

What buyers are looking for

Here are the best bets for a sale

Selling a home in today's economy is not for the weak of heart. A house is one of the largest, if not the largest, investments of a person's lifetime. Sellers understand what they are up against and what it takes to compete in the ever-growing, highly competitive housing market today. On the flip side, the horizon is quite a bit brighter for the buyer. According to Gail Buckingham, Realtor for Century 21 Vision Real Estate in Owatonna, "The inventory is so high, the buyers are finding great deals. The sellers are putting their best foot forward to be the shiny penny in their price range."

So how do you get your house to stand out on the block in an industry where brevity of market time is key?

The basics

Price the house right: Savvy homebuyers know what your home should be worth. They can take a 360-degree virtual tour of almost every room in your house without stepping foot inside! Don't underestimate their ability to size up any other areas. And when they choose to come inside, first impressions must exceed expectations.

Clean the house top to bottom: From dusty windowsills to fingerprints on light switches, make it sparkle! Large surface areas like floors, walls and windows are the most noticeable.

No wet smells: Have a dehumidifier? Hide it. The thought of dealing with water issues (big or small) sends potential clients right back out the door.

Mechanics in good, working condition: They're the "nuts and bolts" of the house — such things as heating and cooling. Not only do they need to be reliable, preferably they would be less than five years old.

Newer roof: Key shelter from the outdoor elements is very important! Again, less than five years old is preferred.

Minor repairs: Fix leaky faucets, squeaky doors, loose knobs, wobbly handrails, etc. Hire a handyman if need be.

Wallpaper and themed rooms? Not so much. Generally shy away from it (unless it's vintage). It's better to leave room for one's own interpretation. A simple fresh coat of neutral paint provides the buyer with an open canvas.

Need design ideas and inspiration?

Attend a tour of remodeled homes in Northfield from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sept. 18. Contact info@vivusarchitecture.com or 507-645-9020 for more information. It is sponsored by Vivus Architecture + Design and Schmidt Homes Remodeling of Northfield.

No clutter: Depersonalize by putting away your favorite things like pictures and keepsakes — a move-before-you-move concept. Find a storage area outside the house if possible. And don't shove things in your closets. Those spaces are inspected! Each room should only have minimal furniture to

show functionality of space.

No air fresheners: Some people are allergic to them and others just don't like the smell. Why take a chance? The fresh scent of a clean house is important but avoid heavy coverups.

A notch above the competition

When you're after the top dollar and can't afford to be second best, you'll need to provide some added features to set your home apart from the competition.

Consider hiring a professional to help assess your home's readiness for sale. They can tell you at a glance what's working and what's not. The process of intake and making recommendations for staging a home usually costs between \$100 and \$200, but the information you gain can really add to your return on investment. The process will allow you to narrow in on the areas that really matter so you can sell your house quickly. Sometimes it's just not that obvious to the owner. An unbiased opinion, or "fresh eyes report," as VIVUS Architecture + Design out of Northfield refers to it, can offer that much needed perspective.

"You want the type of home where people ask if it might be for sale, even when there's no sign in the yard," said Mary Schmelzer, an interior designer who co-owns the firm with architect Peter Schmelzer.

Here's a list of features that get extra points. If you're not in a hurry to sell, you can make these upgrades over time, but either way it pays to invest in a quality look. In the end, you might just like your home so much you won't want to leave! Believe it, it's happened!



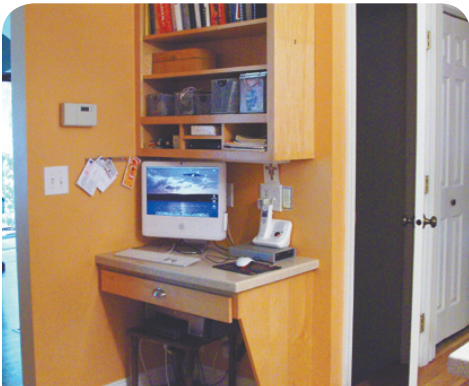
Let natural light in: Get rid of any old, heavy tapestry. Undressed windows are typically better than those viewed as dated or dowdy; natural light leaves the room aglow and also showcases the outdoor scenery.



A good approach: A good entrance typically brings you to the front door. Find a way to steer guests away from a massive two-plus garage as your main entry. Inviting front walks, an open porch or canopy, and a solid door with quality hardware all make it alluring. People typically know right away if they like a house — there's a vibe or something at first sight.



His and hers master bath: A master bath is a sign of civility. Draw the line — you don't have to share gooey toothpaste with your kids! If a bathroom is not adjoining, designate one close by as the master bath by choosing decor that complements the master bedroom.



The command center: This must-have family communications station is designed for mail, paperwork, digital electronics, calendars, phone, etc. It's an important place to gather thoughts (big and small).

A getaway spot: Your house is your haven, but every home still needs a secret getaway spot for quiet retreats of reading or just relaxing.

Good lighting: Rooms that are well-lit appear larger. Purchase higher wattage bulbs for showing your house, but make sure the ambience is still warm and inviting.

Everything-in-its-place: One can't underestimate storage. From gadgets and cords to linens and placemats, it helps if everything has a spot. Items that are not put away may be viewed as clutter. There is a high appreciation for storage in any room of the home.



Stainless steel steals the show: Appliances of this cool tone are the current trend while black is also a favorite. It mimics a commercial kitchen where gourmet meals might be prepared. Now, who wouldn't like that? Again, less than five years old is preferred.



Countertops that shine: Consider replacing dull or worn countertops to give a kitchen an updated look. Countertops priced mid-range are suitable. A variety of gorgeous solid surfaces are available to choose from, including some new eco-smart ones on the market. Also, try adding new hardware to upgrade a cupboard's style.



Closet systems: There are all kinds of closet systems out there from simple to elaborate. The key is to get one. Go beyond the typical rod and shelf, and plan it well. There's anything from do-it-yourself kits to hiring a professional closet designer. Work within your budget.



The mudroom: An essential part of the house (especially in Minnesota). Floors that can be easily swept and mopped are a must. Provide ample closet space. Hooks, lockers and cubbies are an added plus. If you don't have a mudroom, find a way to create something similar by adding some of these features close to the main traffic door.