



Creating curb appeal!

They say you can't judge a book by its cover. But when it comes to houses, the exterior can be just as important as the interior if selling or buying.

When selling, it is the outside, or the home's curb appeal that often determines whether the inside is ever seen. How a house 'shows' from the street can tell a potential buyer a lot about what it may be like inside. Even if the inside is the sparkling, charming, structurally sound dream home they've been searching for, a buyer is not going to forget a cracked driveway, fallen shutters, overgrown grass and flower beds.

That's why most Realtors recommend a house not be seen for the first time at night. If you have no choice but to view homes at night, always be sure to drive past them during the daytime before making any final decisions.

For sellers, there are many ways to enhance the exterior of a home to achieve the curb appeal necessary to attract prospective buyers. Start by taking a close, objective look at your home from the curb. Be sure to view it from different angles. Ask friends and neighbors for their unbiased opinions. What are the appealing features? What's not so appealing? What can you do to improve its appearance?

Are the shrubs untrimmed? Are there broken doors and windows, loose screens and railings? Does the exterior trim, or entire surface, need a paint job?

The interior may be clean, without a leaky faucet, cracked floor or loose door hinge in sight. But if the exterior roof, gutter, walls, driveway, garage and yard look dirty and untidy, chances are you're not going to get a lot of potential buyers knocking at the door.

Creating curb appeal is making your home inviting from the outside—where first impressions begin. This doesn't mean spending a great deal of money remodeling and renovating. Adding a new front verandah might add a lot of curb appeal, but so will a couple of wicker chairs and potted flowers by the front door—at a lot less cost.

Here are some more tips for making the outside of your home attractive and inviting:

Clean up the yard

Mow the lawn, trim the hedges, weed the flower beds, get rid of dead trees and shrubs; get rid of any broken lawn furniture; shovel the walk and driveway in winter; rake the yard in the fall.

Repair any problems

If the roof is damaged, repair it. Also repair any doors and windows that have loose hinges or other damage; fix storm doors and window screens; caulk window exteriors; clean and repair sidings and other structural flaws.

Eliminate clutter

If you have yard and construction debris piled up along the side of the house, or elsewhere, get rid of it. The exterior of your home should be as uncluttered in appearance as the interior. This includes cleaning out the garage - a major breeder of clutter. Be ruthless. If you haven't used something in a year, give it to charity or recycle it.

Give siding a fresh new look

Cleaning the exterior surface is all your home may need for a fresh new face. Before rushing to paint siding, try washing it. For painted wood siding and aluminum siding, use a solution of one cup strong detergent and one quart chlorine bleach in three gallons of water. Be sure to wear rubber gloves, goggles and other protective garments. Work from the bottom up and rinse thoroughly. To spruce up vinyl siding, hose it down, sponge it with a mild liquid detergent and rinse.

Use paint to brighten, re-proportion exterior

A paint job can do wonders for the exterior of a home. A low house can look more graceful and tall from the curb by emphasizing its vertical features. Paint elements such as doors, shutters and corner trim in a color that contrasts with the siding material or color. On a high home, emphasize horizontal by using a contrasting paint color on window sills and fascia boards. You can also make a tall house look lower by painting it a dark color, provided that the roof is dark too. Conversely, a light color will make a home look larger.

Co-ordinate the exterior 'look'

The more co-ordinated your house looks from the outside, the more appealing it will be. Co-ordinate the 'look' of your home by painting the garage, tool shed, playhouse and other outdoor structures with the same color schemes as the house. If your house is a mixture of conflicting textures - vertical siding, shingles and brick, for instance—try painting them all the same color, or in two related shades of the same color, to create a harmonious look. Dark tones work best when working with conflicting textures.

Use flower power

Well-placed flowers, trees and shrubs can really make the outside of a home look inviting. Not only does attractive landscaping invite buyers, it can increase the value of a home. Even without major landscaping, flowers can make a yard look colorful and pleasant. Plant them in garden beds, hang them from railings and porch ceilings, add flower boxes to window sills. There is no limit to the power of flowers.

At night, highlight garden features with spotlights and floodlights. Well-lit paths and entrances promote safety, discourage burglars and are an added feature to any home. A pretty wreath on the door and a welcome mat will finish things off.