



Southern California Realtors Association
home enhancement guide

Little Things Can Make a Difference!



the model home effect

Based on proven marketing techniques, this Home Enhancement Guide offers practical ideas on how to successfully prepare your house for sale. These suggestions require a minimum amount of time and expense to complete and are designed to make your house stand out from the competition.

~ As members of the Southern California Realtors Association, our goal is not simply to sell your house, but to help you realize the best price possible for your property in the shortest period of time. The best way to make a buyer feel at home is to create an environment similar to that found in a model home. Obviously, you cannot recreate the feeling of a display home without starting from scratch, but there are valuable techniques to be learned. When walking into a model home, you will notice several key points:

- » The environment is neutral.
- » The colors and interior decorating accent the features of the home.
- » The smell is new and clean.
- » The sound is either perfectly quiet, or slightly enhanced by subtle background music.
- » All details are looked after, from manicuring the lawn to a floral arrangement in the entry.





the first impression

Did you know that a buyer has formed an opinion of your property within 15 seconds? The right first impression is critical to achieving a successful sale. Following is an outline of the elements that create the overall first impression, including suggestions on how to make sure the buyer reacts favorably.

- ~ Street. Make sure the street in front of your house is free of litter and debris. If necessary, give it a fresh sweep.
- ~ Fire Hydrant. Although you do not own the fire hydrant in front of your house, you should still be concerned about how it looks. If it needs freshening up, get permission from your town and paint it.
- ~ Sidewalk. Sweep your sidewalk if needed and remove weeds that might be growing between cracks.
- ~ Fence. A freshly painted fence gives a home a crisp look. Never let a peeling, tired-looking fence or squeaky gate stand between you and a prospective buyer and a positive first impression.
- ~ Mailbox. A quick painting of an old mailbox will let the buyer know you care about the details.
- ~ Light fixtures. If outdoor lamps look rusted and worn out, new ones will cast a positive light on your property.
- ~ Landscaping. Neatly trimmed shrubs are essential. Taking the time to do this costs little, but has a big impact. Besides being freshly mowed and trimmed, a lawn should look healthy. If there are spots that look beyond help, a little sod goes a long way to restoring the look of a well-maintained lawn.
- ~ Front Walkway. Like the sidewalk, the walkway should be clean and free of weeds. If sections are badly cracked, consider having them repaired.
- ~ Driveway. There are two elements of the driveway with which you should be concerned. The first is its surface condition. If stained or otherwise worn-looking, consider resealing it with a high quality sealer product. Second is the appearance of the car parked in the driveway. A newly waxed, well-maintained automobile will make a much different statement about you and your property than an unattractive, poorly cared for car. If you think your car will be a detriment to the look of your property, park it down the street.

through the buyer's eyes

- ~ Does your yard look well maintained?
- ~ Are the trees and bushes trimmed?
- ~ Is your lawn mowed and edged?
- ~ Is your lawn free of weeds?
- ~ Are the decks and patios clean?
- ~ Does your house need painting?
- ~ Is your driveway free of cracks and oil spots?
- ~ Does your car take detract from the overall look of your property?



the home front

Your landscape is not limited to the lawn and shrubs but encompasses everything from the street to your doorstep. For this reason, you need to make sure each component of the visual landscape looks its best... what we call curb appeal.

- ~ Paint. A fresh coat of paint can be one of the best investments you can make to increase the value of your property. If you do not want to spend the money to paint the entire house, consider just the shutters or the front of the house.
- ~ Siding. If you have vinyl or aluminum siding, have a cleaning service wash or repaint it using a product designed for these materials.
- ~ Windows. Attractive windows can help increase the appeal of your property.
 - » Replace cracked or broken glass.
 - » Make sure windows are sparkling clean.
 - » Install window boxes with flowers.
 - » Apply touch-up paint where needed.
- ~ Roof. The roof might be the single most important aspect of your home front. A well maintained roof will say a lot about the overall condition of the property.
 - » Replace broken or missing shingles.
 - » Repair flashing where needed.
 - » Paint eaves and fascia boards.
 - » If the roof is old and needs to be replaced, consider having the work done before showing the property.
- ~ Gutters/Downspouts. Neat and trim looking gutters and downspouts make a house look ship-shape. Consider replacing highly visible ones if they are in need of repair. If run-off areas are eroded, you can install concrete (or other) spillways.
- ~ Doorway. The doorway is the focal point of your house.
 - » Repaint the door.
 - » Apply new door hardware.
 - » Replace house numbers
 - » Put a flower box or planter alongside the door.
 - » Install a new front light fixture.

through the buyer's eyes

- ~ Are there any exterior holes or cracks?
- ~ Are walks, porches, and doors in good repair?
- ~ Does the roof leak or sag? Are tiles missing?
- ~ Is your chimney in good shape?
- ~ Are any window screens ripped or bent?
- ~ Do all the windows open and close easily?
- ~ Do the locks work?
- ~ Is the paint in good condition?



appeal to the senses

There are many ways to create a more saleable interior, at surprisingly little cost. Sensory selling tools that can have enormous impact. Use the following suggestions and ideas to improve each room in your home.

- ~ Light. It is proven that people react more favorably to property shown under bright light than dark.
 - » Keep windows clean.
 - » Use adequate wattage light bulbs.
 - » Consider replacing old fluorescent lamps, which darken with use.
 - » Use mirrors to magnify the feeling of light and space.
 - » Use light wall colors.
 - » Open drapes and blinds and turn on lights prior to showing.
- ~ Color. A fundamental rule when selling your house is to keep colors neutral and light.
 - » White, beige, and gray are the most popular exterior colors.
 - » Shades of white and very light pastels are the safest interior choices.
 - » Avoid highly patterned wallpaper whenever possible.
 - » Try to limit bright colors to accents like fresh flowers, towels, area rugs, and shower curtains.
- ~ Sound. The sounds of quite are some of the best sounds to have when your home is being shown.
 - » Avoid barking dogs and noisy children if possible.
 - » Avoid work sounds like vacuums, dishwashers, and lawn mowers.
 - » Light classical or instrumental music can be effective in creating a pleasing atmosphere.
- ~ Smell. Scents in your home can work either for or against you.
 - » The smell of newness is positive. This can be achieved by applying a fresh coat of polyurethane to natural wood or paint to walls.
 - » Cleanliness is important. Beyond actually cleaning, citrus oil can create a lasting scent of freshness. Fresh flowers can also be effective.
 - » For a heart-warming touch, place a dish of vanilla in a warm oven to create the aroma of fresh cookies.
 - » Sweeten the refrigerator with a box of baking soda.
 - » Smells to avoid include strong pet odors, tobacco, cooking, and gas.

through the buyer's eyes

- ~ Are there unusual wall or trim colors or heavily patterned wallpaper?
- ~ Are there heavy odors from tobacco, cooking, pets, or other sources?
- ~ Are there sounds from loud music or television?
- ~ Are there noisy children or barking dogs in the surrounding area?
- ~ Do any art or furnishings make statements that might offend the sensibilities of a potential buyer?



package the interior

When considering a home to purchase, the buyer often visualizes what it would be like living there. If the home is dominated by strong personal statements, buyers are less likely to feel comfortable and less able to visualize the property as their own.

- ~ Entry. The entry is where the first impression of the interior is created. Here you have the opportunity to make a big statement in a small area.
 - » Repaint the entry using light, neutral colors.
 - » Move a prized antique or attractive furnishing to the entry, where it will have maximum impact.
 - » Apply a fresh coat of polyurethane to a wood floor.
 - » Tile flooring should shine.
 - » Replace plastic switch plate covers with brass or porcelain.
 - » Polish door handles and hinges.
 - » A new hall light fixture can make a great impression.
- ~ Kitchen. The kitchen can have a major impact on the value of your property. If your kitchen needs some real help, you might want to make extensive improvements. The following is a list of ideas to increase the appeal of your kitchen without spending a great deal of money.
 - » Make sure the room is spotless and smells fresh. Try grinding a quarter section of a lemon in the disposal.
 - » If your appliances are dated by colors like harvest gold or avocado, consider having them professionally refinished in a new color like almond or plain white.
 - » Spruce up kitchen cabinets by installing new knobs or hardware.
 - » Organize cabinets to demonstrate how much room you have.
 - » Remove small kitchen appliances and gadgets from countertops to create an uncluttered look.
 - » Chipped or damaged countertops should be repaired or replaced.
 - » If your linoleum floor is badly worn, replace it with neutral, no-wax flooring or tile.

through the buyer's eyes

- ~ Are your carpets clean and in good condition?
- ~ Do your carpets need stretching?
- ~ Are there any pet or smoking odors?
- ~ Do your holes have any cracks or holes?
- ~ Do your walls need painting?
- ~ Do your ceilings have any water stains, cracks, peeling, or other noticeable flaws?
- ~ Do your ceilings need painting?
- ~ Are light fixtures free of dust and cobwebs?



the impact of small details

Small details make big statements about the condition of your property. A house that shows poorly as a result of an overgrown lawn, peeling paint, or simply the smell of mildew might create the overall feeling that the property has not been cared for. If your house leaves a buyer with this impression, it could cost you valuable time and money.

- ~ Living room. Buyers look for elegant living rooms to make the right statements to friends and relatives.
 - » Use mirrors to enhance the perception of size. Placing a mirror over a mantle or across from a window can make a room look brighter or larger.
 - » Show off a fireplace to its best advantage. Sweep it clean and make sure the screen is in good condition. During the winter, make a cozy, crackling fire. In warmer months, dress up the hearth with plants or flowers.
 - » Use freestanding accent lights to create visual effects behind large plants or pieces of furniture.
 - » Professionally clean wall-to-wall carpet or large area rugs.
 - » Refinish stained hardwood floors.
 - » Clean windows and light fixtures.
 - » Make sure all cosmetic plaster cracks are repaired. (This applies to every room in the house.)
 - » Use lemon oil on furniture to create the right look and aroma.
- ~ Bedrooms. The bedrooms can do as much to sell your house as they can to turn off a buyer.
 - » Make sure the bedrooms are absolutely spotless. Rugs should be cleaned, windows washed, and fresh smells from flowers or lemon oil should be in the air.
 - » Organize closets to increase their perceived size. Closet organizers do a great job of helping utilize space.
 - » Mirrored closet doors can add to the feeling of size in any bedroom.
 - » A ceiling fan is an attractive and practical accent to any bedroom.
- ~ Bathroom. The bathroom has moved from the utilitarian to the exciting. You can create interest with various levels of enhancement.
 - » Place fresh flowers on the vanity.
 - » Replace old fixtures.
 - » Refinish an old porcelain tub using a porcelain finishing service.
 - » Keep personal articles out of sight.
 - » Add color and richness with new towels and a shower curtain.

through the buyer's eyes

- ~ Is your fireplace clean? Is the screen in good shape?
- ~ Are all drapes, shutters, and shades clean and working properly?
- ~ Do your faucets shut off completely?
- ~ Do your sinks drain freely?
- ~ Are your shower doors shiny?
- ~ Do your tubs need caulking?
- ~ Are the floor, vanities, mirrors, and other fixtures in good condition?

A woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a black tank top and blue jeans, stands in a doorway. To her left are several large cardboard boxes. The background shows a bright outdoor area with greenery and a white fence. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent white box containing text.

extra details

The look of the basement, attic, and garage can say more about the condition of your house than you might think. A buyer who sees clean and organized storage areas will have much more confidence in your property than if it were in a state of disarray.

- ~ Basement/Attic. A neat, clean basement or attic reflects the care and confidence of the owner.
 - » Paint cement floors oil-based gray.
 - » Paint the stairway down to the basement and the stairway up to the attic.
 - » Clean the boiler of the furnace room as well as the heating plant.
 - » Make sure there are no signs of pest infestation. If needed, call in a pest control company to remedy the problem before the property is shown.
 - » Hang as many objects as possible on walls to minimize floor clutter.
 - » Clean and organize your laundry room or area.
 - » Make sure all lights are working.
 - » Eliminate dampness with a dehumidifier.
- ~ Garage. A well-organized garage says a lot for your house.
 - » Keep the garage organized.
 - » Clean any oil stains from your car.
 - » Install a garage door opener.
 - » Hang gardening tools and loose articles on the wall.
 - » Hold a garage sale to dispose of unused items that create clutter and distract a potential buyer. Swimming pool/Spa. The swimming pool or spa should be sparkling clean and in good operating condition.
 - » Repair or replace broken tiles.
 - » Patio and/or decking around the pool should be clean and cracks repaired.
 - » Pool filter and heating equipment area should be clean.
 - » Replace worn or broken pool equipment (brushes, hoses, sweeps, pool covers, etc.).
 - » If your pool is stained, you might want to have a professional service drain and acid wash or refinish the surface.

through the buyer's eyes

- ~ Are the basement, attic, and garage organized?
- ~ Are they well lit?
- ~ Is there any evidence of dampness, mold, or mildew in storage areas?
- ~ Is the laundry area clean and organized?
- ~ Are there oil spots or stains on the concrete?
- ~ Are the stairs in good repair?
- ~ Do the doors open and close easily?
- ~ Are there any signs of insects or rodents?



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