

Prepping your home for resale

By Jacqueline Raithe
Contributing Writer

If you're looking to sell your home, a few quick improvements can go a long way, and it might be easier than you think.

"Your house needs to shine," said John Kendig, a Long & Foster real estate agent. "It needs to shine from the moment they drive up the driveway and when they walk in the front door. It should have a fresh aroma, be uncluttered, and the kitchen should sparkle."

That doesn't necessarily mean you need to remodel the kitchen or replace the HVAC system. To start, it's as simple as thoroughly cleaning the house and putting away your knick-knacks.

"The house should be in pristine condition," said Ellen Clark, a ReMax Realtor. "De-cluttering makes the house show better because the space inside seems bigger."

So will getting rid of unattractive or over-worn furniture. She suggests staging, or specifically preparing and arranging the house for showing.

"If you have ratty furniture, get rid of it," licensed appraiser Pat Turner said. "Even though furniture isn't real estate, it does give away care taken of the house."

Floors and walls often require attention, too. Although it will cost money, a little bit of fixing can do a lot of good.



Lisa Billings/Chesterfield Observer

Appraiser Pat Turner checks out new appliances recently installed in the kitchen of a local home.



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Ellen Clark is an Associate Broker with over 20 years of experience in the real estate industry and has been consistently a listing and sales leader since 1996. She is a short sale specialist, relocation certified and focuses on working with sellers and buyers.

Top achievements and memberships

- RAR Top Ten Teams in 2009
- Chairman's Club 2006-2009
- Ruby Award Winner 2001-2007, 2009
- Top Producer 1996-2009
- Board member - Resource Development Committee for Elder Homes Corporation
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"A freshly painted door and trim can go a long way," Turner said. "Fresh paint on those walls, and if you can afford it, refinished floors and replaced carpet. Sometimes you can get away with just cleaning the carpet."

No purples or oranges, Clark said. Pick neutral colors for paint and carpeting.

"A neutral color is good," Kendig said. "You can't second guess what the next buyer will want."

General contractor Joe Gregory of JMG Builders disagrees. He thinks sellers should save their money by not painting or re-carpeting, then negotiate a lower price, reduced by the amount it will cost to have the work done.

"In my opinion you're much better off negotiating with buyers than spending money on repairs and remodeling that the buyer might not even like or want," Gregory said. "In order to be on the safe side, you're going to have to paint in essentially bland colors. Is that a selling point? Not to me."

Some repairs might be inevitable though. If the walkway or steps into the house are unsafe, or the wood handrails are rotten, they need to be replaced. Also, the general structure of the house needs to be solid.

"The bones of the home need to be in good shape - the roof and the HVAC system," Clark said.

The kitchen and bathrooms need to be in good condition, too, but Clark doesn't recommend replacing the appliances or remodeling unless it's absolutely necessary.

"You can't renovate a bathroom any more for less than \$10,000," Gregory said. "Are you going to get that \$10,000 back? Probably not."

Remodeling might be worth the investment if homeowners hope to enjoy the upgrade, but they should be prepared for the renovations to cost more than the increase in the home's value.

Some of the hot spots for renovations are bathrooms, kitchens and windows. Installing products that people will recognize is important, Turner said. To save on your heating bill, install thermo-pane windows.

In the kitchen it's a toss up on whether countertops or appliances are more important, but there are lots of options for both. Granite countertops are very popular, but if you're looking, there are some better products available, Turner said. As for appliances, Turner narrowed it down to three choices: "Stainless steel is very popular, but black is making a strong come back, and classic white is classic white," he said.

In many cases, the real estate experts agree. Stick with small repairs - cleaning, de-cluttering, touch-up painting and fixture repair or replacement. If the house has been occupied by a smoker, you may want to have it cleaned professionally.

But avoid major renovations if at all possible. Gregory maintains buyers would rather have the freedom to redecorate with whatever colors, styles and carpets they want.

"I've talked myself out of work by saying that, but I can't help myself - it's the right thing to say," he said.

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