



HOME IMPROVEMENTS THAT IMPROVE VALUES



Dave Bedient "The SPECIALIST"

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I specialize in servicing retail customers, real estate investors and house flippers. As a skilled negotiator, I will reach the best terms for my clients. Understanding the importance of communication in a client-agent relationship, I am always available to answer any questions or concerns throughout the entire process.

For the last decade, I have actively invested in reinvigorating and renovating properties, which has given me a deep knowledge of the inspection and appraisal processes. Through this, I have formed many relationships with other real estate agents and over time, created an accessible extended network.

Before obtaining my real estate license, I was educated as an engineer. Thus then becoming self-employed and built my own computer engineering company from the ground up over the past 30 years.

My entrepreneurial spirit led me to begin a new adventure in real estate because I have always enjoyed the idea of buying, selling and improving properties. My engineering background has fine-tuned my attention to detail and problem-solving skills, two important traits clients appreciate.

My greatest influence is my father, who taught me to continually improve myself, work hard but

smart and never give up on projects. I have been married for almost 30 years, and a proud father to my daughter and grandfather to my grandsons. When I have time to relax, I enjoy photography, play time with my grandkids, woodworking and supporting my church, foster care groups and various non-profit organizations.

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CHAPTER 1

Remodeling - Is It Worth It?

Remodeling. You've been thinking about it for a while now. That choke point in the kitchen is maddening, the wallpaper in the bathroom is a crime against good taste, and the basement has looked like a dungeon for years. Not to mention the upgrades to the doors, windows, and landscaping that have been the subject of so many dinner table discussions.

It crosses your mind that maybe it would be better to just move and leave all the home's faults for someone else to figure out. Then again, your job isn't going to last forever and you may have to move in five or six years anyway. Maybe it would just be best to tough it out until then. After all, no one gets their money back on remodeling projects at the time of sale anyway, right?

The truth is that deciding to remodel can be an extremely stressful decision. It affects your savings, your enjoyment of the home, and the property's potential resale value. Yet, since the housing bubble burst and the Great Recession came along, more and more people have decided to take on the task of remodeling, frequently attempting the projects themselves to save money.

According to the National Association of Home Builders, homeowners spent \$152 billion on improvements to their homes in 2017. NAHB predicts remodeling spending for owner-occupied single-family homes will increase 4.9 percent in 2018 over 2017 and an additional 0.6 percent in 2019.

That trend has only grown since. The home improvement industry was estimated to be worth well over \$600 billion by 2015. While that number likely includes routine maintenance,

that still represents only one year. This has been driven largely by the effects of the recession, which led many people to try to cut costs where they could and take on projects themselves rather than hiring costly contractors.

Even in the current market, with home prices going back up and homes moving off the market quickly in many places, remodeling can still be a wise decision. The improvements may help set your home apart from the pack if and when you choose to sell. Or you may find that while your home will already sell quickly and for a good price, you still can't quite afford the upgrade home you want, and it would help both your current standard of living and the future resale value to improve the property.

It makes sense that if your home is increasing in value, the values of the homes you are looking at will also be rising; you are not alone in deciding to remodel. However, then comes the hard part — deciding what to do and how much to spend. There are myriad factors to consider. How long do you plan on staying in the house? What is your budget? What kind of projects do you need done the most? Or rather, what about your house drives you the craziest?

How long you plan to remain in the house is perhaps the most important of those questions. The less time you expect to spend there, the less time you have to spend enjoying the fruits of your hard work. It also means that you are going to need to have some money left over when the time comes to move. In such a case, you are going to want to focus on the projects that give you the biggest Return on Investment (ROI). For example, simple and relatively inexpensive things like replacing old doors and windows can have a return of 100% or more in the right market. A major remodel of a kitchen or basement will generally bring less than a 100% ROI.

The goal of this book is to show you that it is possible to remodel

for both personal satisfaction in your home and for increased value should you decide to sell, and to help you decide where and how to best spend your money so that you get the most out of your hard work.

Now, before you go off and start planning that \$20,000-bathroom renovation, it is important that you do your research beforehand to make sure that you are going to get the best possible results.

The single best thing you can do to help direct your home renovation project toward improving its sale value is to contact a real estate agent, especially if you are planning on selling within the next few years.

While we will be going over several examples of where to spend your money that transcend markets, each market is different in important ways. An agent will know your specific market and what sort of improvements, colors, and styles are most sought-after in your area. A real estate agent will also be able to suggest simple fixes with low costs, as well as contractors who are able to perform the work.

Another simple rule to follow is to make sure you get whatever permits your municipality requires. Trying to skirt the permit system may seem like a good idea in the short term, but it can lead to far more anxiety and expense in the long run.

With all of this in mind, let's dive into the nitty-gritty of home remodeling, beginning with a more detailed look at where you should spend your money and how much you should expect back from your investment.

CHAPTER 2

Where to Spend the Money

Full-scale remodeling projects don't generally offer the best ROI. Rather, the best approach to getting full value for your expense and effort is to refresh or replace existing items like windows and doors, usually with a mid-range upgrade.

We are going to take a quick look at several of the best places to spend your money for the greatest return. We'll also dive into details of where and how much you can expect to recoup when you decide to place your home on the market. Let us begin by going over some of those replacement projects and continue with an overview of some of the other big-hitters, particularly the kitchen and bathroom remodel.

REPLACEMENTS

These projects are relatively simple and low-cost, placing them within the reach of most homeowners. The top four improvement projects in terms of ROI, according to *Remodeling* magazine, are the following:

- Garage door replacement: 98.3%
- Manufactured stone veneer: 97.1%
- Deck addition (wood): 82.8% percent
- Minor kitchen remodel: 81.1%

As you can see, these are not sweeping, spectacular changes. So why are they so valuable? You should first consider where all these changes are. Every one of these changes is on the visible exterior of the home, creating a positive first impression in the

minds of potential buyers — an impression that helps set the value of the home in their minds.

Other replacement projects with a good return include replacing old windows with new vinyl or wood window frames and trim and installing a new roof, with returns of 71% and 62%, respectively.

It is also worth noting that the ROI numbers will vary depending on what market you are in. The Pacific Northwest (including Alaska and Hawaii) tends to show the best return on home remodeling and home improvement projects, with Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee also showing strong returns according to the 2015 Cost vs. Value report from Remodeling magazine.

REMODELING

Much can be gained from work on the inside of the home as well. One chief benefit of redoing a room or two inside the home is that it will increase your own enjoyment of your home.

Another benefit is that if you are selling, it is important to carry that good impression from the exterior through to the interior with further improvements.

As with all other aspects of home improvement, there are better and worse ways to spend your money. And, as the adage goes, kitchens sell houses. Citing *Remodeling* magazine, kitchen remodels average a return of 79.3% nationwide, making it the best investment for a total remodeling project.

Other good remodel projects to consider include:

- Attic bedroom: 53%
- Bathroom: 62%

- Basement: 63%

Be warned that these projects can prove costly, with the national average cost for jobs on this scale running in the tens of thousands of dollars. Be sure to carefully consider just how much you are willing to spend and what is in demand in your market to maximize the return on such a large investment.

ADDITIONS

Another consideration when looking to add value to your home, as well as make it more functional for yourself, is to add entirely new rooms. Clearly, this is a large step with an even larger investment involved in nearly every possible case.

Room additions are not cost-effective if you are planning to sell within the next few years. That said, if you plan on staying where you are for a while to enjoy your additions, they can result in a reasonable ROI. Some are more financially worthwhile than others, as below:

- Master suite: 52%
- Deck: 70%
- Bathroom: 62%

As you can see, there is a fairly large range in the ROI involved, though not as large as a less ambitious remodel. A careful reading of the data shows that some of the most expensive projects (a sunroom addition averaged over \$72,000 nationwide) provide the lowest returns.

Of course, there is wide variance in building costs. According to *Remodeling* magazine, a 200-square foot sunroom addition with footings and slabs-on-grade foundation can cost up to \$70,000, while a survey conducted on HomeAdvisor.com found the

average cost on sunroom additions ran around \$16,315.

You must also take into consideration that buyers may not have the same taste as you — and even if they do, they only see the finished product and will have little understanding of or interest in what went into creating it. That brings out the need for a slightly deeper understanding of the way these statistics play out in real life.

For example, a roof replacement is often cited as having a high ROI. While this can be true, it is important to understand this in context. After all, others assert that a new roof does nothing to add market value to a home. How do you square these seemingly contradictory statements?

A roof is a bit like a bass player in a rock band; you should only really notice it when it isn't doing its job. That is, a roof is not something you think about unless it is leaking or has a colony of moss growing on it.

Therefore, while a bad roof can certainly detract from a home's value, a solid, trouble-free roof is simply expected. Its chief value as a seller is how it may favorably compare with other, similar homes with older roofs that are showing clear signs of wear. Do not replace your roof with an eye toward selling unless your home clearly needs it.

One caveat to include is that roofing items like energy-efficient architectural shingles with a transferable warranty may be highly attractive to the right buyer.

Also remember that more money spent does not necessarily mean a bigger return. Going back to the kitchen example, a relatively minor remodel of \$20,000 yields a much higher ROI than a \$55,000 remodel.

While buyers certainly love a large kitchen complete with island and shiny stainless-steel appliances, they won't be as quick to assign significant value to whether it has the best hinges, custom stained cupboards, and imported Wolf appliances that money can buy. At some point, very high-end appliances can even be a turn-off either because the buyer is not familiar with them, or is too familiar and knows just how hard it is to get parts when they fail.

Basements are also tricky. A nice big recreation room is certainly a draw, but often will not be counted as living space in an appraisal, nor in the square footage when the home is listed. People also tend to have their own ideas of exactly what a rec room should be. If you have not finished your basement already or are planning on leaving in less than five years, it is best to either leave it alone or to put up walls along the outside of the basement and install cheap but decently attractive carpet and inexpensive drop ceilings, allowing the buyer to customize to his own tastes.

It is also important that you not overlook the basic systems. When people are looking at a home, they do not expect to find leaky pipes, a non-working furnace, or electrical outlets that pop a breaker as soon as something is plugged into an outlet.

These and other issues like mold, a leaky roof, or stained and damaged carpet will generally turn off a buyer, regardless of how amazing the kitchen and bathrooms may be. Some of these, especially less visible issues like an aging furnace or water heater, may seem like a waste of money if you are planning on selling soon but are actually of critical importance.

A buyer may not notice such issues on an initial walk-through. But even if an offer is made and accepted, that is not necessarily the end of the story. Appraisers and inspectors will almost certainly be coming through the home as part of the process and

either of these can derail a sale. An appraiser will notice such aging equipment and other factors like old carpet and flooring and adjust the home's value based on the current market.

Home inspectors are less concerned with market value but they will point out that even if it is running flawlessly now, a 25-year-old furnace can give out at any time, often leading a buyer to want the value of a new one subtracted from the sale price of the home. Even if you are intending to move in the near future, it is worth the cost to replace or repair the basic systems of your home. These systems do provide a good ROI, at least in terms of salability, and at the end of the day will at least make your remaining time there more comfortable.

The furnace and air conditioning units can be a selling point if they are the new, energy efficient models. An additional bonus here is that there are often tax credits associated with such models, lessening your initial investment. Do not forget that even if some of these repairs do not add additional value in the eyes of a buyer, they do not subtract value either and will help your home sell faster than it would without them.

CHAPTER 3

Improvements That Cost More Than Their ROI

Over the course of many years, we have been conditioned to view almost any home improvement or repair as something which automatically increases the value of the home, as something that will guarantee a great ROI upon selling it. This is not always true.

When deciding whether or not to add a new addition, fix up the basement, purchase new appliances, or other home improvement projects, it is important to ask yourself: do I know that this project will add monetary value to my home? Is this repair a necessity or a nicety? Are these new appliances going to fill my needs and make me happy, or am I buying them because I think that they will add value to the home when I sell it in a few years? There are certain repairs, renovations, and upgrades that just will not help you make a sale.

Let's take a walk through your home and look at things more closely.

New carpeting? While this could appeal to some people, home buyers are often turned off by it because they will feel like they need to have carpets professionally cleaned before moving in. They also might be conscious of health hazards due to allergens that gather in carpets. These thoughts and more will cross the minds of home buyers making their decisions.

If you have good flooring, show it off. You're much better off with hardwood flooring that can be topped with area rugs or carpeted over later if the home buyer chooses to do so.

It's a bedroom, not a zoo. If you want to have pets, have pets, but be careful to avoid making structural changes like adding built-in cages or aquariums. This is an example of "improvements" detracting from the value of your home because unless you find another Dr. Doolittle to purchase the home, you are going to have to convert it back to normal before anyone else will buy it.

The same goes for other highly personalized conversions such as a cold pantry or wine cellar. Anything you do that is truly unique to you needs to be done in such a way that it is easily undone before putting your home on the market. Otherwise, potential buyers may view these personal extravagances as expensive projects to undo, or instead make it part of the deal that you undo them yourself.

Where is the garage? If it looks like a garage, potential home buyers are expecting it to be a garage. If they walk in and find that it's been completely changed into something else that can no longer have a car stored in it, they will not be too excited. Home buyers enjoy not having hail damage their vehicles, not cleaning off ice or snow on winter mornings, not leaving their car at the mercy of night-time pranksters — or worse. Instead of a "man cave," you will find greater success with a real garage.

That does not mean that you cannot create that family room, theater, or gym in your garage. You can — if you set it up in such a way that the garage can become a garage again with minimal cost. For example, don't carpet it.

If you want to cover the garage floor, do so with large area rugs, or if you want to use carpet, roll it out onto the surface without attaching it with glue or permanently installing it in any other way. If you have built-in storage cabinets, leave them as such instead of dismantling them to hang up the big screen.

The famous kitchen. If you plan to live in your home for many years and you want to enjoy an updated kitchen, go for the greatest kitchen you can afford. However, if you plan to renovate the kitchen in hopes of raising the home's value and increasing your profits at its sale, be warned. On paper, kitchen renovations are usually only worth about half of what homeowners spend on them — even less if you go too gourmet.

New granite countertops, new tile flooring, a new brushed stainless steel sink, and a sophisticated cabinet system with a hideaway refrigerator — these things and more might be your dreams coming true, but that doesn't make them the appraiser's nor potential buyers'.

If remodeling is a must, treat with caution and avoid overspending. In general, the kitchen is the heart of the home, so it will impress potential buyers to have a nice one. However, you will not realize a 100% ROI on a kitchen remodel. No one is telling you to hang onto the plaster or old ceramic sink, but it would be smart to tread with caution.

Take a dip elsewhere. It could save you thousands, sometimes even tens of thousands. Before installing an in-ground pool prior to sale in the hope of adding value to your home, think this through. Pools are for homeowners who want to enjoy them — and maintain them, and service them. They are not a particularly strong draw to home buyers.

There are some possible exceptions, of course. Do you live in Southern California or Florida? In that case, a pool might well be an important element for more than a few potential buyers. If you live in a state that experiences real winters, though, an in-ground pool holds less value than in the states where the sun hardly sleeps. You may argue that you can have a heated pool in an enclosure, but then it becomes a question of adding the pool for your own enjoyment. Regardless of whether you

choose to install an indoor or outdoor in-ground pool, or even a permanent above-ground pool in a deck, heavily weigh the pros and cons.

Are you going to enjoy the pool yourself for a few years or are you installing it to improve the home's sale value? Are you prepared to fill in an in-ground pool or dismantle an above-ground pool at a buyer's request?

Many potential buyers view pools as a hazard, especially if they have children or grandchildren who will be in the home with them. They will also be aware of the extra costs attached to the pool for maintenance and water bills.

If your wallet will be just as happy paying for all the expenses attached to installing a pool, keeping up with maintenance, and potentially losing out on tens of thousands of dollars when you can't recoup your investment at the sale, then go ahead and have fun with a pool. Do not, however, do it for the resale value of the property. I know that sounds harsh, but it is unfortunately true.

Taking it up a level? Do you need more room to fit your family for a few more years? Is your mother-in-law moving in so you need to build a special suite for her? There are valid reasons to build additions onto your home, but if you are planning on moving out anyway and the addition will only be a temporary bandage, hold off on making expensive changes.

If your house is the smallest in your neighborhood and everyone else has a second story, you have a better chance of recouping your costs than if it is the other way around.

Home buyers want to be comfortable in the home and with their surroundings. If you are adding onto your house in good taste so that it does not stand out like a sore thumb, the appraisal will likely be more in your favor. However, covering 100% of the cost

of any addition is very unlikely, so don't get your hopes up.

Don't go chasing waterfalls. It is lovely to see yards that are beautifully landscaped with colorful plants, mini-hills, and the little trickle of water flowing down amidst the flowers. It's just the kind of picturesque setting that pleases the eye and relaxes the mind.

However, while good landscaping is important for the general enjoyment of any home by its residents, there is no need for you to invest in extravagant creations in an attempt to bring up the home's resale value.

Instead, a sprinkler system is a practical investment of several thousand dollars. There is greater perceived and real value in this addition than in a miniature babbling brook that will attract birds and butterflies. If you are thinking of ways to upgrade your yard, the sprinkler system would be the wiser choice.

The lower level. The question of the basement raises much conversation among homeowners. There are cases in which finishing a basement has proved to be a great financial loss to the homeowner at the time of sale, and cases in which the appraisal value showed an increase, with buyers happily willing to pay the increased price.

Finishing your basement as local code allows can be done in different ways, and if you can manage without completely altering the structure — such as adding walls or creating extra rooms — it is possible to come out a winner.

What about the bathroom? What about the bathroom indeed. A necessary component of any household is the toilet, and a home without one wouldn't be much better than a particularly fancy tent. Renovating a bathroom could cost you only a little or a fortune, depending on your plans. Like upgrading kitchens,

while a modern, efficient bathroom is expected, do not expect to increase the appraisal or sale value of the home substantially with a large investment.

Replacing the floor covering or the wall color will not cost as much as a full-blown renovation that replaces and rearranges the toilet, the sink, the shower or bathtub, or that expands the room size. Installing a spacious doorless shower, a hot tub, or an extra-large vanity topped by an over-sized mirror in addition to new walls, flooring, and lighting will put your price tag on the opposite end of the spectrum.

Do you need a new toilet? Get it. Is your vanity too small? Then replace it. Is the tile cracked or linoleum peeling back? It is time for a floor makeover. Be practical. You do not want potential buyers cringing at the sight of an old toilet or rusted shower head, but you want to recoup as much money as you can at the sale.

If you overspend on luxuries, you may still make the sale, but not at the full amount needed for you to at least break even for your efforts.

The point of much of this walk-through is that making permanent alterations that are extremely unique to you can cost you at the sale. Prospective home buyers won't necessarily view the expensive solar system painted on the ceiling in the dining room as a benefit, and some may even want to have it removed at your expense for them to consider buying.

If you're upgrading an older, 100+-year-old home to include basic systems such as air-conditioning or upgraded electric or if you are updating the ductwork or entirely replacing the heating and air units in a more recent model home, do not expect home buyers to be willing to pay the cost or for the appraisal to reflect what you spent.

There are certain things home buyers take for granted, including central heating and air, functional plumbing, and electricity. If a home lacks any of these the value goes down drastically. However, value is not affected when these are present, even if you were to spend thousands on the best in the industry. You may get some bonus points for more efficient and environmentally friendly equipment, but not much else. This goes also for buying new gutters.

On the other hand, improvements on necessities such as new siding or a new roof will often yield a higher return than the more important but unseen repairs to electricity, piping, or central heating and air.

While you're living in your house, enjoy yourself. Make yourself comfortable. You have a right to be happy. Just do not break the bank when making improvements if you are doing it to increase appraisal or sale value. Making your money back is not guaranteed, and in many cases the risk of loss is great. It is not easy to strike a balance between what makes you happy and what will make the buyer happy, because ultimately, it is very subjective. What you like and what the potential buyers like will differ, but you can do your best to avoid over-personalizing to help make the sale. After all, every buyer needs a place to call home, because we all know, there's no place like it.

CHAPTER 4

Design & Feature Trends to Avoid; Improvements That Add Value

FEATURES TO AVOID

There are home remodeling or upgrade projects that, no matter your own taste, never help at the time of resale. There are also outdated fashions that scream “update me.” These are some of them.

Inconsistent Architecture

Having your home contain a hodgepodge of architectural styles can be off-putting to a potential home buyer. For a ranch-style home, featuring columns on the front porch can be as jarring as a log-cabin-styled home with art deco accents. Each architectural style has its own inherent beauty, so be sure to emphasize these factors. If you don't, it can be like eating pickles on ice cream!

Oversized Kitchens

Hold the rise of celebrity chefs responsible for this one. Kitchens with every appliance imaginable and too much space can be off-putting to prospective home buyers who do not engage in serious entertaining. Unless you are hosting lavish get-togethers with a team of cooks, it may be time to divide the kitchen into segments, like a cozy breakfast nook and a sit-down family table.

Faux “Old World” Design

By decorating or emphasizing a European style (for example, the region of Tuscany has a distinctive and popular style), we may

hope to capture the elegance of the area, but bear in mind that unless you are sourcing the materials (and a vineyard to boot), there will always be something inauthentic about channeling Europe in another region of the world.

White Appliances

If your appliances are white, it is time to upgrade. White may have been at one time a color of choice to emphasize a spotless home (everything shows up on white!), but that is precisely the problem. Home buyers will subconsciously feel the toil associated with wiping every surface down, or see lingering stains that will never come out. In addition, plastic materials fade over time, turning into a non-uniform yellow. Instead, choose black or stainless steel appliances.

Wallpaper

Wallpaper makes a bold statement in a home. However, that same boldness may put off buyers, especially if the wallpaper is cheap, old, or common. In addition, removing wallpaper is a labor-intensive process that can also put off potential home buyers, especially considering that the removal of older wallpaper may damage the walls and create more headaches. Moreover, wallpaper can be a source of undetected mold growth. Stick with paint instead.

Carpeted Bathrooms

There may have been a time when stepping across the master bedroom and onto an icy cold tiled floor made a carpeted bathroom seem like a brilliant idea, but that time is over. That's what bathmats are for. Carpets and water in the same place is simply asking for mold growth or damage. Some modern homes have heated floorings, which is a huge selling point to potential home buyers and far preferable to the hygiene nightmare of a carpeted bathroom.

Gaudy Gold Fixtures and Hardware

Metallic finishes can give your home warmth and sophistication, but if you have shiny gold fixtures and hardware consider removing them. Gold carries a needlessly flashy and gaudy look that may appeal to nouveau riche buyers, but most home buyers find it as outdated as the '80s. Instead, opt to replace these fixtures with warmer metals, such as polished brass or brushed nickel.

Tiled Countertops

Your kitchen and bathroom countertops play a huge part in the eye of a potential home buyer. If they're tiled, consider removing them. At one time, this trend seemed modern, but the nitty-gritty involved with maintaining tiled countertops can be off-putting. Think about it — what do you do if a tile chips and needs to be replaced? Are you prepared to clean the porous grout regularly to prevent mold and bacteria growth? It just makes the already-unwelcome chore of cleaning the kitchen that much worse.

Cheap Wood Paneling

Wood-paneled homes are beautiful. If you have stunning wooden wainscoting throughout your home, leave it alone. However, if the walls of your house contain cheap wood paneling meant for a church basement bingo game, remove it immediately. Lower quality wood paneling instantly dates your home and screams "cheap" to those looking. Worse, it may imply that the paneling was put up to cover up larger problems, like a lack of insulation or unfinished walls.

Taxidermy

Animal heads on display will not appeal to every home buyer, so it's best to remove that moose head when selling. That said, it may not be a hindrance to a sale in certain regions of the U.S., where hunting is popular. On the same note, similar items, like a bull's skull strategically placed over a mantelpiece or in a garden, will only be appealing to certain types of home buyer. Remember that your goal is to make your home an open template so a prospective home buyer can envision living in the house.

Linoleum Flooring

No one likes walking across sticky linoleum barefoot. Simply put, get rid of linoleum flooring. At one time, it was a popular option, especially in the case of patterned linoleum that could mimic wood or tile flooring. Nowadays, linoleum is almost synonymous with inexpensive apartments and a careless sense of decoration. Instead, opt for flooring materials like hardwood that are not only comfortable, but also visually appealing.

Popcorn Ceilings

If a home contains a popcorn ceiling (also known as a “textured ceiling” or a “stucco ceiling”), it instantly communicates to a home buyer that it has not been modernized. Popcorn ceilings were popular from the 1950s all the way to the 1980s as an inexpensive, ubiquitous alternative to cover up imperfections and unadorned drywall. To modern eyes, it looks more like a dreary Motel 6 than a warm home.

Removal of popcorn ceilings, like wallpaper, is a labor-intensive affair, so be sure to get it done before your open house. In addition, be sure to look for asbestos, which can make or break a closing if detected by a home buyer or inspector.

Glass Mosaic Backsplash

One of the most common trends from the mid-2000s is a glass mosaic backsplash for your kitchen or bathroom. While it may have looked good then because of its relative scarcity, today it is nearly everywhere. Consider replacing it with marble tiling or plain white subway tile to obscure your home’s last appointment with an interior designer.

Bold Paint

The first thing that a home buyer sees when viewing a house for the first time is the color — first the exterior and then the individual rooms. Essentially, this first impression of colors sets

the stage for the home’s other features, including furnishings, decorations, and architecture.

If a bold color is applied to the exterior, like a light pink, potential buyers that like to blend in may be put off. If a room is too dark, such as dark red, or too bright, such as chromatic yellow, the features of the home may be muted or obscured as they compete for visual attention. Neutralizing your home is the best option (see “Neutral Colors” below), as buyers can project their own color palette to their tastes without being influenced by your preferences.

Converted Spaces

It is a modern notion to have our spaces fit our personalities, lifestyles, quirks, and interests. That works just fine when you’re living there, but you may want to reconsider the current usage of each space that you have repurposed when it comes time to sell.

Having a garage converted for another purpose besides storage and parking a vehicle may be fine for your needs, but home buyers may just want a garage for what it was originally intended. If you’ve converted your garage into a place to run your small business, exercise room, or music practice room, be sure to bring it back to its normal garage-only state to appeal to the largest number of home buyers.

This is especially true for cities that have limited parking. Similarly, a bedroom converted into a small office or storage space can be off-putting. This happens because it puts the intended purpose of the room into the mind of a home buyer and that’s not your goal when selling your home.

Carpeting

Most home buyers prefer hardwood floors when purchasing a home, even if you have recently taken the trouble of installing new carpet. People may assume that the germs, pet dander, and

dirt of the previous residents are still present within the carpet.

Furthermore, the carpet color choice for the room may clash with their sensibilities or decorating ideas, leading to another item on their mental “To-Do” list when the time comes to customize the home.

Hardwood flooring is a happy medium of natural hues and the ability to customize. Should the home buyer want carpet, then all they have to do is install it on top of the wooden surface.

Too Much Landscape

There has been a trend in recent years of introducing the “outdoor living room” to holistically connect nature with the home. Trimmed bushes in ornate shapes, carpet-like moss walkways, elaborate gardens, and ponds are all visually appealing, but there’s a catch. A property requiring constant maintenance may make potential home buyers hesitate, especially if their future finances are uncertain.

This also includes the recent trend of urban farming. While you may enjoy fresh eggs, honey, and chevre daily, others may be put off by the daily upkeep that animals require and the implications about your home’s cleanliness, so it’s best to leave no signs that your home was once a farm.

Hot Tubs and Pools

There may have been a time when a pool was considered a selling point for new homeowners, but many home buyers realize how much of a maintenance issue and eyesore it can be. This is especially true for above-ground pools, which tend to take up a large amount of space, create a safety and liability hazard for children and guests, and leave an ugly spot of dead grass when removed.

This is true for hot tubs, too. Hot tubs are notorious as a breeding

ground for bacteria, can be difficult to maintain, and removal from a deck or backyard may lead to even more expense down the line (e.g., rebuilding a portion of your deck where the hot tub once was).

Whirlpool Bathtubs

Whirlpool bathtubs may once have been considered an item of luxury and a major selling point, but tastes have changed in recent years. Those who have owned or used them may have enjoyed the luxury, but realized how much water they use (between 80 – 100 gallons) and how much space is taken up that could be used for other bathroom features such as a bigger shower space or a dual-vanity counter.

Minimalist Design

Outfitting your home like an urban loft space has long been a trend in interior home design, but this may not be your best option for selling your home. Minimalist design in this style can make homes seem unnaturally empty, without emphasizing the natural personality of the home that’s attractive to home buyers.

Instead, you should aim to add accents without creating a barren look. Subconsciously, an overly minimalist design communicates to buyers that the home shouldn’t house furnishings and decorations, something that may be at odds with the buyer’s intentions.

IMPROVEMENTS THAT ADD VALUE AND HELP IN THE SALE

Neutral Colors

Agents, interior decorators, and potential home buyers — what do they have in common? They all prefer neutral colors. Whether it’s showcasing your home’s features without distractions or removing the “personality” from the house, the choice of colors is very important when selling your property.

Picking a neutral color like beige or cream helps stoke the interest of those looking at online photographs. Just imagine a bright yellow house on your computer screen!

Let's look at some neutral color trends to help you sell your home:

- **Green:** A mid-range green, not too dark and not too light, can be a versatile color to bring out the best in your home. Green has a cheery, homespun coziness when paired with yellow, but also brings out the rustic features of the home when paired with an appropriate shade of brown. This is especially true for wooden cabinets in a kitchen or bathroom, creating an inviting atmosphere. However, caution should be used for using green against shrubbery or bushes.
- **Gray:** In terms of sophistication and modernity, gray is an excellent neutral color. It can help accent colors stand out (like a bright green lamp or a red plush chair), or it can be the focal point when used as a darker shade to enhance urban-styled furnishings. Of course, gray can be a bit dull and business-like if not used with caution, so experiment with different hues to achieve the desired effect.
- **White:** White is an excellent color to make your home's features pop. White matches just about every color, whether it's used on the wainscoting, awnings, or ceilings. However, it should be noted that many shades of white are available, and not all are created equal. Remember that while white IS a neutral color, it shouldn't be overused. Painting your entire interior white makes it seem like an unfinished home, or it may be too bright. However, white is a perfect complement to other neutral

colors, as long as you're willing to keep it clean.

- **Red and Orange:** These colors are a bit of a gamble when it comes to finding neutral hues. A soft red or orange works well for kitchens or dining rooms, where they exude a natural warmth and a vibrant, festive atmosphere. However, a dark red or orange can seem too serious for rooms.
- **Blue:** For many people, light shades of blue have a soothing, tranquil effect. Blues should be reserved for master bedrooms, bathrooms, or rooms with lots of natural light, as these conjure subconscious feelings of the beach or a pleasant vacation in one's memory. Dark blues can have a stern, ominous effect, like storm clouds or night time, and should only be used with caution where there is plenty of light or where that atmosphere is not at odds with a room's obvious purpose (e.g. a study).
- **Brown:** Brown and its variants are excellent colors to choose for your home. From dark earthy browns to the ever-present beige, brown is a versatile hue that is a great replacement for places where white would seem like an obvious choice. Dark browns give off a cozy feel that can keep a room from feeling too big, but be careful not to overdo it, as home buyers may make a snap judgment that the size of the room seems too small.

Once you've chosen which neutral colors best suit your home, don't forget that adding a splash of color can bring a room to life. A light blue room with a splash of orange can open it up and play on the contrasts. Try to keep the color ratio at a maximum of 80% neutral, 20% others to avoid having colors clash.

Craftsmanship

Authenticity is a big factor in selling your home. Many can claim to have replicas, but to feature a genuine display of artwork or artisanal furnishings and features (e.g. a custom fireplace or ornate woodwork on the stairs and trim) can be a key factor in convincing a prospective home buyer that your home is the one they want to buy.

Bold Front Door

An easy way to snag buyers is to emphasize your house's curb appeal with a boldly painted front door. A dark red door among neutral colors can have potential home buyers eager to see what else the home features.

Embracing Textures

It is widely believed — mistakenly — that a neutral home must be a boring home. In reality there are many neutral features that could work well with some creativity. Do not be afraid to experiment. Mixing wood grains with plain window dressing can work, as can faux fur with exposed brick. This can be especially interesting visually, as it emphasizes or deemphasizes different features depending on your color and texture combinations.

Shape and Space Considerations

Don't forget about using the shape of the room to your advantage when selling your home. Instead of large wraparound couches, more elegant pieces of furniture can create a visual impression of space and utility, which is a proper use of minimalism.

Emphasizing how organizational systems of the house like hidden closet space or functional artwork can open up new possibilities to potential buyers can have them already mentally unpacking all of their possessions before they even see another home.

Open Layout

If you have two adjoining rooms with a similar purpose, consider

knocking down the walls to create an open floor plan. For instance, a kitchen and a dining room can be combined to create a more open atmosphere for entertaining guests and family, which is a great selling point for home buyers. The same can work for a dining room and a living room, forming a "great room" space that can create a stunning impression for those that visit the home.

Universal Designs

Considering that a large portion of homeowners will be approaching their twilight years soon, having handicap-accessible features that can accommodate older families can be a huge selling point to sell your home. This can include roll-in showers, floating cabinets/sinks, wide doorways, and wheelchair accessible entrances, just to name a few. Of course, there are many features that are designed for this segment of the population and not disconcerting to ordinary home buyers, so consider incorporating them if your home is located in a retirement-age area like Florida or Arizona.

Make It Green

The "Green"(environmentally friendly) remodeling trend is here to stay. From increasing energy efficiency, healthier indoor environments to using sustainable materials, making your home greener is an attractive feature to home buyers who not only want to save money (including federal/local subsidies for participating programs), but also feel good about contributing to the welfare of future generations.

Smarter Homes

Technology is bringing enhancements to homes and lifestyles daily, so expect potential home buyers to inquire about how "smart" your home is. Automation for appliances, utilities, and security at the touch of a smartphone can be attractive features for your home. It is important to find a system that can work in the future, so be sure to find a dependable company that

has software that can be updated as newer features come on the market. Make sure to be careful if you plan to go all the way in making your home a “smart home” though, as many seemingly-reliable companies peddling such features have gone defunct, leaving the formerly-interconnected home features not only useless but vulnerable to security problems!

Hardwood Flooring

Hardwood flooring is a versatile component and an aid to selling your home. It matches with nearly any style, and also allows the potential home buyer to stain it with whatever color matches their current furniture.

Stainless Steel Kitchens

In almost perfect contrast to the white kitchens we discussed before, stainless steel can blend in with different colors to create a cohesive effect while still having the visual luxury of exposed metal. In addition, clean-up is much easier and stainless steel won't rust over time, which is an attractive feature to home buyers.

Don't Forget the Ceiling

While we cautioned homeowners to get rid of textured popcorn ceilings, to create a look of timeless elegance consider replacing them with planks or a grid-like coffered ceiling to give a room a fresh character. This is especially true for rooms like a den or a study.

Crown Molding

Crown molding creates an instantaneously elegant look throughout your home, even in small touches. It can create a centerpiece as a mantle for a fireplace or as little accents around your home, creating an attractive feel for potential home buyers.

CHAPTER 5

Don't Overdo It: Keeping Your Market Area in Mind

How much should you plan on upgrading during your remodel project? That depends on what you are trying to accomplish. You can, after all, spend anywhere from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands on the very same room. We are taking up this discussion with the notion that your home remodeling has to do with getting a good return from your investment and assuming that you will be selling the house at some point in the future. If you have no intention of moving at any point in the next ten or more years, ROI does not matter as much as the return that comes from enjoying the finished product.

It seems intuitive that you would upgrade as much as your budget allows and make your home into the jewel of the neighborhood. Caution, however, is in order here. While you will no doubt enjoy knowing that you have transformed your humble ranch into an HGTV-ready show home, such a move could backfire in a big way when you put your home on the market.

Look down your street. Observe the condition of the homes and yards in your neighborhood. Are they well maintained or a little run-down? What about the inside of the homes that you have been in? Are the interiors tastefully decorated and contemporary or do they reflect the fashions of generations past, sporting an array of burnt orange countertops, olive green appliances, and paisley wallpaper? Whatever the case, that should be your measuring stick.

The reason is simple — no one who can afford a \$200,000-dollar

home is going to look in an area surrounded by \$100,000-dollar homes. Conversely, anyone looking in a neighborhood of \$100,000 homes can't afford the \$200,000 you would like to charge, or they are looking for a deal.

Therefore, if you go all-in and design and build the ultimate spa-getaway in your master bathroom or put in that home theater you've always wanted in the basement, you are not going to get that money back if you are the only home in the area with those kinds of features. Your home will sit on the market for months until you come down to a much lower price than you would have wanted.

To avoid these kinds of mistakes, we recommend making use of a real estate agent to help determine the types of renovations you can pursue that will return a substantial amount of the investment cost. Your agent will already be familiar with the general standards of the surrounding area and what price ranges people are looking for. He will also be familiar with what improvements bring the best ROI, what styles are currently trending, and will have suggestions on how to accomplish them quickly, including recommendations for reputable, qualified contractors.

While you may have been thinking about going full-bore and putting in granite countertops and all new kitchen cabinets — a renovation that would cost thousands — your real estate agent might talk you down to fresh laminate for the countertop and a new coat of paint for the cabinets to brighten up the room. Your remodel cost just went down from several thousand dollars and a week or two without a kitchen to a little more than one thousand dollars and a day or two of inconvenience.

An agent will also go beyond your neighborhood, looking at how your home compares with similar homes in the larger area. This is important as your real competition extends beyond what you

can see out your front window.

Unless your neighborhood has a unique setting or is exceptionally close to parks, beaches, or a vibrant downtown area, there will generally be no reason for a person to buy a house on your street over one in another neighborhood on the other side of town. Your real estate agent will be able to do side-by-side comparisons of your home with others that are similar, making sure that you are able to compete effectively across a wide area.

Take the general condition of the outside of the home into account as well. Where the surrounding yards are patchy and overgrown, it is not worth putting a ton of money into flower beds and trellises that people driving by might mistake for a bed and breakfast stop-over or a fine place for their wedding reception. You know you have gone too far if people stop and ask how much it costs to rent the space.

However, prospective buyers will also seek out new homes by driving around areas they like, looking at neighborhoods they think may be in their price range. Stone walks, hanging vines, and attractive flora will catch a buyer's eye. You should, at a bare minimum, present an image of a well-cared-for house that is in solid condition. Standing out a little bit is not a bad thing, but don't overdo it.

Some agents say that the longer you are in the house after the renovation the more likely you are to recoup the costs as home prices tend to go up over time and natural appreciation will absorb whatever costs you incurred. On the other hand, other real estate professionals say that the more recent the renovation, the more likely a buyer will see that it is new and assign more value to it. If your privacy fence or bathroom are a few years old, they will have begun to show normal signs of age and blend into the rest of the property.

In any renovation, be it landscaping, doorways, or kitchens, do not try to meet the highest demands of fashion. Make it contemporary, but don't go for the bleeding edge of home design. Not only are you likely to spend too much money and price your home out of the market, but you are likely to find that a couple years down the road your height of fashion has become yesterday's news.

In short, keep it simple. If you are remodeling with an eye towards resale, less is often more. Simple projects like replacing exterior doors, fresh stain on the deck, and a fresh coat of paint are more likely to aid your home sale and result in a good ROI than larger projects like wholesale reconstructions and outbuilding additions.

Make sure that the basics are set, taking care of leaking pipes and buggy appliances, and make sure all the doors and windows open and close as expected.

If you do decide to go with a larger project, pick one that leads to a good ROI like a relatively modest kitchen remodel, always being careful not to spend so much that you price yourself out of the market and make it harder to sell.

CHAPTER 6

Outdoor Improvements

Curb appeal is undeniably critical when it comes to making or breaking the sale of your home. Having your front yard in pristine condition will give you a leg up in the buyer's opinion of your home.

IMPROVING YOUR FRONT YARD

Landscaping plays a key role in curb appeal, and is generally the first impression that a buyer gets. Properly planning your landscape is an absolute must in swaying a buyer's decision, and in potentially raising the value of your home.

If you don't believe that landscaping is the icing on the cake, consider these statistics:

- 90% of all real estate agents encourage their clients to invest in having their landscape cleaned up prior to putting their home on the market.
- Having a beautiful landscape can increase your property's estimated value by 12% on average, and will increase your resale value by up to 14%.
- Your home will spend as much as six fewer weeks on the market.
- If you spend 5% of your home's value on landscaping, the ROI can be 150%, if not more.

However, before you start planting flower beds and trees, sit down and plan on paper what exactly you will do with your front

yard to step up your landscape game.

YOUR LANDSCAPING PLAN

Start by constructing a list of what you'd like to incorporate into your front yard based on what you already have. For example, do you have a stone patio leading to your front door? If so, consider planting a flower bed around the perimeter with bright, vibrant colors to help boost the positive feeling of your landscape.

If you have a large tree in your front yard, a bird bath underneath it would definitely be a nice touch. Creating a plan will also help you to budget everything. If you'd like to step your game up further, consult with a landscape architect to further refine your landscaping plan.

They will come out and show you what would look good and where, within your front yard, while taking your budget into account.

PLANTING TREES

If you plan on planting trees, research the issue or speak with a landscape architect to go over your options. You don't want to plant a tree that will take decades to grow, such as an oak, but instead go with one that will only take a few years, such as a red maple.

You can check the "value" of existing trees before you commit with the National Tree Benefit Calculator (<http://treebenefits.com/calculator>). This online tool allows anyone to make a simple estimation of the benefits individual street-side trees provide. With inputs of location, species, and tree size, users will get an understanding of the environmental and economic value trees provide on an annual basis. You can find out which trees are worth what when it comes to property

value, stormwater runoff, carbon dioxide reduction, energy savings, and more. For example, a red maple that is 24 inches in diameter is worth \$244 in McLean, VA, and will add a solid value to your property.

KEEP THE NATIVE PLANTS!

Even if you're not a fan of the native plants in your yard, do not remove them. Saguaro, which grows in Arizona, can add up to \$5,000 to a home's value, depending on the size. If you have a certain native plant on your property, you could even get certification from The National Wildlife Federation for creating or incorporating a natural back or front yard habitat for butterflies, birds, and other animals who are looking for a place to feed and roost. Therefore, not only will keeping your native plants help to make your landscape look fuller, but they will also add vital properly value.

LETTING IT FILL IN AND LEARNING TO CARE FOR IT

Real estate experts advise that you should not conduct serious landscaping, which includes planting trees and flowers, right before you are planning on putting your home on the market. Instead, organize and act upon your landscaping plan at least six months or more before you list your home for sale, to ensure that the work you are doing on your front yard has some time to grow, fill in, and look its best.

Once your landscaping additions have had the proper amount of time to fill in, it becomes a worthwhile investment in your home's overall property value. You will also need to learn how to properly care for all of the additions you have made, unless you are willing to hire landscaping experts to maintain it in your stead.

If you plan on doing the maintenance yourself, you can and should research the plants, flowers, and trees on the internet, where you can find gardening websites and blogs that will help give you extensive care instructions and further tips on how to make the most of your front yard.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTDOOR LIGHTS

Even though buyers are most likely going to be coming during the day to see your home, outdoor lights are important for many reasons. Attractive outdoor lighting is a desirable feature that most buyers look for to provide convenience and security.

Outdoor lights help to prevent tripping and falling over uneven surfaces or anything in the way. Lighting can add tasteful decoration to the side of your home and highlight landscape choices when placed in strategic areas. Lighting keeps intruders away, reducing the risk of burglaries.

Attractive outdoor lighting, then, is definitely worth your time and money and should be an essential component of your landscape plan.

IMPROVING THE EXTERIOR OF YOUR HOME

The appeal of the exterior of your house is just as important as the interior, possibly even more so, since the house's exterior is one of the first things that buyers are going to see during a showing or an open house.

Sprucing up the exterior of the actual house is as important as having a beautiful landscape around it. There are many ways you can do so, without breaking the bank or pulling your hair out! As you already know, curb appeal is vital when it comes to selling your home for a higher price, so ensure that you are doing the right things in improving the exterior of your home before you

put it up for sale on the market — research the area, research your improvements, and don't hesitate to consult experts!

APPROXIMATE ROIs

Below is a list of home remodeling and improvement projects that either increase market value or improve the salability of a home, along with the approximate ROI that can be expected on that improvement.

- Add or upgrade a patio or deck: 70%
- Replace your garage door: 98%
- Major kitchen renovations or upgrade: 68.9%
- Minor kitchen renovations or upgrade: 75.4%
- Add an attic space or bedroom: 53%
- Replace your siding with vinyl: 83%
- Replace your siding with fiber-cement mix: 79.3%
- Upgrade your bathroom: 62%
- Remodel your basement: 63%

If you're looking to step your game up in terms of your ROI, the bullet points listed above are the best ways to do it. Not only do the suggestions for exterior home improvement help the curb appeal of the exterior of your home, they also help the overall value of your home.

DON'T OVERLOOK YOUR ROOF

When selling your home, you want to make sure that everything is in working order and in perfect condition. Considering that, do not overlook your roof as if it is not the literal roof over your heads. Overlooking your roof: don't do it!

DECIDING ON WHETHER YOUR ROOF NEEDS TO BE FIXED

Now that you're paying attention to your roof, you'll need to figure out what you actually have to do with it. The best way to decide whether you need your roof repaired or replaced before putting it up for sale is to look at the current market, check into the sales activity in your general area, and take a good look at your home.

In taking this good look, spend some time on the roof. Have a local service provider go up and take a good look to see if roofing issues could raise any problems with potential buyers. If the inspection comes back with potential issues regarding your roof, whether minor or major, you need to make a decision.

The firm who did the inspection could probably tell you what it would cost to have it repaired, and may even be qualified to do it. Or, you could bring in a roofing expert to get an estimate. In any event, ensure that you speak with at least three different providers, as the costs tend to vary widely.

Once you know the total costs and have estimates in hand, you can then look at your budget to see whether you can afford it. If not, be ready to warn each buyer who comes to view your home that the roof does need some work. You will also need to be prepared to adjust the selling price as well, since the buyer and new homeowner will be the one paying the costs of that new roof.

Otherwise, have the repairs done as soon as possible to ensure that the condition of your roof does not worsen, and adjust your selling price to factor the value of the repairs into the overall price.

Homes that are upgraded, have gotten all the necessary repairs, and are overall in great condition have the necessary potential to sell faster and for more money than their worse-maintained

counterparts.

As an added step, have a roofing specialist conduct a maintenance service and certify your roof for an additional four to five years. Once you have this certification, you will be able to show potential buyers that they will not have to worry about issues with the roof for the duration of the guaranteed period.

REPLACING THE OLD WINDOWS

Many homeowners overlook the importance of replacing their old windows when it comes to renovating, upgrading, and improving the home before putting it on the market. Old, outdated windows should be replaced with new ones for the purposes of energy efficiency, safety, and security.

Even though replacing all your old windows may be costly, depending on how large your home is, the dimensions of the windows that are needed, and the total number of windows that need to be replaced, it's a task that is worth it when contemplating the sale of a house.

Windows that are aged well past their prime become a burglary risk, as they will no doubt be easier to breach, and will be a target for opportunistic criminals. Old windows are easy to spot, especially on a street of houses that all have new, updated ones.

You can also expect a fair ROI on window replacement — approximately 70%.

Buyers want to see a modern, up-to-date aesthetic when they are shopping around for a new home. To further that impression, improved and up-to-date windows are an absolute must before your home goes on the market.

BEAUTIFYING YOUR BACKYARD

The backyard is also often overlooked as a crucial part of your home, especially from a buyer's point of view. This is where the family will play with pets or their children, have barbecues, entertain friends or family members, and much more.

Therefore, creating an oasis in your backyard that will stun each prospective buyer to see it is the best way to not only add more value to your home, but to sell your home as fast as possible as well.

These days, there are multiple trends that buyers might be looking for when it comes to the backyard of their dreams. You, as the seller, will want to incorporate these as much as possible and use them to your advantage to get your home's value through the roof and off your hands as fast as possible.

MORE TREES

Over time, trees become beautiful pieces of art that really tie a backyard together. If you're looking to add a few before you sell your home, do so right away. Get any type that is about 8 inches tall and one- to two-inches in diameter that will sit within a pot that is 15 gallons in size, to ensure that in three to five years the trees will be in full effect.

SMALLER LAWN

This may surprise you, considering most people see a large, healthy, green lawn in their mind when they picture the perfect backyard, but these days a smaller lawn is the trend. Installing deep planting beds in the right places with wide borders and perhaps even some shrubs, for instance, is a good way to ensure that, though the lawn may be smaller, the backyard feels neither empty nor small.

To make the backyard and the lawn appear larger, have a square or ring of flower beds going around the back fence or wall, depending on the setup you have.

Planting plenty of vibrant, brightly colored flowers will bring a more positive, bubbly vibe to the backyard and will allow potential buyers to better picture themselves and their family entertaining or having fun in the sun outside for many years to come.

ADDING A SANCTUARY

To create the perfect backyard sanctuary, incorporating water is the perfect way to have a beautiful, oasis-like backyard. For example, a small pond (with or without fish), a fountain, a pool, or a hot tub with some comfortable areas to sit will give potential buyers the feeling that they have stepped into a small, beautiful, sweet sanctuary that could be their very own.

THE RESALE VALUE OF A SWIMMING POOL

Though installing a swimming pool may seem like a sure bet in terms of resale value, you must first crunch the numbers to figure out whether it is even worth it. Generally stated, install a swimming pool if you want one and are going to be in the home long enough to enjoy it. As an investment in market value, there are better ways to go.

The ROI will generally be between 15% and 25%, which is not very much in resale value. Depending on the size, the depth, and the accessories, the installation costs will run you between \$5,000 and \$13,000. Moreover, those figures do not include the costs for chemical balancing and other ongoing maintenance.

It also greatly depends on where you live. For example, if your home is located in the Midwest, you're looking at an ROI of only

6%, whereas if your home is in Florida, you could get an ROI of 11%. The best way to figure out whether installing a swimming pool is worth it or not is to speak with your real estate agent. They will be able to tell you whether it would be worth doing in your specific region and market.

RENOVATING YOUR SWIMMING POOL

If you already have a swimming pool, you will need to ensure that it is in perfect condition before you have any open houses or viewings. Check for the following pool faults to determine whether your swimming pool needs renovations:

- Liner, decking, and other materials may have worn down over time.
- Plumbing, filter, pump, and any mechanical or electric system that is old and needs to be upgraded to current standards.
- Old design or styling that no longer looks good and needs to be replaced.

You can speak with your real estate agent about the current state of your pool, ask their opinion, and ask for help in finding someone who can renovate and repair your pool for you before you put your home on the market. An updated, beautiful swimming pool can help to add a fair percentage to its ROI and add value to your home.

CHAPTER 7

Flooring, Walls and Lighting

So far, we have examined the pros and cons of remodeling and who can help you make intelligent decisions about where to direct your time, money, and energy. Now we will move on to discussing in greater depth the projects you might undertake to improve value or salability and what materials you should consider using to ensure you are getting the biggest possible ROI on your project.

FLOORING

Floors have become show pieces for well-decorated homes in recent years. This highlights the importance of your decision to change what you have, whether that means carpet or hardwood. It is no secret that hardwood floors are far and away the most popular flooring choice across the nation. This is not a new trend and the preference for hardwood flooring has been growing since the early 1980s, becoming the dominantly preferred surface by the 1990s. This preference for hardwood has continued to grow well into the first decades of the 2000s.

Realtors® confirm this is often a requirement for the homes that people want, and some screen actively out any homes that do not have hardwood flooring. In a recent (unscientific) survey on a Realtor's® website, 95% of consumer respondents preferred hardwood for common living areas such as the living room, dining room, and family room.

If your hardwood flooring is hiding underneath carpet, rip up the carpet and refinish the hardwood floors. It will instantaneously improve the value of your home and help it to sell faster. If you

can't afford to do all of it, or if it's too inconvenient, at least start with one room to show buyers what the wood could look like.

Removing carpet to show hardwood floors is a step in the right direction. You may be pleasantly surprised by the relatively low cost of refinishing hardwood, so it's usually an investment that gets a strong ROI. It will certainly help sell your house faster.

Few other flooring options even come close to hardwood in popularity, and then only in niche markets like Florida where ceramic tile runs a close second. However, ceramic is also one of the more expensive options available. Between budget, comfort, and ease of installation and care there are several factors to consider in favor of hardwood.

CARPET

Carpeting is the flooring that most of us grew up with. While hardwood had been the norm for many years prior, during the second half of the 20th century carpet quickly overcame bare wood, covering our bedrooms, living rooms, and even creeping into dining and bathroom areas. While carpeting has fallen out of favor in recent years, and is not the ideal seller it once was, carpet does still have many positive qualities.

These include the fact that it absorbs sound better than any other option on the market, making it nice if you have young children or pets. Speaking of young children, they tend to fall down a lot and carpet provides a much softer impact. It also retains heat better than a harder option, and is more comfortable to walk on when barefoot in general — both perks in colder environments. Finally, it is considerably less expensive than many other options at \$2-15 per square foot according to the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA).

There are drawbacks, perhaps most visible among them the

difficulty of keeping carpeting clean. Every bit of food that is dropped and speck of dirt that is tracked into the house can get ground deep into the carpet if not immediately cleaned, and will prove reluctant to come back out. Pet stains can alter the color and leave an odor that can linger for a long time after.

In recent years, a related problem has come to the fore. The fact the carpets retain so much of the surrounding environment means that they also retain allergens and have been blamed for exacerbating allergy related problems and asthma — not to mention their capacity to absorb water, harboring and hiding mold.

These problems can be mitigated by frequent steam cleaning, but this at least partially negates the initial savings in cost.

LINOLEUM

Linoleum is a hard, durable material that has also fallen out of favor in recent years, giving way to tile and hardwood. However, it is cheap (\$2-9/ft.), the color goes all the way through (a nice attribute if you should drop a kitchen knife on it), and it can be cleaned or patched easily.

It also lends itself to design creativity as it is easy to cut into unique shapes and styles. Linoleum can be a good way to create an eye-catching look for your kitchen or bathroom.

However, that same design flexibility can lead homeowners to give in to the temptation of trends and wind up dating their floors out of the market. It also needs to be polished occasionally to continue looking good and will stain if you do not clean spills quickly enough.

CERAMIC TILE

Tile is one of the most durable options available. It will take a hit from nearly anything you drop on it. Should the tile get scratched, it can easily be buffed out. Tile is also highly stain resistant and still fairly inexpensive at \$2-9 a square foot. Tile is also advantageous from a design perspective, as there is a nearly unlimited number of options available for creating eye-catching designs.

Naturally, the same caution about those designs mentioned with linoleum applies here. Additionally, ceramic's strengths are also often weakness in other ways. That same durability can lead to breaking anything you do drop on it. And if the tile does chip, it can be very difficult to do a quality repair job on your own.

Tile can be harder on your feet as well, making you want to rush back to those carpeted areas. Dirt also tends to collect in the grout lines, making it difficult to clean.

VINYL

Vinyl is commonly found in many kitchens and bathrooms in middle-class neighborhoods across the country. It is easy to clean if done quickly and is also the cheapest option available at \$1-7 a square foot. If comfort is an issue, this is the most comfortable option other than carpet.

Unfortunately, that affordability comes at the price of durability and it is easily scratched, with repairs generally requiring a professional to come in and replace whole sections of the floor. It can also be susceptible to water damage if it is laid down in tile form as liquids will find their way between the seams.

HARDWOOD

As stated, hardwood is easily the most popular choice for flooring today. Hardwood floors present a clean and distinguished look

throughout the home. It is easy to clean, durable, and tends to be more comfortable than tile. It also has the advantage of being able to be restored every few years, meaning that any scratches, cracks, or loose boards can be corrected periodically, resulting in what looks like a brand-new floor any time it is refinished, often at far less cost than changing out carpet or any other material.

There are negatives of course. Hardwood floors tend to be cold and not retain heat as well as carpet or vinyl and the refinishing is difficult and time-consuming. The price can also get quite high, running from \$6-15 per square foot.

Taking everything into consideration, if you can afford hardwood floors, get them. Buyers are looking for them and will even pass up homes without hardwood, regardless of their other virtues. Not only are they looking, but more than half of agents report that buyers are willing to pay more for a home with wood floors. And given the former craze for carpeting, it is very possible that under your dated shag is an oak goldmine waiting to be uncovered and refinished to its former glory.

Should you not have such a treasure waiting under your feet and budget is an issue, you can go with an engineered wood or laminate floor, which provide many of the advantages of hardwood at less cost.

WALLS

No doubt you can remember not very far back when the color of choice for nearly every wall was white. Bland, boring white.

Of course, there was also that phase of bold, dark colors in the 1990s that seems a bit garish by contemporary standards. And if we go back a bit more, we might be able to remember wallpaper covered with very small print that looked like a precursor to those Magic Eye pictures.

Times and tastes change and if you are looking at selling your home in the near future, few things will help you more for less money than a fresh look to the walls. Keep in mind though, buyer preferences are likely different than they were when you first bought your home.

PAINT

Paint is the most popular wall covering and has been for years. It is easy to apply yourself, is relatively cheap, and anything but an eggshell or flat finish is easy to clean.

A satin finish provides a good balance of qualities by offering a slight sheen that brightens the room without also advertising any flaws in the wall the way a glossier finish would.

When it comes to colors, avoid painting a room entirely in a bland color like white or a bold color like violet or a deep blue. One color to particularly avoid is orange, which Realtor.com says is a turn-off to at least 54% of buyers. Instead, go with a warmer, lighter hue. Popular colors include greens, blues, yellows, and even grays.

Feel free to paint the trim or decorate with a bolder color to accent the room. If you are particularly adventurous, you can even go ahead and do a whole accent wall in a bold color — just not in every room.

One place where white is still recommended is the exterior of the home. It looks clean and is easy to accent by painting the trim, doors, and shutters a bolder color that will help your home stand out from the crowd and enhance its curb appeal.

When it comes to how much to spend, there is not much to worry about here. A hundred dollars will buy you all the paint

and materials you need for nearly any given room. If you are repainting with the same color or one similar to what is already there, you can save a little money by going with a lower quality paint and only doing one coat. If you are completely changing the color though, spend the extra money for a good paint, preferably from a specialty store like Sherwin-Williams or Repcolite.

WALLPAPER

Once the most popular option for covering up drywall or accenting a room in the form of borders, wallpaper has very much fallen on hard times of late, and with good reason. More than most other options, wallpaper is highly personal. Most people are not likely to love eagles, wolves, or a particular flower as much as you once did. On top of that, improperly applied wallpaper can begin to peel and is nearly impossible to remove without causing damage to the walls — damage that then has to be repaired before painting can begin.

For these reasons, nearly every agent working today will encourage a seller to remove it and switch to paint before listing.

It is worth noting, though, that wallpaper is making a minor comeback. If you spend time watching shows like Property Brothers, you will have noticed it showing up in nurseries and laundry rooms on occasion.

Given this, there is no harm in checking with a real estate agent to see if there are buyers in the area who are actually interested in the more modern designs of wallpaper. Still, should you go this route, approach with extreme caution and do not proceed without doing your homework first.

LIGHTING

Lighting can have a huge effect on the way your home looks. A

well-lit home is warm and inviting, while not having enough light can highlight flaws and make your home look dark and dingy.

There are many things that you can do to improve lighting and make a good impression on buyers when they walk through your home.

- **Bulbs.** Upgrading your lighting from older 60W incandescent bulbs to 100W-equivalent LED bulbs will both give you more light and save you money in the long run. The cost of LED bulbs is high per bulb, but is steadily dropping. Add in the fact that they only use 20-25% the energy of an incandescent bulb and can last up to 25 times longer and they are a very worthwhile investment, especially if you do not plan on listing in the immediate future.
- **Fixtures.** If you have some spare money and plan on listing soon, consider replacing outdated recessed or track lighting with more modern monorail or pendant lights. Exterior lights are also a prime candidate for updating as they tend to get overlooked when you are busy focusing on the interior of the home, but are essential to forming a good impression in the mind of a buyer.

In addition to the lights off the side of the garage and front door, consider placing inexpensive stake lighting along the driveway or the walk up to the front door, instantly making your home more inviting.

CHAPTER 8

Cooking Up a New Kitchen

You've heard it said before and we will say it again — kitchens sell houses. Especially with the rise of eat-in kitchens and breakfast nooks tucked in out-of-the-way corners, the kitchen is a place where your family is likely to spend a considerable amount of time together.

It is also very often located in either a central position in the home or is one of the first places you walk through when entering from the garage or front door, making it an area that you are at least going to pass through several times a day even if you so eat out two of every three meals.

As such, kitchens are a prime target for any home remodeling project.

They are also one of the places where you can get yourself into trouble, spending far more money than you are ever going to see return. If you recall from earlier, a mid-range kitchen remodel has a much better ROI than a more expensive job will provide.

Therefore, we'll be steering towards a combination of simple, quick fixes you can use if you are on a tight budget and other, more ambitious projects that you can tackle if you have more time and money.

If your budget is high and you must have those marble floors and countertop, go right ahead. In fact, send pictures — that sort of thing looks great, it's just not our focus here.

APPLIANCES

Unless you have a very modern kitchen with point-of-use refrigerators, drawer microwaves, and everything else hidden behind cabinet doors, a buyer's eyes are naturally going to be drawn to the appliances. If they are clearly old, whether a white that's gone dingy with from of use or even the dreaded avocado green, they will be sure to turn the buyer off. A relatively inexpensive solution is to replace your older appliances with new ones sporting a stainless-steel finish.

It offers the same look, feel, and protection of full stainless at a lower cost. And if you are not listing for a while, don't feel like you need to replace everything all at once. Take it one at a time — just make sure they match when it comes time to sell.

As for what to get, stay away from the luxury brands, they just don't bring enough ROI. Look for a good consumer brand with solid reviews. Keep in mind when replacing appliances that sleek is in.

If you have an old electric coil stove, get rid of it, replacing it with a smooth top stove. Where possible, budget allowing, put in a cook-top separate from the oven and put the oven in the wall, opening at approximately waist height.

If your fridge has a massive ice-maker with tons of buttons, consider looking for a replacement with a water filter mounted on the inside, keeping it out of sight. In general, the less busy the visible surface, the better.

CABINETS

Cabinets can easily be the second most, or even the most expensive aspect of a kitchen remodel. If you have the money, replacing all the cabinets with a contemporary style that focuses on simplicity will serve you well. When doing this, get cabinets

that go all the way to the ceiling, adding valuable storage space and getting rid of collection points for the dust and junk that tend to accumulate on top of lower cabinets.

If you already have wood cabinets and doors, a simple paint job will accomplish much the same effect. White is a commonly popular color for kitchens, though grays are also in vogue. Make sure you get a good quality paint for the cabinets, since they will take the beating a kitchen often receives. Going cheap here can lead to scratches and chips within weeks or months, ruining the effect for a buyer.

Also on the cabinet front, one can give an updated look to existing cabinets by replacing the hinges, handles and pulls. Feel free to go with a uniform brushed nickel look or add a splash of color with accented pulls, breaking up the white.

Another excellent feature to add, either as part of a full-scale remodel or as a separate project, is drawers and shelves that slide out. This allows the contents to be organized and accessed easily without having to bend over and reach into the back of a cabinet, groping for that can of beans you swear you put there last week.

COUNTERS

Laminate counters were once the norm throughout many kitchens. These days, options like butcher-block tops, quartz, and even concrete have grown in popularity. Granite was once the go-to option for a countertop upgrade and is still very popular, but it has lost much of its luster in recent years. Part of the reason is that it has become considerably more mainstream, losing its rarity value.

Granite counters also need to be resealed annually to prevent stains, and are very unforgiving to anything that is dropped on them. Because of this, crushed quartz tops have become an

immensely popular alternative to granite.

Quartz is available in more colors, is more forgiving, lower maintenance, and lower price than granite, making it an excellent option if your budget allows. Butcher block is also a great option that won't break a moderately healthy bank account. It also provides a distinctive look that sharply distinguishes itself from the look of natural stone.

Barring any of those options, going with a fresh laminate is a very budget-friendly option and there are many styles now that imitate the look of granite and quartz. Using the same material for the backsplash can also help give a modern look to your kitchen at a fraction of the cost.

One project to take on if there is any room in the budget is to get rid of any choke points. The kitchen is often a high traffic area with people having to pass through it to get from one end of the house to another. Considering this, it is somewhat surprising that it was once common to have a peninsula come out directly across from the refrigerator.

The refrigerator is one of the most commonly used parts of the kitchen and is frequently being opened for snacks or gathering food to cook whatever meal is coming up next. This creates a natural bottleneck that should be removed by moving either the peninsula or the fridge.

SINK

The sink is easily the most-used area of any kitchen. From dumping unfinished beverages to cleaning dishes, washing hands, or getting a drink of water, any homeowner visits their sink several times a day. As such, it should be one of the more eye-catching parts of your kitchen as well.

The simplest thing that can be done to modernize a sink is to replace the faucet. Go with something contemporary with multiple spray settings, an extendable nozzle, and a built-in filter.

If you're also doing the countertops anyway, consider spending a bit of money to entirely replace your old sink with a modern under-mount sink. These result in a cleaner-looking counter and even make cleaning said counter easier, since food can be swept straight from the counter into a sink with a garbage disposal.

LIGHTING

The earlier advice on lighting still applies here: increase your wattage and efficiency by replacing incandescent bulbs with LEDs, and consider an update to your fixtures. There are some kitchen-specific ideas to consider though.

Light is very important for food preparation, yet all too often the counters and lower cabinets can be left in the dark as poorly-positioned light sources are blocked by you, your other cabinets or appliances, or by simple poor placement.

A quick fix for this is to get adhesive lights or rope lights to put under the cabinets. You can turn them on and off as needed and if they are placed intelligently they will add to the value of your kitchen with a very small investment.

These are a great solution for any dark pantries or cabinets in your kitchen and throughout the home as well.

Naturally, if you are already doing things like replacing cabinets or the backsplash, it will make more sense to install the necessary wiring for installed lights under the cabinets.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

You've taken all our advice and done the simple fixes to update your kitchen and still get a good amount of money back. Yet, it still needs something. Time to get a little creative.

Do you have empty wall space? Put up some open shelving. It is low cost, leaves the space feeling more open than if you installed cabinets, and can turn your normal-use dishes into a display piece while also allowing buyers to project their own tastes — their dishes, their favorite ingredients, their art.

What about the ceiling? If it is tall enough or if there is space in an area where no one will walk directly under it, you can put in a ceiling rack for storing pots and pans. This creates an interesting atmosphere and lets you see what you need without having to rummage through a stuffed drawer.

Is there a lot of open floor space? If so, you can install a separate island. A simple countertop with some additional drawers for storage will do a lot to improve both the efficiency and look of your kitchen.

As with many projects, less is more when talking about a kitchen remodel. Especially if you are selling soon, spend as little as possible to refresh your kitchen and give it a contemporary feel. Keeping it simple will not only save you money, but will help you get on the market faster so you get on with the business of searching for your new home rather than getting bogged down selling your old one.

CHAPTER 9

Living Room Upgrades and Renovations

Research and detailed planning are crucial when it comes to any successful remodeling project, especially when you are planning on making changes that include structural renovations and working within a set budget. Good planning can help you remain within budget, as you will have researched the costs of each step in advance. Developing ideas and setting them in motion towards successful execution takes time, so ensure that you do your homework, always have your budget in front of you, and write everything down.

Once you have a general idea or theme for what you'd like to do, do some research on it and find examples of how the finished product will look. In planning renovations, think long-term, accounting for many years to come. If you are planning on having children within the next few years, take your future children into account while you are planning your renovations and upgrades.

Your living room is where you are going to be entertaining guests, friends, family, or whoever else might frequent your home, and you want it to feel open, welcoming, and all-around inviting. There are many ways to make the space feel as open as possible while squeezing in extra seating.

You are also going to want a potential buyer to feel like they could entertain happily within the living room, so planning how your furniture is going to be staged is important! If you're short on ideas, or have no idea where to begin, speak to your real estate agent for help with figuring out what to do. Your agent may refer

you to a professional staging expert that will work with you to create the perfect living room.

USING MIRRORS TO OPEN UP SPACE

By strategically placing mirrors, you can make your living room look and feel more open than it really is. Using mirrors to create the illusion of a larger living room works, and is especially helpful if there is a shortage of windows.

If you do not have a strong focal point to your living room, such as a structural beam or a fireplace, create one using a large mirror. Strategically place the large mirror straight across from either the largest window or the only window in the room. The mirror will reflect the outside view and give the impression that the room is larger than it really is, while providing a main focal point to use to your advantage.

Once the mirror is in the perfect position, incorporate a few decorations to enhance the mirror as the main focal point in the room. For example, have a tall plant on the side, if possible. Focal points are important in general, as they are the main viewpoint during an open house or viewing.

When a buyer walks into the room, the first thing their eyes are drawn to is the focal point in the room, so ensure that you have one and that it is highlighted as much as possible to create a good impression.

SMALL-SCALE FURNITURE GOES A LONG WAY

Full-size sofas can be very practical when it comes to seating arrangements, and armchairs can be comfortable, but both are also bulky and space-consuming. Small-scale furniture is the way to go when it comes to living room upgrades.

Look for small love seats, settees, and chairs that will work with your style, theme, and space. Small furniture will give the buyer the impression that your living room is larger than it is, and will allow them to picture their own furniture, decorations, and belongings within the room.

SMALL SIDE AND COFFEE TABLES

Having a few small side tables works better than having a large coffee table and large side tables because it allows people to maneuver around the room more easily. Often, there is only one walking path in a living room, which creates a choke point. Having multiple paths around smaller furniture creates a better environment for open house showings and individual viewings. Smaller tables allow the buyer to see more of the available space and better envision how they would style the living room should they choose to purchase your home.

STAGING TIPS FOR THE LIVING ROOM

Following are just a few simple bullet points on staging tips for the living room that will be of help when you are going through the process of readying your house for sale.

- Remove all personal items from the room, such as figurines your child made in art class, family photos, or pet photos.
- Add new paint for its cosmetic value, which will also help the sale price in the end.
- If anything in the room needs to be repaired, do it now, so you won't have to stage around it and can incorporate it into the staging.
- Do a thorough cleaning of the living room, even in spots the buyer won't see, such as under the couch and among

the cobwebs in the corners of the ceiling.

- Remove furniture pieces that do not blend in with or complement the rest of the room, such as a chair that does not match your furniture set.
- Never mix themes! If you're leaning towards modern or Victorian, for example, don't try to create a decor theme out of both, stick with one.
- Place fresh flowers around the room, but not too many. This will help brighten and freshen the living room up.

PAINTING AND DECOR

When selecting a living room paint color in preparation for a sale, choose a solid, light color that helps the room look more open. For decor, select and place pieces that will open up the room and add bits of style that match the room's overall theme. Beautiful paintings in a classical mode are always a nice touch, as well.

CHAPTER 10

Bedroom and Attic Renovations

When planning home improvements to increase sale value, renovations of the bedrooms and attic spaces are often overlooked. However, these remodeling efforts can make the house more appealing and help it stand out to buyers during an open house or viewing.

Adding a room to your home can easily cost many thousands of dollars. If you build a new master suite, you might see a 66% return on your investment. If you add a family room, expect a 62% or less ROI. However, adding another bedroom to your home is the exception to the rule. Another bedroom makes your house much more appealing. You can save money on renovations by dividing a large space with a wall to form an extra room. To qualify as another bedroom, however, the room will need a window and a closet.

RENOVATING YOUR BEDROOM

Making renovations to increase the sale value of a home requires careful attention to the ROI. As we have seen, kitchen upgrades or adding a swimming pool rarely add the cost of construction to the selling price, often returning a ROI of less than 25%.

By expanding your bedroom, you're looking at an ROI anywhere between 40% and 80%. A smaller project that can bring a decent ROI is expanding the bathrooms before putting the house on the market, installing bathtubs that are deep, large, and with roomier, closed-off, tiled showers.

A larger master bedroom with an expanded closet and a

bathroom that comes with a dual-head shower or a spray system are among the most popular expansions that homeowners are now choosing.

Expanding your bedroom to add a bathroom will bring a good ROI, because it gives the buyer the sense of the general area being brand new. Buyers will be willing to pay more if a house has areas, in this case the bedroom, that are completely remodeled and/or expanded and include that sense of newness.

Turning your bedroom into a livable master suit decked out with a larger closet and a beautiful bathroom is a great best way to really catch a buyer's eye, close a deal quickly, and sell your home for more.

THE COST OF REMODELING AND EXPANDING

Increasing square footage in your home by adding a new room can be an incredibly expensive project. Although you may recoup some of your investment — anywhere from 50%-83% — the costs of this project can quickly spin wildly out of control. Just turn on any home remodeling TV show; projects that begin off with a \$10,000 budget quickly spiral into \$35,000 or more when homeowners and contractors run into unexpected issues.

Rather than adding whole new areas, reinvent the existing space in your home to save money. Finish a basement, or convert the attic to a bedroom. Many homeowners can also add small apartments in, or over, their garages.

When it comes to remodeling and expanding your bedroom, the cost may run into the thousands, but it may also be worth the investment. If you are planning on remodeling your bedroom completely, the cost of new dry-wall, carpeting, insulated windows, new trim, moldings, a refinished ceiling, upgraded heating fixtures, and paint will likely run you around \$8,000,

depending on the size of the current room. If you are planning on expanding and remodeling, then you're going to be looking at a cost around \$10,000 or more.

The cost of new windows is generally between \$300 and \$700 per window, depending on the size and the requirements. Fiberglass for wall insulation with a value of R-19 will cost about \$1.80 for every square foot installed, while insulation of R30 value for ceilings and attics will cost \$2.25 for every square foot installed. Per square yard, for installation and padding, carpeting averages around \$15 to \$25. Drywall for ceilings and walls will typically cost around \$9.80 per panel, not including any of the finishing compound, nails, or screws.

These prices also do not include the removal the disposal of all the original paneling and the scraping of any textured ceiling paint, either.

The average cost for new moldings is around \$3.00 per installed foot, while baseboard heating fixtures will run you between \$150 and \$500.

Hiring a professional painter to sand, prime, and paint the walls, in addition to upgrading the ceiling and drywall, is going to run up to \$35+ per hour, unless you have the knowledge, skills, and time to do it yourself.

You're also going to pay at least \$70 per hour to bring in an electrician to get the lighting and electrical wiring up to code. Carpenters generally charge the same amount as well, but both electricians and carpenters will sometimes base what they charge on square footage.

To find the right people to help you achieve the renovations, remodeling, and extensions that you have in mind, speak with your real estate agent. Chances are they have helped homeowners

in the past, or can direct you to another agent who has.

From there, they will help you with your research, your budget, and with tracking down the resources that you'll need to get the job done!

STAGING BEDROOM FURNITURE

Before you get started on the actual furniture in your bedroom, remove all clutter and personal items from the room. This helps to create an open, distraction-free environment. You don't necessarily have to move things far, just out of sight — tuck family photos in a dresser drawer, for example.

If you do not already have one on your bed, consider a comforter or a duvet that comes with matching shams, to create a solid, consistent look. For example, you could have a classic theme, or matching pastels.

Don't be afraid to move the furniture around in your bedroom to see what works and what doesn't. You never know, your dresser may create a more open space across the room. It's also a good idea to flip your mattress, as well.

If you don't have a headboard, get one, as it creates a simple yet sophisticated look. Remove any piece of furniture from the room that does not go with the main pieces. Adding a tall, potted plant is always a nice finish.

RENOVATING YOUR BASEMENT AND ATTIC

Renovating your basement and attic will offer a decent ROI and will allow you to sell your home for more! Buyers love to see basements and attics that are put to good use and will pay for the privilege of not having to undertake those projects themselves.

Though the cost of renovating and remodeling your basement may be in the tens of thousands, the ROI is in a solid 70%, which means that the work and money put into getting the basement ready before your open house or viewings will be worth it when it's time to close the deal.

If you're concerned about your ROI, go with a renovation that will be perfect for appeal and overall use. For example, an extra bedroom, a home office, or even a play room for kids. In fact, it's better to stick to a general category of use during the renovation period, just so you can get an idea of how you're going to stage it, what color of paint you're going to use, etc.

A walk-out basement is a nice touch as well, especially if it connects to the backyard. This will give potential buyers the option to rent out their new basement to tenants should they choose to do so, which is something that some people look for when it comes to buying a home.

Inspect the staircase that connects the basement to the rest of the house to see whether it needs repairs. Like the bedroom, your real estate agent can help you find the connections you need to make your basement renovations possible.

Renovating your attic into a bedroom has an ROI of 61% and is a "wow" factor to prospective buyers. Renovating your attic into a bedroom is the absolute perfect way to sell your house for more. An attic can easily be renovated, considering the basic structure is already present (the roof and the floor).

Buyers love to see a home with an attic bedroom, as they are desirable, have quirky characteristics, and are charming overall. It costs about the same as a basement to renovate an attic into a bedroom, and has a comparable ROI.

For extra value, you could also consider adding a private

bathroom into the attic bedroom, depending on how much available space there is, and whether you will need to make a plumbing extension. If you decide to add a bathroom, no doubt buyers will be making you offers straightaway, as attic bedrooms with bathrooms are rare gems when it comes to real estate and are unlikely to be available unless a homeowner decides to install one themselves after they've made their purchase.

Like other areas of your home, you can easily find the help you need to make an attic bedroom (or any other type of room) by speaking with your real estate agent. Your agent should be able to give you all the help and connections you need.

CHAPTER 11

Bathroom Renovations and ROI

If you are looking for the greatest sale price ROI on your renovations, the place to look is your bathroom(s). If your home has only one bathroom, you can recoup much or all of your investment by adding another one. HGTV estimates that the ROI on bathroom renovation spending is 80-130%. According to the estimates provided by the National Association of Realtors®, a bathroom remodel can recoup 60% of the amount you've put into bathroom renovations.

To find room in your house for an extra bathroom, look at extra rooms or underutilized spaces. Consider areas such as closets or spaces under the stairs too. If you want a half-bath you need at least 18 square feet. If you want a full bath, including a stand-up shower, you need at least 30 square feet. If you want a bathtub, make sure you have at least 35 square feet to work with for an addition.

While sinking \$10,000 into average bathroom remodeling and \$26,000 for more upscale renovations (the national averages according to Remodeling magazine) into a bathroom may seem like an extravagant expense when trying to sell your home, the most high-traffic part of your home (what day don't you use the bathroom?) is very important to the buyer's decision-making process and subsequently to your home's value.

An immaculate modern bathroom communicates consciously and subconsciously to the comfort, style, and — most important to the seller of the home — the value that the rest of home contains. Nothing is more alienating to a prospective buyer than an outdated, dysfunctional bathroom — especially considering

the high costs and headaches associated with water damage and mold growth.

Determining your budget beforehand (in terms of both money and time) is a sound way to ensure that your bathroom renovations don't get out of hand. For smaller budgets, you may be limited solely to cosmetic improvements, such as updated fixtures or a new sink. Larger budgets can accommodate makeovers that substantially increase the home's value, like a larger shower, new windows, and artisanal tiling.

Of course, contributing your own "sweat equity" to your home's renovations can save you money, so determine which projects are best left to professional contractors and which ones you can handle. If you decide on hiring contractors, be sure to have a fixed plan in place and do not deviate from it.

The National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA) recommends having a six-month plan to ensure that things go smoothly, as major bathroom renovations last between 2 and 3 months on average.

Be forewarned: as with most renovation projects, bathroom costs and expectations can quickly get out of hand, especially when homeowners are eager to sell their homes. That said, let's look at various aspects of the bathroom and see what types of renovations can add more value to your home.

BATHTUBS

Choosing the right bathtub for your master bathroom is worth some careful consideration. Some home buyers feel that a bathtub takes up too much space, while others make it a focal point of their relaxation. Some buyers prefer or need accessibility (i.e. mobility-impaired individuals), and for them a bathtub may be a deal-breaker. For those that prefer elegance, a clawfoot tub

may be appealing. Having a bathtub in one bathroom and a shower in a second is a solution to suit all needs. Ensure that any bathtub you select matches the overall theme of the room (you would not install a Victorian claw-foot tub in a modern-era themed bath).

SINKS AND COUNTERTOPS

One way to add value to your bathroom is to focus on the countertops and the sink. A popular trend is to invest in a stone countertop.

Typically, bathroom countertops tend to be smaller than kitchen counters, so you can spend a significantly smaller amount of money and still get a desirable spa-like quality. One strategy for saving money and adding value is to purchase a slab that contains some imperfections. If you make sure that the imperfections are masked by the sink that will be placed in or on the stone surface, you get the best of both worlds without having to pay the higher price of a flawless slab.

It also helps to think creatively. One common trend for DIYers is to take an old dresser and mount a sink on the top as a pedestal, or recess the sink on the top counter, creating an elegant solution. This is also useful if you're struggling to find adequate cabinet space to fit the look of your bathroom.

Don't forget to update the faucet as well. Attractive metals like stainless steel or polished nickel can bring some extra "oomph" to your bathroom. However, be sure that the hardware matches the faucets, or your bathroom might have a hodge-podge feel that will ward off more finicky buyers.

Finally, you can make your bathroom even more attractive to new couples by offering multiple sinks for his and her.

CABINETS & STORAGE

Bathrooms offer a challenge for homeowners in terms of storage. After installing a sink, bathtub, toilet, and shower, there still needs to be somewhere to store hygiene items and towels. In addition, these storage solutions must be aesthetically pleasing to potential home buyers, so it can be a balancing act to make sufficient space without becoming unattractive or overly utilitarian. However, there are solutions to make the most of available space:

- **Vertical:** Most bathrooms don't utilize the upper wall space, leaving these spaces barren. To remedy this, try installing multi-tiered shelving units in strategic places, with towels within easy reach of the bath/shower. Alternatively, recessed alcoves between wall studs can create useful spaces for holding smaller items.
- **Moveable:** Using baskets or hampers for items can make the most of spaces where cabinets cannot fit. Be sure these moveable additions match the décor of the bathroom, even if they are not included with the sale of the house.

As for the cabinets, be sure that the materials are up to date and not reflective of short-lived trends, as these can work against a seller when they fall out of favor. Make sure that the colors of the cabinets are neutral and are made of a moisture-resistant wood appropriate for the bathroom.

SHOWER

An attractive and functional shower is a great way to attract home buyers who may imagine luxurious and refreshing daily rituals when they purchase the home. Frameless glass shower enclosures

enhance the spa-like feel of the atmosphere, match just about any color scheme, and are more appealing than flimsy plastic enclosures.

Don't forget to consider who will be purchasing your home when renovating your shower. There are various options on the market, but it helps to update the showerheads in accordance with the type of home buyers you'd like to appeal to. For potential owners under 45, multiple showerheads are a go-to choice. For older home buyers, hand showers that can assist seated individuals may be best. Seating also plays a factor for the elderly and infirm, who prefer some resistance when showering and should have somewhere to sit for safety and health reasons.

TILE

Bathroom tile can be one of the more expensive features to renovate, so it pays to be deliberate in your choices. One smart way to save money is to limit tile strategically, focusing only on a specific area of the floor instead of the entire floor (e.g. inside the shower stall).

Another clever trick is to use the expensive tile as an accent, mixing it in with less expensive tile to save money, but also highlight the costlier tile with contrast. Because of the cost, you may want to align your renovations in accordance with the tile's color and attributes. While installing a heated bathroom floor is a nice touch, it will not return a reasonable ROI and tearing up your floor can be needlessly expensive and time-consuming.

BATHROOM VENTILATION

There's more to remodeling your bathroom than meets the eye. While it may be nice to have a window to open after a steamy shower, this is an old solution. The focus on modernity is automation and efficiency. If your bathroom does not have a

modern ventilation system, consider installing one as a top priority.

Moisture from excess humidity fogs mirrors, makes the floor especially slippery, and creates a breeding ground for mildew and mold. Having moisture under control is vital to ensure that not only are the physical hazards minimized (e.g. slipping on wet tile), but also the quality of the air and the damage that can result from mold and rot.

Make sure that the ventilation system exhausts air to the outside of the home, not the space between the joists of the ceiling, attic, or other interior space.

Consider ventilation systems on the market that contain features such as quiet exhaust fans and humidity-sensitive switches that automatically activate when moisture build-up in the air reaches a certain threshold.

LIGHTING

One way to spruce up your bathroom at a fraction of the cost of more labor-intensive renovations is to look at how your bathroom is lit. Lighting around your vanity mirrors can bring a luxurious feel to everyday grooming.

Adjustable lighting for soaking in the tub can create a relaxing atmosphere to the bathroom as well. Some light fixtures offer heat lamps that can create a mini-sauna for the bathroom that works in conjunction with your ventilation systems.

As a rule, eliminating dark spaces and inadequate lighting adds value for potential home buyers.

PAINT

Like lighting, one of the more inexpensive and effective ways to spruce up your bathroom is to invest in a few cans of fresh paint. Pay careful attention to how you paint if you choose to go DIY, however; attention to detail is critical and a few blobs of paint on the tub, sink, and so forth can undermine the improvements you've made. Also be sure to find a high quality, mold-resistant paint that can ward off mold growth, and don't forget to paint the ceiling, where hard-to-clean surfaces can be breeding grounds for mold and mildew.

UPDATE THE FIXTURES

The little details do matter, especially under the scrutiny of those who view your home with an eye to buying it. This includes the light fixtures, door knobs, towel racks, cabinet handles and so forth, all which can rust and degrade from constant use and moist atmosphere.

CAULK AND GROUT

Like a fresh coat of paint, paying attention to the fine details can bring a new look to your bathroom at a minimal cost. Cleaning grout may be tedious, but restoring its original hue can make the surrounding elements "pop."

The same goes for caulk — a tube of caulk is inexpensive. A fresh application of caulk, especially clear or matching-white colors, not only brings out the other elements, but also prevents moisture from eroding the structure of the bathroom.

GOING GREEN

No, we're not talking about painting everything in your bathroom green, not unless you really want to. We're talking about the trend of making your bathroom more environmentally sound. More and more home buyers are looking to find homes

that feature ethically-sourced materials and conserve resources (e.g. water, power). These include:

- **Low-flow sinks, toilets, and showerheads.** They can typically be found for the same cost or even for less than traditional models.
- **Automatic light switches.** Some models adjust the amount of light based on the amount of daylight or if there's an occupant in the room. Great for forgetful people!
- **Purchasing used or repurposed materials.** Nothing is greener than recycling old materials, like a vintage clawfoot bathtub, as you reduce consumption. Thrift stores often have an assortment of used/reclaimed furnishings that not only have a vintage appeal, but are also sold well below the price point of similar types of fixtures bought new.

CHAPTER 12

Remodeling, Additions and ROI

When remodeling your home, building an additional room or adding a new level to your home can be pricier than, say, renovating your deck. There are of course inherent benefits to an extra room that homeowners can enjoy, like the extra space and functionality, but homeowners should certainly be aware of the costs as well. Be aware that in making extensive renovations to your home, the cost may not be recovered at the time of sale. Those types of improvements have to be solely for your homeownership enjoyment, as by making your home the jewel of the neighborhood, you may be lifting it into a price range beyond what your neighborhood can support.

Arriving at a concrete number (pun intended) is never an easy task, either for the homeowner or the contractor. Typically, remodeling contractors ballpark the cost of an addition in dollars per square foot. The reasons for this include:

- This provides a rough baseline of costs typically associated with your home addition (e.g. labor, materials, and fees)
- It can help the homeowner determine a realistic budget
- The quality of materials can vary depending on the client's tastes (e.g., wood flooring vs. tile)
- Availability of material may vary
- Timeframe and expedience of the project

Home estimates in and of themselves take time and effort, so expect the conception of your home's addition to cost money

before even a single nail is hammered.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE COST OF A NEW ADDITION

A common question that homeowners ask is how much a new addition will really cost after an estimate is provided. There is often wide variance. The answer, however, is more elusive, as adding on to any home — whether it is building out from the pre-existing footprint or adding a new level on top of it — is subject to a host of complex factors.

These factors may include (when applicable):

- Architectural design
- Site preparation (demolition, excavation)
- Concrete work
- Support structure (standalone and/or in conjunction with existing structures)
- Roofing materials
- Siding
- Ceilings/Walls
- Carpentry
- Inspections
- Electrical and Lighting
- HVAC
- Carpeting
- Window installation

HIDDEN COSTS

As a consumer, it is in your best financial interest to minimize costs when adding a new home addition. One of the first places to keep an eye out for hidden costs is the remodeling contract.

While it may cost more initially, be sure to demand a fixed-cost contract. This contract should include:

- detailed list of the work involved
- a change-order policy
- a firm price

The advantage of this style of contract is that you can shift the responsibility for meeting the costs and budget onto the contractor. For instance, if it is determined that dry-rot is discovered in your support structure, leading to additional work and materials needed to complete the project, the contractor will be legally responsible for assessing this beforehand — not when your project is on the line. Also, this helps offset the cost of materials, which may rise over the duration of the project.

The change-order policy is also important, as you have a right to change the project if you feel that alterations need to be made after the contract is signed. This is a way that contractors protect themselves, but it also gives you a firm idea of what costs will occur should you change your mind during the completion of your home addition. Also, don't forget that if you secure a loan for some or all of the addition's costs, you'll have to pay loan origination fees and processing fees, which can amount to 1-2% of the total loan amount. Lenders typically require appraisal and inspection fees to determine the viability of your home's addition as well, so expect to pay these fees.

TAXES AND INSURANCE

With an addition to your house, you can expect your insurance premiums to go up. Depending on the replacement cost for the new addition, your premiums may increase significantly. This depends on your insurance provider, but a good way to ballpark your new premium is to take your home's value and add in

a replacement cost of 125% of the new addition's price. For a home that was originally valued at \$200,000, adding a \$100,000 addition raises the value to \$325,000 in total, so you can expect your premiums to jump a good 50%.

Taxes follow a similar logic, but are also dependent on many other factors. A value will be stated for the new addition on your building permit application. This amount will be added to your home's valuation for the following tax year, which typically increases your annual property taxes.

However, taxes change year-by-year based on the housing market — for a home's value that's skyrocketed based on a real estate bubble, you may see a significant increase. Vice versa, a slumping real estate market may see your taxes experience only a minimal rise. These factors will play heavily into how potential buyers view your property when determining if your home is a worthy investment. Taxes and insurance premiums will also play a part in how much money you are able to recoup — for a house that's been stuck on the market a while, you may find that these costs begin eating into your ROI.

CHAPTER 13

Tips for Increasing Your Home's Value via Improvements

\$99 AND BELOW IDEAS

- **Get a professional perspective.** Engage a real estate agent or interior designer to examine your home with an eye to improving sale value. Many real estate agents will do this as a courtesy, but an interior designer will likely require a consultation fee. Check with area designers; the hourly fee is normally less than \$100. In that time, they can give ideas for necessary or desirable improvements. Even small improvements, such as paint colors or furniture placement, can go a long way toward improving the salability of your home.
- **Inspect it first.** Not all home improvement projects are cosmetic. They may be less obvious than red brocade 1970s wallpaper in the bathroom, but deteriorating roofs, termite infestations, or outdated electrical systems will play a major role in your house sale. While a new roof will not add appreciably to market value, as a serviceable roof is expected by home shoppers, a dilapidated roof can quickly squelch the deal, or at least cost the seller the amount of a new roof off the listing price and cost you the trust of a buyer who now suspects you won't have maintained other parts of the home as well. You can't fix it if you don't know it's broken, so hire an inspector to

check out the areas of your home that you do not normally see. An inspection can alert you to unseen issues that could negatively impact the value of your home. Small problems (like minor water leaks) can become big, expensive problems quickly; the longer you delay repairs, the more expensive those repairs will be.

- **Paint, paint, and paint some more.** Among the most visible, yet simplest and most cost-effective improvements in preparing a home for sale is fresh paint. A freshly painted room looks clean and updated — and that adds value. When selecting paint, use neutral colors to appeal to the greatest possible number of people, making your home more desirable to a wider audience. On average, a gallon of paint costs around \$25, leaving you money to buy rollers, painter's tape, dropcloths, and brushes. Get out the ladder and get busy!
- **Get inspired.** Instead of spending \$100 on a decorator's opinion, do it yourself and search for remodeling and decorating inspiration in home design magazines, books, television shows, and websites. Keep it simple — DIY projects are great for remodeling on a tight budget.
- **Get energy efficient.** Many local utility companies provide free energy audits of their customers' homes that will demonstrate how to maximize the energy efficiency of your home. An energy-efficient home will save you money now, and touting that energy-efficiency in sales marketing will appeal to economically and socially conscious buyers.

\$100 TO \$200 IMPROVEMENTS

- **Add a water-filtration system.** To add an inexpensive bit of luxury while saving money over time in the kitchen, install a water-filtration system. These systems purify your water and save on buying bottled water. A water filtration system is an inexpensive improvement and the type of luxury touch that attracts home buyers.
- **Plant a tree.** Trees add curb appeal. A longer-term strategy to add value to your property if you are not soon planning to sell your house is to plant a shade tree. Mature trees make your home more desirable, while a fully grown, properly placed tree can save you as much as 40% in cooling costs. Mature landscaping is also beneficial for the environment, providing a habitat for wildlife.
- **Add low-maintenance landscaping.** Shrubs, bushes, and colorful plants will add curb appeal to your home, so "think green." Purchase greenery that is native to your region, or plants that can survive in drought-like conditions — which means they'll require less water and maintenance.
- **Improve the air in your home.** If you have older carpets in your home, they could be housing contaminants and allergens. To determine if carpeting needs replacing, hire a company to test your indoor air quality. If results show that your carpets should be replaced, use environmentally friendly natural products like wood, tile, or laminate floors. Hard-surface floors are much easier to clean, don't hold odors, instantly update your home, and, in general, are more appealing to buyers.
- **Remove textured or "popcorn" ceilings.** Popcorn ceilings date a house as few structural elements do. Remove the

dated look and add to the value of your home. Beware that ceilings might contain asbestos — have yours tested professionally. Then use a solution to soften the texture, and scrape the popcorn away. Removing a popcorn ceiling may not seem like a big change but one of the keys to adding value to your home is to repair, replace, or remove anything that could turn buyers away, no matter how small a change it might seem.

\$200 TO \$400 IMPROVEMENTS

- **Engage a lawn service to clean up the yard.** The key to curb appeal is your front yard. Carelessly mowed grass, patchy brown areas, and untrimmed bushes or hedges are a fast turn-off to prospective home buyers. A lawn care service can be engaged for a few hundred dollars to trim your lawn and shape your hedges. The curb appeal will go from messy to maintained.
- **Clean even where it's not seen.** Expect people to be picky when they are shopping for and choosing a new home. Cleanliness counts — and you only get one chance at a first impression. So make the interior of your home sparkle from the moment buyers walk through the door! For about \$400, hire a cleaning service for a thorough top-to-bottom scrubbing. Even a well-maintained home has overlooked nooks and crannies. For about \$200 more, get all the windows in the house professionally washed.
- **Minor bathroom updates return big dividends.** Even if you can't afford a full bathroom renovation or remodel, small changes such as repainting, removing dated wallpaper, and replacing old lighting will update the

room without hurting your budget. If there is no ventilation system in the bathroom, have a wall-fan installed.

- **Upgrade to energy-efficient fixtures.** A ceiling fan can provide light and, in warmer months, produce a soft breeze that can reduce the need for expensive air conditioning. But an outdated, chipped, loud, or broken ceiling fan is a useless distraction. Replace old fixtures with new ones to make your home more enjoyable as a homeowner and to increase the bottom line if you decide to sell.

\$400-\$750 IMPROVEMENTS

- **Update the bathroom for a big ROI.** A bathroom update with a budget of \$750 can return a fine ROI while attracting buyers. One cost-effective change, such as replacing an outdated vanity, older plumbing, and lighting fixtures, or installing a tile floor, will improve home value and sales potential.
- **A kitchen update adds value.** As with bathroom upgrades, almost any kitchen update will add to your home's value and garner the attention of buyers. Kitchens and bathrooms are key for buyers. To maximize your home's value, start by swapping out one item — such as an old sink — for a shiny new stainless model. Even small updates will add big value to your home.
- **Replace worn carpets or rugs.** If your carpets and area rugs are stained or worn, it is worth the investment to replace them. Buyers are turned off by the thought that they will immediately need to replace all the flooring in a

home. Ideally, you want to replace them all, but if a more limited budget constrains you, start by replacing the carpet in the room that shows the most wear and tear and replace the others as finances permit.

- **Keep up with maintenance.** Compile a list of all the little things that are broken or in need of repair in your home. Note the cracks in the walkways, the chips in the wall paint, and the outdoor faucet that doesn't really work. Considered individually, minor repairs might not seem that important, but if every room has just one thing wrong, those small issues will add up to give the impression that your home hasn't been taken care of. If you don't feel comfortable taking on the repairs yourself, hire a professional. Staying on top of maintenance today can eliminate problems tomorrow if you should decide to sell.

MORE TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR HOME'S VALUE

This list of ten improvement projects is from www.homes.com:

- **Landscape.** Landscaping is extremely important to present the house to other people. It doesn't have to be extravagant, but maintaining it is crucial.
- **Fix minor repairs;** don't give the next owner a laundry list of chores to deal with.
- **For a refreshed and updated look,** paint the walls. A simple and easy fix!
- **If you plan on making major enhancements to the home,** consider updating the kitchen.
- **Consider updating a bathroom,** as those usually have the most bang for your buck.

- **Increasing storage options** is always a good choice, like adding built-in shelves or more closet spaces.
- **Installing good windows.**
- **Make improvements energy efficient** to keep home current on trends.
- **Don't forget about curb appeal!**
- **Of course,** a well-appointed master suite will give the illusion of luxury and relaxing Saturday mornings.

TOP GARDENING TIPS FOR INCREASING VALUE

What is outside will often heighten the desire to see what is inside. It is important not to overlook landscaping and gardening in your efforts to improve your property's value and salability.

The best plants for adding the most curb appeal will depend on the type of house you are selling, its desired price point, and the condition of your front yard. In an "As Is" sale, you don't have much to do except clean up any obvious mess; however, if you are looking for top dollar, pay attention to the details that will garner your home more positive attention:

- **Get your lawn into its best possible condition,** or add a new patch of lawn with sod for instant green. Lawns are plants, too.
- **Cover exposed foundations and utility boxes,** and add privacy from your neighbors with fencing, shrubs, or bushes.
- **Add color with annual flowering plants** set out on your porch or entry. Seasonal annual plants add instant color to garden beds as well.
- **Add an inch or two of mulch** after putting in new plants. It makes your garden bed look cleaner, makes the color of

flowers pop, and covers unsightly dirt.

In addition to flowering plants, plant trees in your yard to increase your home's value. Mature trees are the most valuable in a landscape, followed by well-placed, newly planted trees that contribute shade, ornamental value, and fruit or nuts. In general, a well-designed landscape with beautiful trees will increase the value of your home.

Taking advantage of the latest in gardening trends will also make your home stand out to prospective buyers by giving your property an up-to-date look outside. Miniature container gardens continue to grow as a popular garden idea, and growing your own food is enormously popular. On the edible gardening front, gardeners are creating "Cocktail Gardens," "Smoothie Gardens," and even "International Cuisine Gardens" with their favorite Japanese, Indian, and Thai herbs and vegetables. Also, anything that is a "vertical garden" is top on the gardening charts. Adding any of these items to your landscaping will enhance buyer interest.

THIS OLD HOUSE'S WAYS TO BOOST HOUSE VALUE

The venerable *This Old House* home improvement television show weighed in on the home improvement and remodeling projects with the best ROI and interest-generation in buyers. According to these home improvement gurus, the ways to increase the value of your home at the time of sale include:

- **Create space.** Buyers want a wide-open floor plan and a living room right off the kitchen. They are into big spaces. Opening space and creating a sense of flow in the house generates a response from buyers. You might knock out a nonstructural wall, or remove a kitchen island. For just a

few hundred dollars, you can transform the feel of the house. However, a kitchen island can also be an asset, creating needed storage space. If the kitchen has enough cabinets, it could pay to haul the island away, but an alternative is to replace it with a moveable island.

- **Prune, limb, and landscape.** People forget about their trees more than almost any feature. Yet, landscaping is one of the top three investments that yields the biggest returns. According to a survey of 2,000 brokers conducted by HomeGain.com, an online real estate marketing site, an investment of around \$400 or \$500 dollars in landscaping can bring a return of four times that much.
- **Let the Light Shine In.** The number one item on the HomeGain survey, lighting — anything from a dimmer switch to the increasingly popular sun tubes — noticeably enhances a home's appeal. For example, dimmers allow you to create a specific mood to fit different situations. Sun tubes are a new home improvement in lighting. Less expensive than framing in a skylight, sun tubes — also known as light pipes, sunscoops, and tubular skylights — use reflective material to funnel natural light from a globe-capped hole cut in a rooftop down through a ceiling fixture and into a room. With tubular skylights, sunlight is nice and moonlight is even nicer. A few other ways to light things up: fix broken panes, make sure windows open (and do so quietly and easily), and consider installing lights that use motion detectors to turn themselves off. High-wattage bulbs make small spaces feel larger, and soft lighting can warm empty spaces.

- **Don't put off maintenance.** Before other value-enhancing improvements and remodeling projects, address the basics. Insulate the attic, repair plumbing leaks, replace rusty gutters, inspect the furnace, replace or repair leaky windows, install storm doors, and weed the flower beds. These kinds of fixes go a long way toward value. Investing in maintenance could also be crucial to a sale.
- **Go green.** If your heating or air conditioning systems are outdated, new ones are a much better idea, with energy savings of up to 30 to 40%. Another example: spending \$7,000 for the unit and installation of a solar-powered water heater, with \$2,100 back in green tax credits, could save you as much as 80% on your water-heating bills. Research published by The Appraisal Journal estimates that energy savings add twenty times the annual savings to the value of your property. Energy savers make your house more desirable.
- **Make a "grand entrance."** Home sellers are advised not to underestimate the power of a front door. It is said that people make up their minds in the first seven seconds of entering a house. Buyers expect a working door bell. An overhang above the front door, such as an awning or portico, can also increase value. Buyers want a way out of the rain, or shelter from the sun while fumbling for keys, or somewhere for greeting guests. If you're up for more exterior upgrades, move to the back or sides of the house. People get back dollar-for-dollar the costs of decks they put in. If the deck is completed with the right material so it will stay in good shape, it will hold value.
- **Have flooring that stands up.** Don't undervalue flooring in a home sale; 94% of real estate pros recommend

spending money on floors. It doesn't have to be a lot of money. For an estimated average investment of \$600 to \$900, brokers report that the return in value comes in at up to \$2,000. You can spend even less than that — some well-placed nails can eliminate distracting squeaks. Other small projects with a big impact include repairing broken tile, patching damaged floor boards, and tossing out the wall-to-wall carpeting.

- **Bath upgrades offer the best ROI.** Almost all real estate agents and brokers say updating the kitchen and bath is the best bet for adding to a home's value. It may not be economical to do a major renovation if you are trying to spend as little as possible before putting a house up for sale. However, some upgrades are cheap, easy, and fast, especially in the bathroom. Replace frosted glass in favor of clear glass, clean the grout, remove rust stains, apply fresh caulk, update doorknobs and cabinet pulls, replace faucets, and install a low-flush toilet. Even buying a new toilet seat can make a difference.
- **Use neutral wall colors.** If you're getting ready to put a house on the market, don't allow walls with chipped or cracked paint to go unmaintained. If you need to do more than a touch up, choose neutral colors. Sellers are well-advised to get out of their personal taste. Buyers want to be able to project their own ideas onto a space, and sellers can help with neutral wall colors.
- **Remove the "question marks" from your house.** Some real estate agents call this the "what's that?" factor, and whatever it is (1950s wallpaper, a broken front step or cracked threshold, green-and-blue vinyl flooring), fix it or remove it.

EXAMPLES OF IMPROVEMENTS THAT PAID OFF

"If the roof is leaking, buyers won't get beyond that." That is a piece of truth that sellers simply cannot get around. No matter what upgrades or improvements have been made to make a house more appealing, and thus costlier, if the fundamental systems (furnace, AC, plumbing, electric, foundation, and roof) are in bad shape, so is the chance of a sale.

There are, though, examples of home improvements that you can almost bank on returning a good ROI on your investment outlays.

According to *Remodeling* magazine, you are less likely to recoup your investment in a major kitchen or bathroom remodel than you are to get back what you spend on basic home maintenance such as new siding. Siding replacement recouped 92.8% of its cost, according to the study. The only home improvement likely to return more at resale was a minor (roughly \$15,000) kitchen remodel, which returned 92.9%. Replacing roofs and windows was also high on the list, returning 80% or more at resale.

In the hottest housing markets, investing in a kitchen or bath remodel is a wise investment, often returning more than 100% of the cost. In Baltimore, for instance, a \$9,400-bathroom remodel recouped 182% of its cost at resale, according to Remodeling's 2004 study. The markets in Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, and San Diego also offered triple-digit returns on a bathroom remodel. Minor kitchen remodels (average cost: \$15,273) also provided returns of more than 100% in cities including Providence, R.I., Miami, New Orleans and, of course, San Diego, where a \$17,928 investment netted \$27,000 on resale.

Don't spend money remodeling the bathroom if it's the only one

you've got — that money is better spent adding a second bath. Many people love the charm of older homes, but many older homes lack a sufficient number of bathrooms. So if you've got a four-bedroom, one-bath home, it's certainly going to pay to add a second bathroom. A National Association of Realtors® study by Florida State University professors found that adding a bathroom increased the sale price of a home by 8.7%, more than twice the rate for adding a bedroom.

Testimonials & Reviews

Thomas A

"David Bedient was the best choice I could have made. He made finding and purchasing a home for me and my family trouble free. David was extremely knowledgeable about the area I was interested in willing to go the extra mile for me always in phone contact emailing me and answering any questions that I may have had and keeping me up-to-date on the process. David is very professional and knowledgeable. He would be a great choice for anyone looking for a home."

Feliphe G

David was everything I was looking for in a realtor when buying my first house. He made the process seem much less intimidating and confusing. The Mortgage specialist that is on his team helped to increase my credit score and put me into a first time home buyer program.

Connie W

David has exceptional customer service! I am a landlord of a rent house and he has picked out some very good tenants for me more than once. I would highly recommend him to anyone that is looking to rent or buy a house!

Rene O.

I found David from one of his car signs; he has branded himself "The Specialist, not just a realtor. He sure lived up to that title, from the presale, to the inspection, to the Appraisal and to the closing table. He educated us of the process and answered all our crazy questions and sometimes our late timing. He never made us feel like we were bothering him. We are so happy with our new home and the help and education he gave us.

Richard W.

David has negotiated 2 residential moves for me in recent years with excellent results on both occasions. He's a great realtor who understands both his client's needs and the market trends. If you want the best deal at below market pricing, give David a call. You'll be glad you did.

Stephen B.

David did an incredible job of getting our property sold. There were several obstacles that had to be overcome in order to get the house approved for sale. I am thankful that David was our realtor and I'd recommend him to anyone.

Norma G.

Always available to answer questions & share information.

Robert W.

Being a first-time homeowner, completing all the paperwork, locating a property, and other tasks seemed really overwhelming. Dave is definitely a lifesaver, which is fortunate for us. He kept an eye on our budget and showed us some of the greatest offers available in Houston. Dave is undoubtedly a knowledgeable real estate agent. He deserves five stars for finding us the best deal.

Sandy V.

David is a realtor who is truly exceptional. He was always willing to respond to our inquiries, give us updates, and share insightful knowledge. David is a great asset because of his ability to handle difficult negotiations. At every stage, we experienced genuine support and were kept informed. David's great service is a reflection of his genuine concern for his customers.

Jose V.

David is an absolute real estate pro. He showed knowledge of the market and a commitment to finding us the ideal home. From

the moment we met until the day of closing David's negotiation, and attention to detail made the process run smoothly. We are incredibly appreciative of David's and suggest him to anyone in search of an excellent real estate agent.

Here's How You Can Get Free Professional-Quality Pictures to Market Your Home

Most buyers “view” your home for the first time when they see it online. The pictures they see form their “first impression” of your home. As you know, first impressions matter!

This is why professional-quality pictures are so important to your sale. If the buyers like your home — based on the pictures they see online — they are more likely to schedule a showing.

But, if they don't like them, they are less likely to schedule a showing — and, that's a potential buyer you miss out on.

Because pictures are so important, I'm offering to take free professional-quality photos of your home. You can use these pictures to market your home for sale by owner. This is 100% free with no obligation — provided you only use them to market your home by owner.

Now, I'm sure you're thinking, “Why would a Realtor offer me this for free? It doesn't make any sense.”

Here's why. It's like when you go to the grocery store and someone offers you free samples. They give you the food samples, whether or not you buy more food from them. That's why I'm giving away the pictures. They are a free sample of what I can do to sell your home.

So, if you'd like free professional-quality photos of your home, give me a call.

We'll schedule a time that works for both of us for me to come and take pictures of your home. I look forward to helping you!

Best Regards,

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