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HOMEFIT

Exercise the Best Ins and Outs of Home Ownership

What NOT to Do
as a New Homeowner

Quick Ideas
for Organizing
the Toys

10 Reasons to Hire Me

5 Home Improvement
Projects That Should
Add Value,
But Don't

How to Craft a
Successful Offer

**10 SIMPLE HOME STAGING TIPS
EVERY SELLER SHOULD KNOW**

Letter from the Editors



Are you in the mood to spruce up your home? If you are preparing to put your house on the market, you should think ahead so you spend your time and money wisely.

You may have some great ideas for home improvement projects that sound perfectly legitimate if you are thinking about selling your house. We will give you the facts. You might want to reconsider some expenditures because often those little niceties may not add value to your property in the end.

However, we have another great article that will give you some easy DIY home staging tips that you can economically incorporate into your home once you are ready to list it for sale. Another piece in this edition that coincides with staging but any parent can use, is about all those toys. Every child has them, but parents are better off organizing the kids' playthings so just maybe they will stay that way.

If you are buying a home, we share some tips on creating a successful offer that will make the sellers happy and you too! We also have some tips regarding what you should not do when you first move into your new home. You will want to get to know your new home so you do not make any costly mistakes.

Lastly, we have several reasons why you are better off hiring a real estate agent whether you are a buyer or a seller. You'll see how it just makes smart sense.

We hope you enjoy exploring our pages meant to assist home owners, buyers and sellers in today's housing market. Please feel free to contact us if we can be of service to you in any way.



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5 Home Improvement Projects That Should Add Value, But Don't



Lots of homeowners believe that if they put a lot of time and money renovating the house and the property, it will make it easier to sell when the time comes. It will also increase the value of the property. This is not necessarily true.

To be blunt, many real estate experts claim that the only renovations that have a good chance of increasing the value of the house are the [kitchen and the bathrooms](#).

Here are five home improvement projects that should add value, but usually don't. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't do them. Just don't expect them to make your home irresistible when it finally goes on the market:

1. A Swimming Pool

A lot of people would rather visit a house that has a swimming pool than have one.

Swimming pools require a lot of upkeep. The water has to be kept sparkling clean, which means increased energy costs from pumps and filters. The tile has to be scrubbed clean of algae and cracks have to be repaired.

More than anything else, the pool needs to be made safe by surrounding it with a sturdy fence. But for some families with very young children, nothing can make a swimming pool safe enough. This might cause

them to pass on a house that's otherwise just right for them.

One thing that may be worth the thousands of dollars it costs to install a swimming pool is if everyone else in the neighborhood has one. Some homeowners can't stand to be thought of as the odd man out.

2. A Gorgeous Landscape

The money and sweat equity that you've put into making your landscape the talk of the town might have limited appeal.

It's simple. People want their landscape the way they want their landscape. You may be in love with hostas and put them everywhere where there's even a bit of shade. A potential buyer might not like them. Rather than spending the time and effort to dig all of those plants out, they'll move on.

Not only that, even if the prospective buyer does think your landscaping is beautiful, he or she might simply not have the time or inclination to keep it as beautiful as you have.

3. Wall-to-Wall Carpeting

For some potential buyers, just the sight of acres of wall-to-wall carpeting is a deal breaker. They don't even care what else is in the house that they might covet.

Wall-to-wall carpeting needs more care than hardwood or stone floors. The fibers harbor dust mites, dirt, grime and allergens.

On top of this, the colors and patterns just might be absolutely wrong for the decor the buyer has envisioned for his or her new home. Rather than tearing the carpeting up and renovating the floor beneath it, a buyer will look at another place.

Skip wall-to-wall carpeting and buy area rugs, runners and mats instead because they're portable.

4. Crazy Expensive Upgrades

You personally went to Italy and picked the slab of carrara marble that you wanted for your kitchen countertops, had all of your cabinets carved out of bubinga wood with satinwood veneers and splurged on a couple of Maria Teresa chandeliers. Believe it or not, this might not increase the value of your home.

Also, some potential buyers may find such pricey upgrades offputting. It's true that they can take all of your expensive furnishings out, auction them

off and replace them with simpler stuff that's more to their taste, but it's a pain in the neck. Potential buyers might go for a home whose old furnishings they can live with, at least for a while.

5. Upgrades That Are Invisible

It's certainly nice that you've replaced your old, inefficient HVAC system with one that's zoned, computerized, can be controlled over the internet and whose warranties can be rolled over to the new owner.

It's absolutely swell that you repiped your old plumbing system with its limescaled and rusted pipes with those versatile PEX lines. But is brand new plumbing and HVAC, which the new owner won't even see all the time, a selling point? Probably not as much as you'd like it to be.

Remember, some home renovations will add to the home's resale value, but most won't!





How to Craft a Successful Offer

When crafting an offer to buy a home, the buyer should be aware of several important factors. They should note that these factors are among the main reasons that buyers need the help of real estate agents as they will be familiar with the nuances of home-sale negotiations.

The important factors include knowing how to make an offer in a seller's market versus a buyer's market and looking for concessions. With those things in mind, here are a few tips that can help homebuyers to craft successful offers.

Market Research

This is important for all large purchases, especially the largest purchase most people ever make. A buyer's market may mean less competition for the home. Less competition means that the seller may be more welcoming to an offer below asking price, fewer potential buyers also means that they may be more willing to entertain the buyer's concessions.

A seller's market may mean that the seller is entertaining offers from other buyers and is less

likely to accept an offer that is below their asking price. Buyers may also not have as much leverage to request concessions. Learning the differences can help with making an offer that will be accepted as opposed to one that is rejected instantly.

When doing market research, one of the first things a buyer should find out is the average time that similar homes in the area spend on the market. This is an important part of determining whether they are in a seller's or a buyer's market.

Looking at comparable properties is a crucial part of market research. Buyers should look closely at similar homes within a half-mile radius of the home they want. The goal here is to find homes as close in size, age and neighborhood to the target house as possible.

The sale price of these homes can be a good indicator of what the asking price of the target home should be. The sales of the comparable homes should be relatively recent, from no further back than six months.

Seller Research

All sellers are different, therefore there is no one tip that will help buyers to deal with every single one; however, finding out how motivated they are to sell can help with most negotiations. The buyer's real estate agent should be able to get this information from the listing agent.

For example, sellers who already have another home and who are paying on two mortgages may be extra motivated to sell as soon as possible. A seller with a low mortgage balance may be willing to wait for better offers. Homes that are part of estate sales or that are being sold in as-is condition may indicate that the seller wants to make the sale quickly; that seller may accept a lower offer in exchange for a quick closing.

Buyers should not assume that sellers are willing to take a dramatically reduced price just because they want a fast sale; however, they can feel confident offering a little less or asking for reasonable concessions.

Setting an Upper Limit

This limit should be one that will not be overstepped no matter what. The concept of a dream home is a powerful one. Once a buyer finds a home that they really want, it is easy to go overboard by offering more than they can really afford. Being "house poor" is not fun and homeowners will need discipline and the willpower to adhere to a strict spending limit.

The offer should be an amount with which the buyer is completely comfortable. They should be okay with their offer no matter what the outcome.

Above all, buyers should remember this: they are in charge of the offer. They decide how much to spend. Their offer is an indication of how badly they want the home and the higher the offer, the more likely it is to be accepted.

The fear of offering too much when the seller would have accepted a lower amount is a common one; however, this is a risk with all real estate purchases since sellers are not going to state how little they would have accepted.

A buyer should feel comfortable with their offer as long as it is within a reasonable range based on their market research. Buyers should also note that a small overpayment can often be offset by the appreciation of the home.



What NOT to Do as a New Homeowner



Moving into a new house is one of the most exciting moments in any homeowner's life. There's so much potential and promise. And there are so many things that need to be done as you turn a house with a sold sign into your home. But before you go crazy hanging curtains and running conduit, there are some very important tips on what not to do when you move in.

1. Turn On the Water Without Knowing How to Turn it Off

Ah, running water. A wonderful invention, to be sure. But if that

questionable shower faucet in your new master bathroom breaks off in mid-wash, you're going to have a bigger problem than getting the soap off your birthday suit.

Before you turn the water on, find the main water shut-off valve for your house. It's usually in a utility or laundry room or possibly the garage.

In case a pipe ruptures and starts spewing hundreds of gallons of water into your living room, you can stop the water flowing in from the street by shutting off the main.

Make sure everyone knows where it is, knows which way to turn it and can make it happen should the need arise.

2. Assume You Have an Attic and It's Properly Insulated

You probably do have an attic, but make sure you know where it is and how to get in it. Look for a door in the ceiling with molding or trim around it. It's usually in a hallway or closet. Push it straight up and over, or you might be lucky enough to have pull-down steps. Grab a flashlight and ruler and check out the insulation. It

should measure about 10 to 14 inches deep. Good insulation will keep the outside temperature out and the inside temperature in. Your thermostat and your wallet will thank you.

3. Plant a New Tree to Mark Your Territory

Actually, if you want to plant a tree, shrub, cactus or even a flag, go for it. However, make sure you don't do it straight through the gas line.

Before you even think about picking up a shovel, call 811, the federally mandated "Call Before You Dig" hotline. Your local utilities will be alerted to come out, often within a day or two, and mark all that sneaky

underground stuff. Your pipes, cables and wires are happier when not punctured by a pitchfork.

4. Hang Your Velvet Elvis on That Bare Wall

Just like your yard, your walls are full of wires, pipes and cables. Ductwork can also lurk behind that chartreuse beauty of a bedroom. Before you get busy with a hammer, get a stud finder to tell you where it's ok to hammer. Nails and electrical wiring do not mix. And just in case your stud finder is fickle, don't nail too deep.

You'll miss most wiring if you don't go deeper than 1 1/4" through your drywall. And it

pays to keep in mind that wiring travels from outlet to outlet around the 2ft. and under space along your walls. Elvis doesn't belong there.

5. Level the Annoying Slope Leading Up to Your House

What is the deal with the hill? That slope leading up to your front door, and hopefully the rest of your house, is designed to send rainwater and snowmelt out to the curb instead of straight down into your basement, crawlspace or foundation. Water is great for that new tree you just planted after you called 811, but it's not so good for drywall.

6. Cut Down Trees

Trees can be a tricky business. Root structure, branch strength and wood density are all factors to consider when cutting down a tree. And when you add really dangerous power tools to the mix, only one thing can go right, while a whole lot of things can go wrong.

It's best to leave this one task to professionals. They will know if a permit is required and will bring the right equipment. Your roof, your neighbor's roof and your back will thank you.

Moving into your new home should be memorable for all the right reasons. Follow these tips and hopefully the worst crisis you'll face is when your mother-in-law figures out you gave her the right address – in the wrong town!





10 Simple Home Staging Tips Every Seller Should Know

Just as a well-staged Broadway show is a bigger box office draw than a shabby production, home staging can help you sell your home faster at a higher price than just about any other home-selling tactic. It's one of the most cost-effective practices too.

The hours of sweat equity that you invest in staging your home will be rewarded with dividends when that "Sold!" sign goes up on your front lawn. These ten proven home-staging strategies can help make it happen.

1. Check Your Curb Appeal

The hours you spend staging your home's interiors won't

count for much if your front yard is so unappealing that buyers simply drive past your door. Mow the lawn, rake the leaves and edge the walkways. Landscaping tricks like placing pots of bright flowers near the entryway help ensure that potential homebuyers make it inside.

2. Make a Great First Impression

You want buyers to find your home appealing from the moment they cross the threshold, so make sure that your front hall or foyer makes a strong first impression.

An eye-catching painting or striking light fixture engages

buyers from the start. Think about the views that the entryway offers of the rest of your home too. A few strategically placed focal points will help draw buyers into the space.

3. Depersonalize the Space

Buyers want to picture themselves at home when hunting for the ideal property. Rid your home of anything that will pull them out of that fantasy. This not only includes family photos but things like collectibles, personal mementos and the children's artwork too. Your goal is to make your home look like as beautifully impersonal as a luxury hotel.

4. Banish Clutter

Clutter doesn't just make your home look messy and unorganized. It makes it feel smaller as well. Remember that each square foot of space matters to homebuyers. A streamlined space will make your home feel larger than it is.

Make your home look spacious and expansive by keeping surfaces clear, traffic patterns unobstructed and personal items out of sight.

5. Organize Your Closets

When staging your home, never forget that homebuyers will feel free to examine every square inch of your property, including your closets. In a way, that's a good thing because it gives you the chance to show how carefully you maintain your home.

Well-organized closets are sure to impress. If you can't find room to stash everything, rent a storage unit or hide them in a locked storage shed.

6. Keep It Clean

From cleaning the cabinet under the kitchen sink to scrubbing tile grout in the shower, no housekeeping chore should be overlooked when preparing your home for sale.

Wash the garage floor, clean the curtains and clear away the cobwebs around your basement heater. Your home should be so

clean and spotless that every room would pass a white-glove inspection.

7. Stage the Furniture

Rearrange your furnishings with an eye on how the furniture looks when you walk into the room.

Create conversation areas that make it easy for buyers to imagine sharing the space with friends and family.

Spruce up faded sofas and chairs with slipcovers or colorful throws and pillows. Cover worn tables with simple yet elegant tablecloths.

8. Light It Up!

Nothing is as unappealing as a dark and dreary room. Use windows and lighting fixtures to your advantage. Strip down window treatments to the bare minimum or remove them entirely to fill your home with natural light. Dark corners make rooms seem smaller, so make sure that every crook and cranny has adequate lighting.

9. Kitchen Considerations

No other room in your home will receive more attention from buyers than your kitchen. Ensuring that every inch of the space is scrupulously clean is essential. Keep countertops clear, clean behind the refrigerator and scrub down the inside of your microwave oven.

If cabinets look the worse for wear and repainting or refacing them isn't in the budget, new hardware may give them the fresh look you need to seal the deal.

10. Add Finishing Touches

You've cleared away the clutter, rearranged the furniture and cleaned every item until it's polished and gleaming. Now's the time to add a few final touches to help ensure that your home is warm and welcoming.

Place a vase of flowers or a blooming plant in every room to give it a bit of life. Open windows to let the fresh air inside. A plate of fresh-baked cookies invites homebuyers to linger and fills your home with a scent that says, "Welcome home!"





10 Reasons to Hire Me

Buying a home is a big decision, whether it's your first home or your 50th. Sure, you can go out on a limb and do it all yourself, but there might be more to consider than you realize.

Here are some reasons why it might be smart to hire a real estate agent:

1. Experience

Real estate agents buy and sell homes for a living, so they have the experience and know the trends, ins and outs of buying and selling, and what not to do.

2. Education

REALTORS® have to complete schooling and licensing in order to practice their craft. Wouldn't

you rather go with a professional who does this for a living?

3. Save Time

Yes, you can read all kinds of research online and take notes and do calculations, but do you really want to take the time to do that, along with all your normal duties of work, family and now packing?

Buying a house is already a stressful time, so don't overload your plate and risk missing something important.

3. Filter Out the Fluff

So you have a list of houses you found online that you want to go see, but open houses take time and you can't fit them all in one day.

Your real estate agent knows the houses and can tell you the real story behind them that carefully-honed Internet pictures can't. This will help you narrow your search.

4. Neighborhood Know-How

Along with knowing information about homes, agents also know the neighborhoods. This is crucial.

Which areas are designated for which schools for your kids? Sure, that information is online as well, but your agent can tell you about reputation of schools and neighborhoods that the Internet may gloss over.

How close is too close to the freeway? Is that nice new neighborhood accessible only

by going through a trailer park? What are the other homes in the area really selling for and how long did it take? What are the crime rates and demographics? These are important behind-the-scene tidbits you and your family need to know.

5. Realistic Offer Advice

A real estate agent will help you with your offer. They know the other real estate agents in the area and will be able to have frank conversations about price.

Your agent can tell you whether your offer is so low it will be an insult, or be able to determine if you actually have a bit more wiggle room.

6. Market Trends

Market conditions change month to month and not everyone has the inside scoop, so your real estate agent will be a valuable resource in this arena.

They can look at the average per square foot price for homes similar to what you are looking for, the average of how many days homes are in the market and median pricing. They look at both long-term and short-term trends and will be able to give you a good forecast on what to expect.

7. REALTOR® Associations

The real estate agent network is a tight-knit group, with many having relationships over years.

They are in the know on things like which lender to choose and which vendors are reliable and affordable.

They work daily with a wide variety of people and will be able to steer you in the right direction.

8. Negotiations

How are your negotiation skills? Even if you believe you are a good negotiator, real estate agents not only have the advantage of experience, but the emotional aspect of buying a house is also removed.

They present your case in the best light to the seller and tell them why you are the best buyer out of all other interested parties.

9. Legalese

Although we live in an age of computers, paperwork is not totally obsolete, at least when it comes to buying a home. The real estate process changes year by year, and there are always new disclosures and mandates for both federal and state, depending on the area you are considering.

More often than not, the average Joe is either unaware or can't keep up with all the changes. That is what your real estate agent is for. Your agent knows the rules and the necessary paperwork, as well as possible loopholes, and will keep your transaction legal and can explain to you in layman's terms what it all means. This will save you a headache.

10. Post Sale Help

So you bought your dream home, signed all the paperwork and are moving in. Think that's the end of it? Not so fast.

A good real estate agent will make sure you know about the best landscape company and even answer any property tax questions.

Just because the paperwork is signed doesn't mean their job is over. Be sure to return the favor by referring them to your family and friends. That's the biggest thank you that you can give.

Buying a home doesn't have to be a stressful experience. It should be an exciting, rewarding time. I can help you with it. Let's get this process rolling and find the home that fits you!



Quick Ideas for Organizing the Toys

One of the most out-of-control areas in your house may be your child's toy box. It often serves as a kind of "catch-all" for everything that does not have a designated storage space.

A look inside is likely to reveal toy cars, stuffed animals, dolls, balls, books and every other item which was on the floor when you asked your child to pick up the room.

Instead of stuffing everything inside the toy box, consider some alternative methods to organize your child's toys.

Start by Sorting

Rather than tossing everything into one big box, start by sorting everything into categories. Put all the games, books, dolls, cars

and whatever else you find into manageable piles.

This might be a good time to do a little weeding out, so have your child join you in this process. If you find two or three similar items, suggest that one might go to a child in need and ask your child to pick his or her favorite. This may take a little time, but once all your child's toys have been sorted, the rest is easy.

Storage Containers

One big box might seem like the best choice for all your child's toys because they all fit - or barely fit.

The problem is that in order to find one specific toy, your child probably has to empty the box to find it.

One way to solve that problem is to use storage containers to help organize those toys. Your choices for containers are virtually limitless, and here are some excellent ideas:

- Trash cans
- Wooden crates
- Buckets
- Plastic containers
- Industrial containers with liners
- Storage cubes
- Sturdy boxes
- Wastebaskets
- Large canisters

Each of these containers can be designated for one type of toy, such as cars, dolls or balls.

They are also versatile enough that you can decorate or embellish them to match any room décor.

Once the toys are sorted, you'll have a pretty good idea of the size and number of containers you'll need.

Utilize Your Space

Doors: If there is a door in the playroom, consider using a shoe organizer with pockets to keep some toys organized. This is a great idea for dolls, larger toy cars or even arts and crafts supplies.

It is essential that your child can reach the pockets. If a door is too tall, think about other places where a shoe rack can hang so your child can easily remove and replace the items in it.

Under the Bed: If the toy box is in your child's room, use the space under the bed for easy and accessible storage. Find storage containers that suit the height of the bed and will slide out for easy access. If it's a difficult space to access, you might want to keep the toys that don't get used as often here.

Corners: The corners of a room are often under-utilized. A hanging net is the perfect storage idea to use this space more effectively. Stuffed animals, balls, or any other larger but lightweight toys will fit perfectly in this net.

You can also string a kind of vertical clothesline from floor to ceiling in the corner. Use clothespins to attach stuffed animals or other items to the line.

Bookshelves: Stuffed animals often take up a lot of space in a toy box, so think about other ways to keep them organized and make them accessible to your child.

A small bookshelf is ideal for keeping them organized. To make it fun, drill a few holes in the top and bottom and string some elastic between them to create a kind of cage for the animals. The storage resembles a zoo cage, which is a fun way to store them. The animals are easy to remove when it's time to play and easy to put away when it's time to pick up. Games and books are also easily stored on shelves.

Walls: Any kind of shelf or basket can be hung on a wall. These help to get things like games, books and stuffed animals off the floor and keep them organized.

Label Everything

If you want your child to know and remember which toys go where, put labels on any storage containers, especially at first.

If your child is old enough to read, your labels can be written in words. If your child is too young to read, pictures are great alternatives and will clearly let your child know what to put in each container.

A toy box is a great idea, but often it ends up overflowing with all of your child's toys. Sorting things into more accessible containers should help control the constant toy clutter.



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