

# REAL ESTATE

Your Home  
Your Life



# Get Top Dollar in Winter

You might think that the winter months are a less-than-ideal time to enter the real estate market, but recent research will have you thinking again.

According to a study by online brokerage Redfin, homes listed in winter months sold faster than those posted in the spring — and for top dollar.

If need or desire has you considering listing in the winter, here are three strategies that will make your listing stand above the rest.

## PRICE IT RIGHT

Price your home to sell and it surely will. Your real estate agent should do most of the heavy lifting, but it won't hurt for you to visit a few real estate websites and look at the list and sale prices of comparable homes in your area.

Remember, don't get greedy here. Price your home at market value and you are more likely to garner attention from buyers.

## PERFORM A SELF-INSPECTION

It is important to take a look at your house the way a buyer would. Does the roof look to be in good shape? Are the gutters clean and securely fastened? Are all your windows double-paned?

If there are major issues, it is in your best interest to address them now. A hanging gutter in the back of the house might seem like a small project you've been "meaning to get to," but to a potential buyer, this could hint at other hidden

problems.

If this one issue needs to be fixed, what else needs looking after?

## PLAN, IF POSSIBLE

If you know ahead of time that you will be listing your

home in the winter, consider taking photos well in advance. Homes look their best in the spring and summer, and by planning ahead you can show potential buyers aspects of the home and property they might miss in the winter.

If your listing photos show the thick and lush green lawn or a pool that is clean and glistening in the sun, potential buyers are more likely to swoon over the home's curb appeal or imagine themselves in a deck chair in the backyard.



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# Winter Staging

Be sure to always show off your home's best features — even in the “off-season.”



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## CLEAR THE PATH

Getting to your front door should not be a quest in and of itself. Sweep or shovel your driveway and all walkways that lead to the front door and around your home.

Not only is this a safety issue, but clearing the path allows potential buyers to notice the chevron brick walkway or flagstone path.

This is an important time to keep up with your yard work — especially if there is no snow on the ground. Leaves should

be raked up regularly, and landscaping should be pruned to avoid looking scraggly, as if it hibernated for the winter.

## THINK 'CHEERY AND BRIGHT'

Cold and dreary weather doesn't make it easy for your home to put its best “face” forward. Take extra care in the presentation of your front entryway.

Brighten it up with a colorful wreath or a swag of fresh greenery. Consider giving your

front door a fresh coat of paint and add planted seasonal bushes — such as holly — on your front porch or stoop. Consider greenery on the mantel for a cozy touch.

## MAKE IT COMFORTABLE

A chilly house can be uncomfortable. Turn your thermostat up before a showing. Arrange an extra coat rack near your front entrance so potential buyers can take their coats off and view your home in a more relaxed and comfortable

atmosphere.

Bonus tip: A warm house invites lingering in colder months — giving them more time to fall in love with the space.

## DE-PERSONALIZE — TO AN EXTENT

Ever wonder why “show homes” sell new builds so well? It is because building companies have mastered the balance between enough furniture and decor so that a space looks lived in and cozy, but zero clutter

and personalization.

Removing personal photos and replacing them with inexpensive, general artwork is a great first step. Removing all clutter (like those stacks of paperwork you've been meaning to get to or the piles of toys littered throughout the house) is a must.

Staging your home is a great way to both show potential buyers all your home can be and depersonalize it a bit so that they can better imagine themselves in the space.

# Avoid Buyer Turnoffs

Winter brings with it an array of problems. Cold temperatures and precipitation wreak havoc on our homes and add extra steps to our day-to-day routines.

Don't let these pesky problems translate into buyers turning up their noses. Here are just a few areas to focus your attention.

## OUTDOOR GEAR

Colder months bring with them the added bonus of many extra layers and outwear accessories. This can quickly turn into a lot of clutter.

Make sure you have space for all the extra seasonal gear. Keep a basket by your coat rack for gloves and hats, and put away coats that are not being used.

Don't let the first thing potential buyers see when they walk through the door be a pile of muddy boots and a mountain of coats.

## MECHANICAL MALFUNCTIONS

It is never more important than right before you list to check up on all major systems — especially for a winter listing. Be sure to service your furnace and make sure your water heater is in good shape.



Don't let the first thing potential buyers see when they walk through the door be a pile of muddy boots and a mountain of coats.

Consider replacing outdated appliances. This is a great time to concentrate on greener, more efficient models. By making sure all the essentials are in good working order, you can put a potential buyer at ease knowing they won't need to tackle any major projects

directly after purchasing.

## PET PATROL

Winter months also bring with them a certain level of dampness, which makes pet odors more apparent. Stay on top of cleaning cages or kennels, and sweeping and vacu-

uming to eliminate these lingering odors.

If you have a cat or dog that sheds excessively, be sure to regularly take a lint brush to the furniture.

## DATED HARDWARE

Dated hardware is one of the

most common turn-offs for buyers and one of the easiest upgrades a seller can make.

Cabinet hardware and door hardware are the likeliest offenders — and changing them out takes only a bit of time, money and a Philips-head screwdriver.

# Relocating Before the Holidays

**M**oving around the holiday season can be stressful for the whole family. From social factors, to learning a new city or school, there are many reasons that moving can cause anxiety.

Consider the following tips as you guide your family through the transition to a new home.

## MAKING IT EASIER FOR KIDS

Moving can be a scary thing for children — especially if they are leaving the only place they've called "home" for the first time.

Are you moving out of your child's current school district? When you conduct school visits, take your child with you. If it's possible, have them sit in on a class.

The first day will be a lot less stressful if they already know some of the classroom routines or recognize a few friendly faces. Also look for ways to turn anxiety into excitement with the new home. Allow kids to help pick out the paint color of their new room or create a scavenger hunt in the new house for the first night.

## MAKING IT EASIER FOR PETS

Moving to a new home can



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make pets feel insecure, but there are things you can do to alleviate their tension and help them adjust to their new space. One of the most important things you can do for your animals is to adhere to their usual routine.

This means feeding them,

walking them or playing with them as you normally would. Also be sure to bring along their favorite toys.

Packing might entice you to throw out the old and buy new toys for a new house. This is not a good idea. Familiar items such as toys,

blankets and bedding help pets feel more in control of new spaces.

## Making it Easier for You

Remember that those around you — kids and pets included — pick up on and absorb your emotions. If you

feel anxious, they might act out or be extra-sensitive. Do things to stay calm and avoid getting overly stressed. This could be as simple as lighting a candle in your favorite scent or taking the pressure off yourself to cook the first few nights by ordering take-out.



# Vacation Homes

**M**aybe the cooler weather has you thinking of warmer climates — and homes. Purchasing a vacation home is a big decision.

Not only is it a significant financial investment, but also it means you have found an area that you love so much that you want to return to it on a regular basis — even if it means giving up other holiday locales.

Before you commit another proper-

ty to your real estate portfolio, consider the following aspects of owning a second home.

## **MAKE A SOUND INVESTMENT**

Make sure your potential property is zoned to rent. Your real estate agent should have this information, but it can also be obtained from local government agencies.

Properties that cannot be rented out in your “off-season” aren’t just a wasted second-income opportunity but become sitting ducks for theft and disrepair.

## **NOT EVERY DAY IS A VACATION**

This brings us perfectly to the second point: Understand that it is more “home” than “vacation. Especially if you purchase a home over a condo or apartment — there will be a lot of maintenance to keep up with.

All those little projects and repairs you need to complete at your year-round digs exist in a vacation home too. And you likely have even less time to deal with them.

Will you be responsible for all of these types of things? Are you prepared to hire out for maintenance? Make sure that in all your vacation-home dreaming you allow for a good dose of reality.

## **HOW OFTEN WILL YOU GO?**

Are you retired? Do you consult, freelance or work from home? If not, you need to consider how much vacation time you are allowed each year and how long and often you can comfortably be away from your office.

Are you willing to trade in frequenting other locations to stay in the same place each year? Part of owning vacation property is understanding the worth of the investment.

The right vacation home can bring immeasurable value to your quality of life. Go into the process with a sound mind and level head, and you will surely be satisfied with the results.

# Kitchen Remodeling Scope

It's no secret that kitchens are big business in real estate.

Realtor.com reports that home listings featuring a “killer kitchen” or “luxury kitchen” sell 8 percent faster than nearby homes of similar size. Remodeling Magazine's 2017 Cost vs. Value Report places kitchen remodels high on its list of home projects for return on investment.

It can be difficult, however, to know when you should work with the kitchen you have and when you should undertake a major remodel. Here are some factors to consider.

## MAJOR VS. MINOR

You might get more return on your investment with a minor remodel. Remodeling Magazine lists a major kitchen remodel at number 13 of 19 on its Cost vs. Value list, at a 65 percent ROI. A minor kitchen remodel comes in at number 4, with an 80 percent ROI.

For its research, Remodeling considered an outdated 200-square-foot kitchen with 30 linear feet of cabinets and countertops. It considered a minor remodel to involve replacing the cabinet doors and drawer fronts in a shaker style, updating appliances, upgrading countertops and updating the sink and faucet, along with cosmetic updates to the walls and new flooring. The cost was listed at \$20,830,



with a \$16,699 increase in resale value.

For its major remodel, Remodeling replaced the same kitchen's cabinets with semi-custom wood models, added a 3-foot-by-5-foot island, upgraded to a stainless steel sink and modern lever faucet, and installed stainless steel energy-efficient appliances, including microwave, dishwasher, disposal and lighting. Cosmetic updates to the trim, walls and ceiling also were included. The major remodel

increased the home's value by an estimated \$40,560 with an investment of \$62,158.

## FORM VS. FUNCTION

Before embarking upon a kitchen remodel, ask yourself what it is that you don't like about your current kitchen. Is it primarily an issue of aesthetics? Do your oak cabinets seem drab? Do you envision gleaming granite countertops? Is the vinyl flooring dulled and worn? Changing these aspects of your kitchen could be costly to

accomplish. Oak cabinets cannot be easily refinished, and granite doesn't come cheap.

Is it perhaps only better functionality that you need? Do you constantly lose cookie sheets in the far reaches of a corner cabinet? Are your pantry shelves a mish-mash of snacks and staples? Even the expense of a high-end kitchen organization project with custom shelving and drawer dividers can pale in comparison to the cost of new custom-built cabinets.

## FUTURE PLANS

How long you're planning to stay in your home also should influence your remodeling choices. If you're going to invest in your home and aren't planning on selling anytime soon, customize the remodel to your own tastes and needs.

If you're not sure you will stay put for the long run or are considering a sale, go for basic upgrades that would appeal to a wide range of potential buyers. Think neutral colors and versatile storage options.

# The Declutter Factor

**W**e've all heard how important curb appeal is to selling a home.

Having a tidy and put-together space inside is just as important — especially in the winter when buyers spend less time looking around the exterior of the home.

If you are one of those obsessively neat people by nature, then you've already found out how to do this. The remainder of us, however, have some work to do.

It's time to highlight the strengths, downplay the weaknesses and make your home appealing to the masses of homebuyers.

## FINDING JOY

Prepping for sale can be an ideal time to go through your things with a little more thought. Get rid of things you haven't used in ages; things that are currently sitting in boxes in the back of a closet do not need to be re-homed to a new closet in a new house.

Donate items to a local nonprofit organization or church that helps underprivileged populations.

You can shed some extra belongings while giving to a great cause.

## STAGE YOUR SPACE

Removing clutter is the first step in staging your home. The next is all about arrangement. Your rooms should be staged to be walk-through friendly.

After you've removed all extraneous junk from a room, take a critical look at the furniture. You might find that moving a chair to the other side of the room or moving a bookshelf down the wall a foot or two opens up a room. Shuffling things around can provide better access around larger furniture pieces, such as a couch or dining table.

## SUSTAINING THE END RESULT

Now that you've gone through the hard work of removing the clutter and arranging your furniture, don't go back to the dark side. Commit to keeping each space neat and tidy, and to not allowing the clutter to creep back in.

If you have a large family, make a chore chart and hang it where everyone can see it. If everyone does a little bit, no one is left doing a lot.



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