



*Getting your house
ready to sell*

GETTING YOUR HOUSE READY TO SELL

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Introduction

Whether it's a cottage or condo worth \$500k or a 10 million dollar luxury property, there are certain steps you can take to best get your property ready to sell. Prepping a house is an investment – both in time and money. Everything from minor repairs to design and staging must be considered, and every corner of the house inside and out should be addressed. It's worth the effort though. Follow these strategies, put in the care your property deserves, and you'll be rewarded with a sparkling, sellable home.



INTERIOR

Clean it out

Houses show better with less furniture and more open space. Clutter is almost guaranteed to scare away potential buyers. Remove anything that blocks pathways or hampers views. If necessary, rent a storage unit and put your furniture, books, magazines, knickknacks somewhere safely out of sight. No one wants to be tripping over children's toys or wading through papasan chairs while they're trying to see the property.

Also, unless they're attractive fixtures of a room, it's best to avoid empty bookcases and cabinets. If you have long tables, consider replacing them with smaller ones, or at least having their leaves taken out. You want only enough furniture in each room to keep the house feeling warm and livable, and to demonstrate the room's purpose (the strategically-placed television to give the rec room its character, but otherwise enough space to emphasize square-footage). Above all, you want to make sure the house looks open, inviting, and full of potential – with plenty of room to move around. interior



Fix it up

Next, do a thorough inspection of your house and make the necessary repairs. Remember that a single negative impression can make all the difference – it's worth spending a little more money to be sure everything is functional and looks new. Do a full walk-around, taking note of every fault you can see. Here are a few items to check off the list as you go:

- Replace cracked floor and/or counter tiles
- Patch holes in walls
- Replace burnt-out bulbs
- Fix doors that don't close cleanly and quietly (same goes for drawers/cabinets)
- Fix or replace leaky faucets
- Replaced damaged windows (yes, scratches are damages)
- Patch visible cracks in concrete or brickwork
- Replace carpeting OR have carpeting professionally cleaned
- Clean the walls thoroughly
- Replace old or flaking wallpaper
- Switch out passé appliances and decor



INTERIOR

Make it shine

Don't just stop at fixing things that are broken – try to improve what's already there. Cleanliness is a major part of selling a house. And don't just clean once; you should clean the house before every showing. Anything that looks at all old or run-down, no matter how nostalgic it is to you, should be replaced. Switch out old furnishings with new ones. If you can afford it, hire a professional cleaning service. We'll get into further specifics as we explore the house in more depth, but here are some general tasks to remember:

- Wash windows inside and out
- Dust carefully, clean out cobwebs
- Use a pressure washer to spray down sidewalks and exterior
- Re-caulk showers, tubs and sinks
- Polish faucets and mirrors
- Clear out the refrigerator
- Wax the floors
- Replace worn-out rugs
- Hang up fresh towels
- Air the place out

Your house has plenty of competition, so remember to compare it not only to the adjacent houses, but to the best houses in the neighborhood. When a buyer is making the rounds, you want your house to stand out among the options like a set jewel.

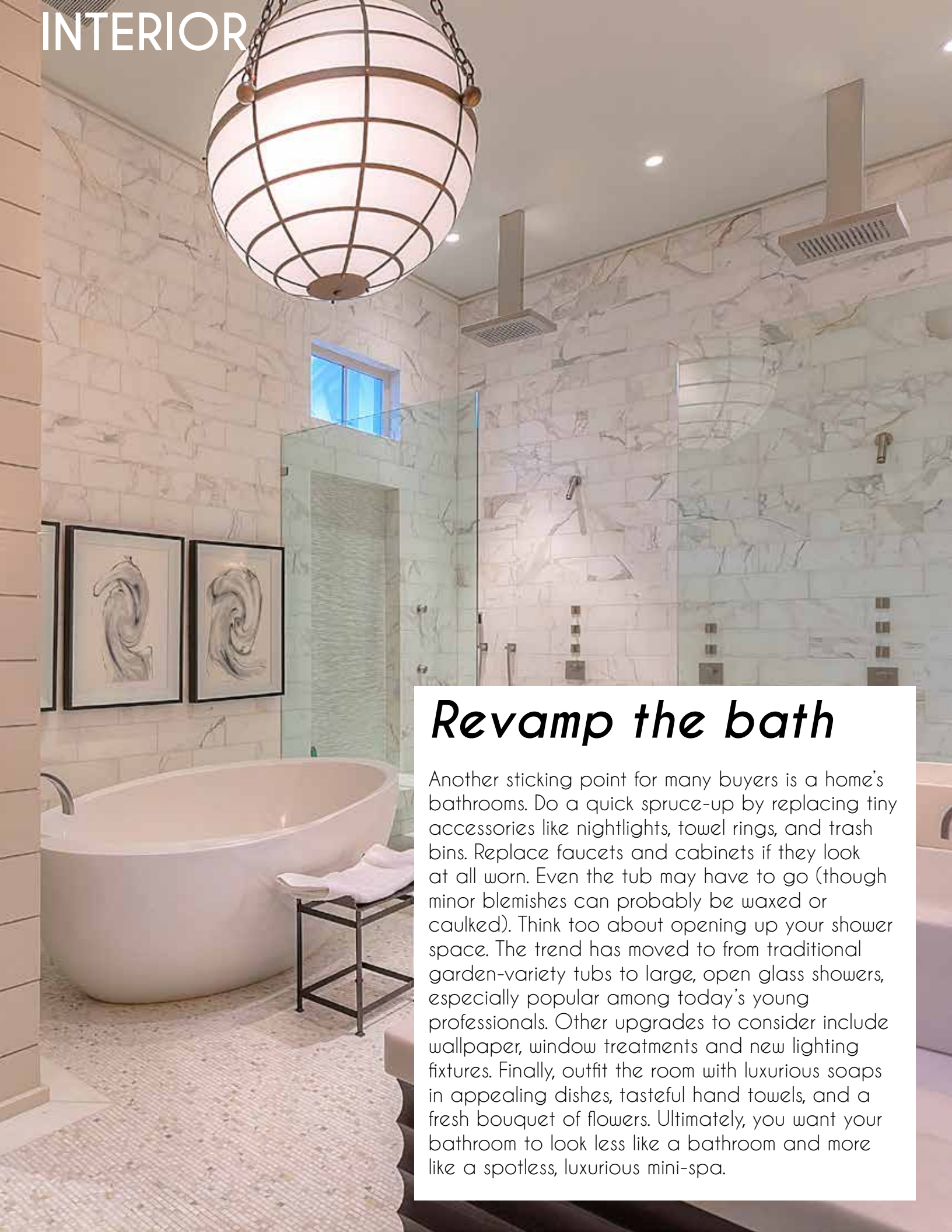
spotlight on paint

Consider repainting the walls in sophisticated neutral colors – wheat, mocha, white, soft gray. You don't want the buyer to remember your house for its orange walls or purple bathroom. Neutrals and lighter earth-tones have a broader appeal. Plus, a new coat of paint exudes freshness and is one of the most affordable ways to spruce up your home.



Kitchen is king

Possibly the most important room in the house for a showing – especially in our increasingly food-conscious world – is the kitchen. Give the space its due. For starters, install elegant (but not gaudy) cabinet knobs and drawer-pulls. If your appliances are outdated, purchase a new cooktop, range and/or dishwasher. You might also want to replace the sink and faucet. And remember – when renovating, look for styles with universal appeal and simple charm. Elegance is usually understated. Lighting is also key. Try to keep the kitchen as open and airy as possible. Brighten it with a variety of lighting, such as under-cabinet fixtures, track-lighting, pendants over an island, or recessed lights. Think about repainting the kitchen white. This makes the space feel significantly bigger. It also serves as a blank slate so that buyers can put their own vision onto the kitchen. When it comes to cabinetry, lean in the direction of lighter, symmetrical cabinets, rather than darker, irregular-sized cabinets and drawers. The trend is moving more and more toward open-plan living and multifunctional spaces. Having a large, open-plan kitchen with an island at its center can really make a house more attractive to buyers, who often need to multitask. Try to reinvent your kitchen as a modern, appealing space where they'll want spend time cooking, having their kids do homework, and socializing.



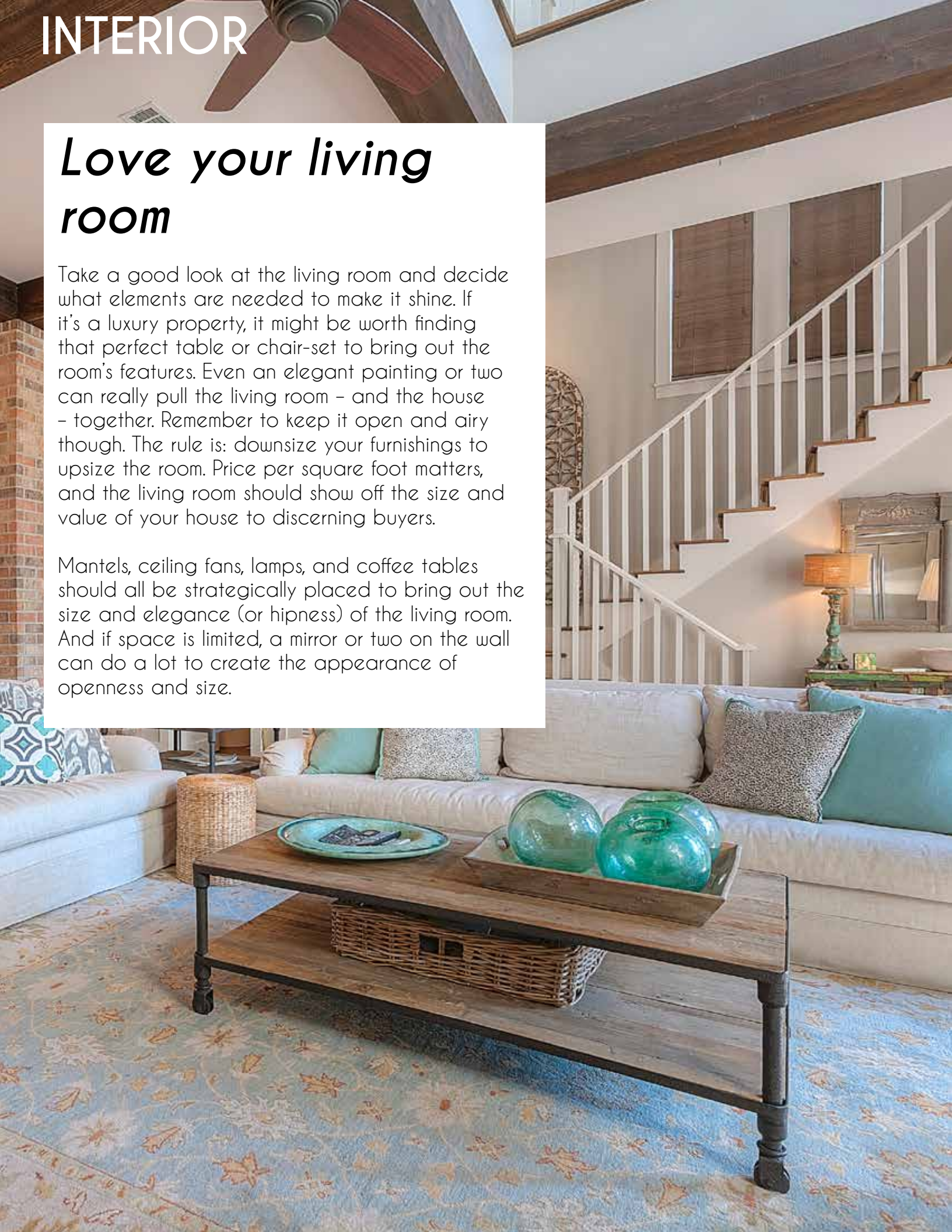
Revamp the bath

Another sticking point for many buyers is a home's bathrooms. Do a quick spruce-up by replacing tiny accessories like nightlights, towel rings, and trash bins. Replace faucets and cabinets if they look at all worn. Even the tub may have to go (though minor blemishes can probably be waxed or caulked). Think too about opening up your shower space. The trend has moved to from traditional garden-variety tubs to large, open glass showers, especially popular among today's young professionals. Other upgrades to consider include wallpaper, window treatments and new lighting fixtures. Finally, outfit the room with luxurious soaps in appealing dishes, tasteful hand towels, and a fresh bouquet of flowers. Ultimately, you want your bathroom to look less like a bathroom and more like a spotless, luxurious mini-spa.

Love your living room

Take a good look at the living room and decide what elements are needed to make it shine. If it's a luxury property, it might be worth finding that perfect table or chair-set to bring out the room's features. Even an elegant painting or two can really pull the living room – and the house – together. Remember to keep it open and airy though. The rule is: downsize your furnishings to upsize the room. Price per square foot matters, and the living room should show off the size and value of your house to discerning buyers.

Mantels, ceiling fans, lamps, and coffee tables should all be strategically placed to bring out the size and elegance (or hipness) of the living room. And if space is limited, a mirror or two on the wall can do a lot to create the appearance of openness and size.





Beautify the bedroom

Appeal to as many customers as possible with a clean, tastefully designed master bedroom, free of personal items and clutter. Install new linens, a reading lamp, modern artwork, and a soft-toned bedspread. Refresh the bedroom walls with a coat of paint in a soothing shade – soft blues, greens, khakis – but definitely something gender neutral. Lastly, think about storage space. If needed, enhance the closet with new doors or shelves. You might even want to install an external wall-cubby or series of shelves. You should also open all closets. It's virtually guaranteed that prospective buyers will peek inside your closets. Make it easier for them by keeping them open and making them look great. Closet space can be an important selling point for some buyers, so show yours off to their full advantage. Clean them out, replace cabinetry as needed, and leave a few well-placed personal items (a few jackets, some shoes) to really show them off.

INTERIOR

Extra rooms

Find your home's edge, anything that really sets it apart. Do you boast an in-house recording studio? Set it up for potential buyers as if they were visiting rock stars. Does your Victorian have a card room? Deck it out with vintage furniture and an attractive rummy or poker set. These extra rooms are often what make your house stand out from all the other properties in the neighborhood. Don't hide those six-car garages and home theaters. And don't leave rooms empty – even the smallest extra room can be given a personality and a purpose. It shouldn't just be “another room” – at the very least, make it a “study.”

spotlight on flooring

Floors are important, and while they may very well be replaced by the incoming homeowner, you want your home's floors to be attractive as possible. Whether tile or teak, all floors in the house should be carefully cleaned – and any damaged areas should be replaced. If a floor looks to plain or drab, add a splash of color with a pretty area rug. Also consider other homes in the neighborhood. If they have top-of-the-line floors, parquet and carpet just might not cut it – it might be worth your while to splurge on hardwood floors or quality tile.

Front entrance

First impressions are everything, so give special care to your entryway. All woodwork should be retouched and the front door repainted. Replace worn or broken doorbells, give the entrance a little character – maybe some plants or a wind-chime – and putout a clean doormat. Lastly, light the space well. Day or night, you want the entrance of the house to be inviting, to pull the prospective buyer inside, eager to explore further.



Exterior

Curb appeal

A prospective buyer will never make it inside if your house doesn't look good from the street (and online). Just as you cleaned and fixed up the inside of your house, it's important to go over the exterior and make any changes that will spruce up its appearance. Here are some helpful tips to remember:

- Keep the lawn edged, cut and watered regularly
- Trim hedges and prune trees regularly
- Place potted seasonal flowers near the entrance
- Install clearly-readable, elegant house numbers
- Check the foundation, steps, and walkways for cracks and crumbling
- Inspect doors and windows for peeling paint
- Clean and straighten gutters
- Replace damaged or loose roof shingles
- Apply a fresh coat of paint to the front door
- Sweep and wash down the sidewalks

Landscaping 101

Beautifying your garden and landscaping can do a lot to make your house more attractive to buyers. For your front lawn, apply a product to get rid of weeds. Also be sure to trim the hedges, prune the trees, and clear any debris such as old leaves and branches. Add a touch of color by planting flowers or positioning potted blooms somewhere near the front entrance. And remember to water regularly and do what's needed to keep the landscaping fresh. In a desert environment, consider a xeroscape garden. Just make sure no plastic is exposed, rocks and sand are tidy, and that the landscaping complements the house.



Exterior

Driveways, cars and garages

If your garage isn't especially nice, keep the garage door closed. If you have an impressive six-car garage, however, by all means show it off. Clean up grease or oil spots, remove old boxes and clutter, and if you can, keep a luxury car in there to show off the space. Also, double check that the garage door opens cleanly, and that your garage door opener is in good working order.

The patio

Driveways, cars and garages

A tasteful spread of outdoor furniture looks very impressive to a buyer. If necessary, borrow some from a friend or hire a designer to enhance the "showability" of your property. If you have an old deck, have it re-stained. A well-placed hammock or a nice grilling corner can grab a buyer's eye as well. If you have a lot of outdoor space, find a way to show it off.

Don't forget the back yard

The back yard should be tidy and well-trimmed, just like the front. If you have swing sets, old boats, or other back yard furnishings, you should probably remove them. They just take up room, and you want your back yard to appear as spacious as possible. Let the homeowner decide what to do with the space.

Swimming pool prep

Even if your pool is usually light on chemicals, now's the time to add and adjust chemicals until the pool sparkles. Make sure to clean the filtration equipment, getting rid of any cobwebs and algae. Store your chemicals, tools, and pool accessories neatly, and be sure to keep the pool area tidy and secure. Consider a few well-placed pool chairs to make the space



STAGING

Staging is the final step in preparing your house for the market – and arguably the most important. No matter how well everything works, and how new the furnishings are, a tasteful, delicate presentation is what will actually sell your house. For this reason, if it's within your budget, it might be worth hiring a professional stager to help you prepare the house for showings. Think of staging as creating a mood. The first step is to try to dissociate yourself from the house. See it through an outsider's eyes by standing on the curb, approaching slowly, and then doing a full walk-through of the house and surrounding property. Maybe even ask a friend, neighbor, or real estate agent to come over and give you objective advice. This can be especially useful if you know someone with a good eye for design.



STAGING

The basics

Staging requires the eye of a designer, the ability to evaluate your house and create dramatic scenery that appeals to all five senses. Here are a few things you can do for a well-staged home:

- Arrange furniture in an attractive grouping (known as avignette)
- Light thoroughly, creating a warm, bright environment
- Drape window coverings with simple lines and fine materials (silk, satin, etc)
- Add unique elements to shelving, bookcases, and mantel places so that they are not bare
- Decorate each room with mirrors, plants, flowers, floor & table lamps, and throw rugs as needed
- Re-stain cabinets and woodwork that appears dry, renewing its luster
- Put out large bowls of attractive, fresh fruit
- In the kitchen, arrange colorful cookbooks on the counters and/or island
- Place fresh towels, soaps, and a white robe in all bathrooms

Vacant homes often feel cold and empty. It's essential to achieve the difficult balance between clean and lived-in. A well-chosen variety of clothing, books, flowers, and other accessories can be indispensable for this task – maybe a basket of fresh farmer's market produce on the kitchen counter, or a vase of flowers beside the sink. Just make sure the dressing you choose fits the style and mood of your property. You're not selling just a property, but an entire lifestyle.



STAGING

Let there be light

A must-have home invariably has great lighting. In general it's a good idea to open as many window coverings as possible and let in sunlight. The brighter the better; buyers love airy, sunlit rooms. If your interior lighting isn't adequate, install new lamps and fixtures, and increase the wattage of your bulbs. Don't go overboard on artificial light, however. A good estimate to shoot for is a total of 100 watts for each 50 square feet. Finally, try to use a variety of lighting in each room: ambient (general or overhead), task (pendant, reading) and accent (table, wall, closet).

Feng shui

If your house isn't selling, it may have a shortage of Qi ("chee").

In all seriousness though, using Feng shui to stage a house is becoming more and more popular – and many sellers find it delivers excellent results. Consider bringing in a Feng shui expert to analyze the home and make improvements. If it doesn't work, you can always go back to your original staging ideas.

A note on smell

Use common sense. No smoke odors, no mustiness, no incense, no pet smells. You want a neutral, pleasant scent – think about installing a bouquet of fresh flowers in a vase after you clean. Just make sure you change the flowers regularly.

Check day/night and by the seasons

Your house should be appealing in full daylight and in the middle of the night. Check the lighting at various times and weather-patterns to see if there's anything that can be improved upon. And if your house is in an area with a lot of rain, visit the property during a storm to doublecheck that there aren't any leaks.



CONCLUSION

With the myriad tasks that go into prepping a house for sale, it can be easy to forget one basic thing: you're not just selling a property, but a home. Your house represents a lifestyle, a neighborhood, a place where someone may raise a family. Think about your ideal buyer, and prepare the house accordingly. Put in the time, the attention and the care – just like you might for a member of your family – and you will be rewarded.





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