dipped into paint. Carefully apply this into the engraved numbers. You'll be surprised at what a professional result you can achieve.

House numbers that have been mounted onto the house, such as over the garage, should also be visible from the street. Make sure they're in good condition, and still match your home. Perhaps the house has gone through some changes since the numbers went up, and now they're not quite so stylish anymore.

If the house numbers are rusty, if they have pieces missing, or if a number altogether is gone, it's a good idea to paint or replace them.

They are readily available at hardware stores and home building centers, and you can obtain some pleasant looking ones inexpensively. It will make all the difference to your prospective buyers.

The same goes for numbers that are located on mailboxes. If they are incomplete, torn, or otherwise unattractive, simply replace them or stencil new ones onto the mailbox.

This makes your home easier to find, more inviting, and gives an impression that your home has been well cared for.

## **Beautify the Front Entrance**

The front entrance, including the front door, the porch, and the windows nearby, are the gateway from the outside to the inside.

Since there will be a moment while the prospective clients – or the real estate agent – knock on the door, or open it, there will be a moment where they pause right in the entry, and will likely get a very close-up, very detailed impression of your home.

These are also an important focal point when it comes to curb appeal, so be certain that they're in tip-top shape. This is where the future

owners, as well as all of their guests will enter their new home. It will be important to the eye and to the heart.

The door itself must look sharp. If needed, a fresh coat of paint can make all the difference to a pleasant, inviting, and well-maintained home.

Be certain that the hardware – such as the doorknob, the latch, the hinges, etc – are all freshly painted or polished. It gives an extra level of overall attractiveness.

Other useful steps to improve the entryway include:

- A freshly painted/replaced mailbox
- Bright, functioning porch lights
- A new (un-tattered) welcome mat

If you have a doorbell, make sure that it is working, or remove it altogether. As with the front light, one of the things that can create the worst impression for your home is to have basic elements not functioning properly. This will make the prospective buyer wonder what else has not been your top priority for maintenance.

## **Exterior Cleaning**

After the entrance improvements have been made, have a look at the overall building.

- Is the siding clean?
- Are the windows clean?
- Are the gutters clean from the outside?
- Are corners and indents free of spider webs and vines?
- Is the walkway clean enough that it has a defined edge, and doesn't have mud or other dirt creeping over the sides or across the middle?
- How about the stairs?

**For Sale Secrets**

Remember, your goal for the best possible curb appeal is a neat, clean, well maintained atmosphere. Take care of these different factors to clean up the atmosphere of your home.

All of these items can be easily performed in a few hours, and they'll make an enormous difference for selling your home.

Now that the outside has been adequately beautified, and you've mastered curb appeal, it's time to move on to the inside of your home.

Just like there was a lot of little things you could do to make an overwhelming difference to the outside of your home, there's lots of great projects you can tackle inside, without having to spend a great deal of money.

While the whole home is very important, the two primary areas for sprucing up should be your kitchen and bathroom. The following tips will guide you through the inside of your home in general, and then progress to each area of your home, to make sure that you're maximizing its potential.

## **Decorating for a Sale**

The world of real estate is becoming more sophisticated in its understanding of what sells. In this sense, there is a much better comprehension of how we can spruce up our homes for sale. In fact, there are actually people who have made an occupation of just this study and this task.

There is a whole knack to being able to properly "stage" a home these days. Fortunately, it while it is an extremely effective effort, it is not one that takes a large amount of money. It's just a matter of improving your current surroundings.

The key is to look at your home not through your own eyes, but through the eyes of the prospective buyer. Look at your home as though you've never been there or seen it before in your life.

Think of it as romancing your buyer with your house, so you'll want to set the mood.

## **Make Space**

Clear out excess furniture and accessories from the interior of your home as much as possible. If a piece of furniture is too big for the room, or is crowding the room, put it in storage, have a garage sale, or give it to a deserving charity.

This also goes for decorations, oversized stuffed animals, and other items that you may have collected over the years. Anything that takes up space should be considered, and if it's not necessary, you'll want to clear it out.

Nothing is more effective at opening up a house than getting rid of clutter. It will look immeasurably more spacious without all of your extra things in the way.

Pay special attention to keeping hallways and doorways clear. Not only will this make the prospective buyer feel that they will be purchasing a more spacey home, and can easier imagine their own things inside of it.

### **The Value of Surface Space**

Go through your house and clear off all of the horizontal surfaces, kitchen counters, and bathroom countertops.

This means that you won't be leaving any magazines, knick-knacks, or other various items to add to a cluttered appearance in your home. Either pack them or get rid of them in some other way.

### **The Nose Knows**

Your home should smell good. When this comes to selling the house, it means that there should be no noticeable odors. Make careful attempts to get rid of the following smells:

- Pet odors

## For Sale Secrets

- Stale cooking/food smells
- Cigarette smoke

Smell makes an enormous impact on people when they enter a home. Furthermore, while smokers and pet owners may not even notice the smells in their home – having become quite accustomed to them – they may be an overwhelming turn-off for potential buyers.

In this case, have a non-smoking, non-pet owning friend come over to perform a sniff test.

While it used to be recommended that you bake bread or steam cinnamon potpourri before a potential buyer is to come through, it's no longer recommended. The same goes for spray air fresheners.

If you insist upon adding a scent to your home, make it a very – repeat, very – lightly scented candle, or scented oil. However, it's better not to scent the home at all.

The best way to get rid of scent problems in a home isn't to cover them up, but instead, it's to remove them at the source.

Recommended techniques for accomplishing this include:

- Scrubbing the house
- Having the air vents cleaned
- Replacing old, smelly carpeting
- Smoking outdoors

## **Remember That Buyers are Human Too**

Just like you, buyers are lazy when it comes to having to take on large projects within the home. They want to be able to move in and be happy with what they've bought.

If your property is in need of work, such as the following, you should tackle them before the potential buyers get to see it, so that all they

will picture is moving day, not all the work they'd have to put into the home.

- Old, dated wallpaper
- Ratty carpeting
- Cracked or peeling paint
- Cracked, broken, or missing tiles
- Other similar projects

Most people will want all of the important work done before they move in. They don't want to have to worry about tearing the place apart as soon as they get their stuff inside.

They want to buy a home, and not remain unsettled for a long time while they bring the place to the level that they consider to be livable.

With each change that they prospective buyer calculates that they'd have to make to your home; they'll become just that much more concerned. When it comes to selling your home, you need to make it your priority to assuage these concerns.

### **Testing the Home for Baby Compatibility**

Are families with babies and/or young children a part of your potential market? If they are, then you need to ask yourself if you would put your own child on your floor and let him or her crawl about.

In the case of having your house pass the baby test, go for cleanliness first. Make the following efforts for approval from the perspective of a judgmental parent:

- Floors looking clean enough to eat off of,
- Carpets looking and smelling fresh,
- Walls free of grimy smudges and handprints

## **Butt Out**

Of all the impacts that your home can have on your buyer, cigarette smoke is the very last one you'd want. This doesn't just mean the smell – which, as we discussed in tip #15, is quite offensive to potential buyers – but the look of ash trays (even clean ones) and smoke stains on walls, cupboards, and otherwise.

This is also true for burn holes in carpeting and upholstery. Sure, you're not selling your furniture, but the furniture that is there will leave an overall impression, so make certain that they don't show signs of smoker's damage.

For the majority of buyers, they won't even want to tour a home if it is currently owned by a smoker. With that in mind, make sure to get rid of any "evidence" of your habit.

While this book is not about preaching to quit smoking, for all intents and purposes, your home should appear as though you've never smoked in it a day in your life.

Store all of your ash trays out of sight; clean all of the walls, ceilings, and other places that have smoke stains, and replace or cover any fabrics, carpets, or upholsteries that have burn holes.

If you must smoke, do so outside, and make sure that you're not smoking in front of an open window that will simply let the smoke back in.

## **Give Your Home a Timeless Feel**

In the world of real estate, there is a huge difference between an old home, and a classic home. It's comparable to the idea of used clothing versus vintage clothing; only on a much grander scale.

If your home is about 40 years old, with 40-year old paint and wallpaper, 40-year-old appliances, and 40-year-old carpeting, then you have an “old” house, which is hard to sell.

On the other hand, if you’ve shown that you’ve maintained your home with an overall established look, but which has been kept fresh and up-to-date, this is a “classic” home, which is a very appealing style.

The major kinks of the new home have been worked out, the neighborhood is settled, and it has been maintained well enough that “falling apart” won’t be a major issue.

### **Shed Light on the Subject**

Two major things that your potential buyers will be looking for in your home include light and space.

Sure, it’s alright to have one room that is a bit on the darker side; however, if the entire home is dark, that should be considered to be a problem.

When people will be viewing your home, open drapes and blinds, turn on all of the lights, and add lights to darker rooms.

If Mother Nature doesn’t feel like being helpful on the day that people will be viewing your home, use flowers and other similar things that will suggest sunlight.

Your goal is to make your space look crisp, sharp, and vibrant. Your home should be a happy space inside which the prospective buyer wants to spend more time.

### **Get a Professional Home Inspection**

Most buyers will have a professional home inspection done anyway, but if you do it ahead of time, then you can take care of any necessary repairs even before it goes onto the market.

Depending on your area, and what kind of home you have, this will probably cost between \$200 and \$400 to have done, but it can be well worth the effort.

If you're not certain who to hire, ask your real estate agent, and he or she will be able to recommend several quality inspectors.

### **The Art of Plain White**

It's true; color is very popular when it comes to walls. However, there is a problem; you and your buyer may not have the same taste in what colors are best on walls.

Paint is a relatively easy and inexpensive way to give your home a fresh new look, and if you're going to put in the effort, you may as well do it right. Before selling, you'll want to stick to neutrals.

White, beige, and cream may seem pretty boring, but despite this fact, they are the best for creating an easier sale.

Remember also that white reflects the most light out of any color, and therefore it will make the rooms appear the largest.

### **Look Down on Your Carpet**

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carpet, think about wood or laminates, since they're better selling features.

Wood and laminates make your home look more spacious, and people like to see woods and laminates more than carpeting when they're looking at homes. As an added bonus, these types of flooring are much easier to keep clean than carpets are.

### **Avoid Making a “Statement”**

If you have any kinds of “loud” decorating that makes a statement or that is controversial, you should take it down.

Examples of controversial decorating are a deer head on the wall, or a bear skin rug.

These items may be attractive or fun in your eyes, but there are many people who will find this a complete turnoff.

This is the same for books and magazines that you might have lying around. If you're not sure, the best thing is not to display them, in case something might be offensive or simply unattractive to prospective buyers.

### **Wallpaper: It Sticks or it's Nix**

Peeling wallpaper should be removed immediately and replaced with a fresh coat (or two) of paint.

This is especially important in bathrooms. Here, you should either paint a neutral color, or the lightest color that will match the existing tile.

This is the same for kids' rooms. If they need a fresher look, then go with colors that are as neutral as possible.

That way, while buyers look at the house, they'll be looking at the home for itself, not for your own decorating abilities. Furthermore, this allows them more of a shot at imagining the way their things will go into the space.

## **Straighten the Closets**

While no buyer will expect that your closets will be perfectly neat or empty, but they are looking for a large amount of storage space for their own things.

To help with this impression, the rule of thumb is to take everything out of your closet, and only put half of it back in. The rest of the stuff will need to find a new home; in the garbage, the clothing donation charity, or packed in your suitcases.

The reason for doing this is that partially empty closets look much roomier than they may really be. And remember, it's space and storage that sell.

The same can be done for your kitchen cabinets and other storage areas. An added bonus is that when you're done sifting through your stuff to get half out of the closets, you'll already have gotten rid of a lot of things that you'll no longer have to move.

Moreover, if you've packed up the extras, that's work done that you would have had to do sooner or later anyway.

## **Flower Power**

Fresh flowers in your house will give it a healthy, clean, and bright look, without spending a fortune.

If you have the money, you can add a professional arrangement full of exotic flowers to a room in your home.

However, if you'd rather splurge on other things, then you can always go for a cheaper flower. The important thing is that they're fresh, healthy, and in warm colors.

Affordable fresh cut flowers include:

- Carnations
- Daisies
- Pompons
- Irises
- Freesia
- Asters

Consider having the colors not only match the room, but the season.

For example, springtime is a great opportunity to use pinks and purples, summer is fantastic for reds and bright yellows, and fall is great for oranges and pale yellows. In the wintertime, anything bright and happy is a good idea.

If you have flowers in your yard that can be cut, it's pleasant to have some in the house. This not only ties the inside and the outside, but it gives your home an authentic happy and fresh feeling.

Just be certain that you don't cut so many that the outside gardens have bare patches!

## **Open Up the Windows**

If it's mild enough outside – that is, if it's cool enough in warm weather, or warm enough in cool weather – you might think about opening up the windows.

This will bring the fresh air in, and will be wonderful for making the air breathable, and getting rid of any “home” smells that you may not even notice, but may be obvious to the prospective buyer.

Be careful about the temperatures in which you open the windows. If you make it too hot or too cold inside, then the prospective viewers will feel uncomfortable, and therefore won't attach themselves quite as well.

Moreover, a too-cold house will take away from the welcoming feeling you're trying to instill in the home, and a too-warm house will make the house feel smaller than it is, and will make the prospective buyers want to leave faster. Naturally, that's not what you're going for.

### **Clean, Clean, Clean**

When people look to buy a home, they're being extremely picky and observant about every little thing. That being said, you don't want to lose a sale just because you have a cobweb in a basement window.

Therefore, it's a good idea to go over your home with a "white glove" to ensure that it is spic and span. Pay special attention to elements such as:

- Dust
- Cobwebs
- Trash
- Grunge

### **Let Your House Stand Out – In a Good Way**

When people are looking for houses, it's very, very rare that they'll only see one or two houses. Therefore, if you're going to have a number of people view your home as they look at a dozen or so other homes, you need to make sure that yours is the one that stands out in their minds.

Of course there are good ways to stand out, and there are bad ways. The bad ways must be avoided at all costs. The good ways, however, should be aimed for with great attention.

Think about it: if you were to see five houses today, and another five a week from now, all with very similar features, how much would you really remember about each individual home?

The odds are, you'll remember the one that had some special little detail; maybe it's the one with the pink roses on the kitchen table.

Not only will this sort of little thing make your home more memorable, but it will also let your house rate higher among the others.

It's like the "hook" that marketers aim for in commercials and other advertising. It's something different and positive that sets your home apart from other houses.

## **Be Realistic**

Remember that as much as you want to maximize your selling potential, you don't want to be so extreme that you've not only wasted your time, but you've overwhelmed those who will be viewing the home.

If you go too far, the house will look so staged that it will feel artificial. You want your buyers to feel that they could move into the place, not that they should stay behind the red velvet ropes.

## **The Different Rooms of the House**

In each of your rooms, you should have three primary goals:

1. Depersonalize the room by taking away family pictures, removing everything from your refrigerator and other similar surfaces, and taking posters and trophies out of kids' rooms.
2. Clear away high-traffic areas of excess furnishings and other belongings, to give the highest impression of space and comfort.
3. Highlight the primary features of every room, making sure that they have not been hidden or obscured by furnishings, plants, or other belongings. Such primary features include:
  - Fireplaces
  - French doors
  - Tubs with jets

Beyond these, keep the following tips in mind when you prepare your house to be sold. Keep your eyes open for the “rapid fire” section at the end of each room, for quick additional tips to give that final polish to each room.

## **The Kitchen: Know how much is enough**

It is usually the kitchen and the bathrooms that are most scrutinized when a house is being considered for purchase. Therefore, they should be your first priorities when you look at the interior of your home before your prospective buyers arrive.

However, most experts agree that it's not always the most cost-effective decision to completely remodel your kitchen before selling. Sure, you may get part of it back, but it simply can't be guaranteed that you'll get a return on all of your investment.

Instead, there are some great little things that you can do as far as minor improvements and general sprucing up, which will provide a much greater impact on the speed and success of the sale of your home.

## **The Kitchen Sink**

There are lots of little things that you can do to the kitchen sink that are quite inexpensive and easy, and which will make an enormous difference in the overall picture.

For one thing, you'll want to be certain that there aren't any leaks at all. Do a good job repairing leaks, to ensure that there won't be any unfortunate surprises while the prospective buyers are viewing your kitchen.

Also you will want to remove stains from the sink and surrounding area. Use a good quality cleaning product, and make the sink and its hardware simply shine and sparkle.

This is almost as effective as replacing it altogether.

## **The Kitchen Appliances**

Even if you are not leaving your appliances behind, they should be well cleaned, and shiny. This includes a thorough cleaning of your:

- Refrigerator
- Oven
- Dishwasher
- Microwave
- Toaster
- Coffee maker

This is especially important for anything you'll be leaving behind, such as a built-in dishwasher, but everything should be cleaned in order to give an overall impression of a sanitary, well maintained, friendly, and overall pleasant kitchen.

Dirty appliances will inevitably make prospective buyers feel that the rest of the house is dirty as well. Even if everything was immaculate except for the oven door, that one little patch of grunge will be enough to alter the feeling that a potential buyer has about your home.

The truth is that a fantastically large number of the 90 million kitchens in America are aged 50 years or more. This means that they'll need to aim for that classic, but well maintained, and up-to-date appearance, instead of simply "old".

## **The Kitchen Cupboards**

As long as your cupboards are still in good condition, then you will want to avoid committing a large amount of money on cupboard surgery.

When it comes to cupboards there are some great little "facelift" efforts that you can make that will give the appearance of cupboards that are much newer than they are.

These efforts are:

- Replacing rusty, chipped, or out-of-date hardware
- Putting fresh, white shelf paper down
- Wiping down cupboards to get rid of smudges, fingerprints, and other things that take away from shine.
- Putting a fresh coat of paint on cupboards that simply will not be wiped clean.

It is these few cosmetic differences that will convince prospective buyers that you still have good kitchen cupboards that are clean and in satisfactory condition.

## **The Kitchen Surfaces**

Whether you're looking at the kitchen counters, shelving, or table, there shouldn't be any clutter in your kitchen whatsoever. If there is anything that isn't an absolute necessity, get it out of the room altogether.

Think of it as a weight loss for your kitchen. Get rid of floor obstructions, clean out the cabinets, and clear off the countertop and table.

This will open up your kitchen as far as it will go to give it a much cleaner, roomier appearance. Moreover, clutter will take away from the appearance of cleanliness you've worked so hard to achieve.

It can even add years to the appearance of your kitchen, taking away from your efforts to keep it up to date.

The bottom line is: open up your kitchen by removing everything but what you really need.

People want big kitchens. They want room for their own clutter, as well as room to maneuver around. If you can't show them that, then they will not be impressed with that room at all.

This disappointment will be enough to turn them off the entire house.

## **The Bathroom: Find out what needs to be done**

Anything that you can do to your bathroom is a great way to add value to your home. However, before you jump into a project, have a good look at the actual problems and issues, instead of simply doing things so that you can say "this is a new toilet".

Bathrooms are tricky places, and as much as you want to maximize their appeal – as they are a main selling point in the house – you also don't want to get stuck with a project that won't pay off when you sell your home.

Also, if you do dive into a task, you risk running into unexpected problems when it's too late to go "back," and then you may be stuck with some unfortunate unexpected expenses. Such costly surprises should be avoided if at all possible.

Instead, take a similar tack to what you did in the kitchen, and aim more for cosmetic improvements than actual renovations and overhauls.

## **Bathroom Fixtures**

Have a look at your bathroom fixtures before you "attack" them. Ask yourself the following questions:

Are the fixtures or their seals damaged, cracked, or leaky?

Is the style of the fixtures greatly outdated?

Are the fixtures stained, grungy, or dirty?

If you have answered "yes" to any of these questions than consider the following plans of action.

- Replace or repair seals or fixtures that are damaged, cracked, or leaky
- If you are replacing fixtures, don't go too expensive, but make them attractive to enhance or at least match the appearance of your bathroom
- Go over all of your fixtures with a quality bathroom cleaner to remove any stains, buildup, grime, or other types of dirt. Your bathroom must sparkle.

## **Bathroom Moisture**

Moisture is inherent to any bathroom, and yet it can be a real pest for creating a grimy appearance, encouraging mold or mildew growth, damaging your decorating, and creating other problems.

Look around your bathroom, and ask yourself the following moisture-related questions:

- Are any of the finishes moisture-damaged?
- Are there visible water stains on any surfaces?
- Is there any mold growth on any surfaces?
- Is there any paint blistering or peeling?
- Are there any swollen, buckled, or rotten surfaces?
- Is any of the grout or caulking chipped, cracked, or peeling?

If you have answered “yes” to any of the above questions, then go over the following plans of action that may be ideal for your bathroom issues.

- Find out if any of the moisture is coming from building leaks, plumbing leaks, or high levels of humidity. Fix the cause of the moisture if at all possible.
- Repair or replace the damaged or deteriorating parts of your bathroom.
- Remove any visible mold growth with a quality cleaning product that is specific for that purpose.
- If possible, keep the window open to increase ventilation and release excess humidity.
- Replace or repair grout and caulking, and maintain it to prevent water from escaping.

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## **Bathroom Plumbing and Electrical**

To be certain that the plumbing and electricity are up to snuff in your bathroom, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the water pressure satisfactory?
- Do the pipes make a banging noise (known as water hammer)?
- Do the drains flow slowly?
- Are there any unusual noises or smells in the drains?
- Is the electric wiring safe and adequate?
- Is the lighting good enough to light the area?

If you are faced with any of the above issues, consider the following techniques to better the situation:

- Install water pipes with a larger diameter to allow for greater flow, or use pressure-balancing valves
- Provide your plumbing an air cushion to get rid of the water hammer
- Make certain that your drainage system is sufficiently vented, and that the proper traps have been installed.
- Unclog any drains that used to drain more quickly, and are now slow to flow.
- Have an electrician inspect your electric wiring. Have the wiring upgraded for safety reasons, if required.
- Update the lighting in the bathroom so that it is adequate for the space.

## **The Front Entry**

Other than the kitchen and bathroom, the front entry may very well be the most influential, as it will be the area of the interior of the house making the first impression – the lasting impression.

As this will be the very first part of the interior that the prospective buyers will see, you might want to consider a fresh coat of paint on the walls and/or door.

Additionally, you'll want to make sure that the floors are extremely clean, to give an overall fresh and sanitary feel to the house.

You'll want to make the front entry a place that has lots of light. Keep all of the lights on, and open up any blinds to maximize the light. The brighter the entry, the more welcoming and appealing the home.

## **Bedrooms**

Aside from the kitchen and bathrooms, the bedrooms are the most closely observed areas of your home. Therefore, be certain that the bedrooms are especially presentable.

The beds should all be made, and as wrinkle-free as a 5-star hotel. The entire space should be free of all clutter and overly-personal items, to allow the largest appearance, and to permit the prospective buyers to imagine themselves and their things in the space.

Even the closets of the bedrooms should be tidy and organized, with as little extra stuff in them as possible.

Any extra furniture should be removed from the bedrooms to give them a larger appearance.

Keep all surfaces clean and clear. Tuck extra little items away while potential buyers are viewing your home. Every little bit will count towards the overall clean and larger impression.

## **Living Room/Dining Room**

These rooms should be clear, with only enough furniture in them to make them feel welcoming. Any extra furniture should be taken away.

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The surfaces should be free of photographs, knick-knacks, and other personal items, and should be unscrupulously dust-free.

## **Rapid Fire Tip Section**

Now that you've gone through the main rooms of your house, and know what will be expected overall, here are some final tips to give your home that extra polish, and set you on the right path towards a fast, easy, and successful sale.

### **Do the Windows**

Clean your windows until they absolutely sparkle. This is entirely necessary. Use a razor blade to scrape off any paint splatters. Use ammonia and water to wash the windows, and then buff them until they shine.

You shouldn't need to be told to replace any cracked window panes.

### **Make Your Floors Gleam**

Your floors must be spotless. When prospective buyers enter your home, they'll either wipe their feet, or take off their shoes; where will they be looking at this moment?

Of course, they'll be looking directly at your floors. Have a nice – if possible, new – mat in the entry, and wash your floors until you can see your face in them.

### **Have a Place for Coats and Umbrellas**

Too many coats and umbrellas in the entry makes your house look cluttered. Allow only one per family member in the entryway, and have room in case the people viewing your house want to take off their coats as well.

## **Use Mirrors in the Right Places**

Using mirrors is a fantastic strategy for opening up a smaller area, as long as it's done correctly. Place mirrors in bathrooms and entryways, and make sure they're located somewhere that they'll reflect something attractive.

If your kitchen or dining room has open shelving, you can make the whole room look bigger by placing mirrors in the backs.

## **Keep Your Walls Simple, Yet Elegant**

Too many pictures on the walls will make a space feel smaller and crowded. Instead, choose either one large picture, or a grouping of smaller ones.

## **Use Higher Wattage bulbs**

The brighter the rooms, the larger they look, so while your home is up for sale, use brighter bulbs.

## **Silence the Squeaks in the Floor**

It's easy to take the squeak out of your floorboards, by locating the offending spots, and squirting some powdered graphite lubricant into the seams between them. Step on the boards to work the powder into the joint. Repeat when needed.

## **Rapid Fire Kitchen Tips:**

### **Paint**

The entire kitchen can easily look rejuvenated with a simple fresh coat of paint. Paint can be added to the walls, ceilings, and cabinetry, taking years off the appearance, and making them look much cleaner.

Aim for neutrals to make the space look big and hygienic.

### **Center Island**

If you want to give the kitchen a custom look and you have enough room to do so, connect two or three stock base cabinets and overlay them with a new countertop to create an island. Leave room for the addition of bar stools on one side.

### **Molding with flair**

If your cabinets are a bit on the plain side, use molding to give them some spice. Regular panel or picture molding can redefine flat doors and drawers.

Similarly, elaborate crown molding, placed where your cabinets meet the ceiling, can create an elegant classic appearance, and is sure to draw positive attention.

### **A backsplash to make a splash**

Using inexpensive glass mosaics, porcelain tile, natural slate, or a faux paint finish, you can create a custom, unique backsplash that will add beauty and attractiveness to your kitchen.

## **Light up their lives**

Add lighting to your kitchen, and increase appeal, the appearance of size, and overall brightness. Moreover, lights can be added just about anywhere in a kitchen. This includes:

- Under cabinets
- Above cabinets
- From the ceiling
- From the walls
- Anywhere else that will add to the visibility and overall look in your kitchen.

A spotlight or pendant light is an attractive addition over a kitchen island.

## **Dressy window dressings**

Depending on the look of your kitchen, there are many different window treatments that can add to the appeal of your kitchen.

Wood blinds, roman shades, or Venetian blinds are all great shades to add style, and keep out the glare of the sun when it moves to that side of your house.

If you have a more “country” or “crafty” kitchen, then lace, or kitchen curtains can be very warm and pleasant additions to add appeal.

## **Rapid Fire Bathroom Tips:**

### **Keep it Clean**

Your bathroom should be cleaner than brand new whenever someone comes to view the home. This includes the floor, walls, mats, tub, toilet, sink, and counter.

### **Keep it Neat**

Counter space should look as large and clear as possible. This allows the people viewing the home to see it when it looks the biggest, cleanest, and most hygienic. It also de-personalizes the space, so that they can imagine the space for their own uses.

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So there you have it! Use these tips to get your home ready for a quick and profitable sale!

There are also several sites online that can give you even more tips and tricks for sprucing up your home.

Sites such as:

<http://www.hgtv.com>

<http://www.diy.net>

<http://www.toh.com>

Offline you can visit your local Home Depot or Lowes to see what weekly Do-It-Yourself classes they are offering. Many of the classes they offer can teach you things that you can do to your house yourself to spruce it up to sell.

Good luck with selling your house, and finding a new one...

Liz Tomey

<http://www.how-did-they-do-that.com>

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