

Montreal Gazette  
Saturday, March 11, 2006  
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Section: Arts & Life: Homefront  
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Column: Real Estate  
Source: The Gazette

Do you have your house on the market or are you thinking of listing?

Royal LePage has a few tips to help you hasten the sale and get top dollar. Here's a hint, start by filling a bucket with hot, soapy water.

LePage polled 2,002 adults from across the country, trying to get a handle on what people like and don't like when it comes to house hunting. The biggest turn-on, and forgive me if this sounds like something out of a Penthouse survey, is a house that looks and smells clean.

The biggest turnoff is a house that has been overly personalized. Fantastic! An investment of \$4 for a bottle of Pine-Sol and a little elbow grease could boost your sale price by thousands. So why don't more people take the time to clean before listing their homes for sale?

I recently visited a home in Notre Dame de Grace that looked like a homebuyer's dream from the sidewalk. The minute I stepped through the door, however, I was assaulted by the stench of litter box and stale cigarette smoke. I couldn't get out fast enough.

Sadly, people who live in houses that smell tend not to notice odours, said

Dianne Usher, the LePage senior manager who oversaw the survey.

"That's where a good real-estate agent comes in. The agent has the expertise to help you make the most of your home whether that means airing it out or rearranging the furniture so that rooms show to advantage," she said.

Among the mistakes people make are having not enough or too much furniture. Blocking windows and doors with beds and sofas is a common mistake, she said.

Some of you might think this advice is for chumps. After all, we've just come through six or seven years when Montreal houses traded hands and prices rose with dizzying speed.

News flash, folks. That boom market is over. Prices have stabilized, the number of active listings continues to rise and the average house is taking longer to sell. If there are four similarly priced homes for sale in a neighbourhood, you can bet the one that is cleanest and has had the most tasteful upgrades will sell fastest.

If you were to prepare a checklist of the items that would have the

greatest impact on selling your house, cleaning, decluttering and taking care of minor repairs, should be at the top of the to-do list.

"The way you live in your home is different from the way you sell it," Usher said. "You're surrounded by memories and mementos of the times you've had. But when it comes time to sell, you want to make it easy for the next family to imagine themselves living there."

That means taking down diplomas and family photos, removing drawings from the fridge door and hiding away knick-knacks. Go one step further by cleaning out and reordering your clothes closets, so that potential buyers will notice how much storage room you have.

Everyone knows kitchens sell houses. The LePage survey found that 79 per cent of buyers would be willing to pay more for a house with a renovated kitchen. Other top-rated renovations include upgraded bathrooms, new windows and new flooring. Those surveyed by LePage said that they would prefer to spend more time looking for a house that met their requirements instead of investing time and money in post-purchase renovations.

Not all renovations are created equally, however.

"Style and decor are especially important with big renovation jobs," Usher said. "These are the changes that cost the most to make and could influence whether a buyer makes an offer or not."

That means thinking twice before you turn a five-bedroom house into a two-bedroom or building a sound studio in the guest bedroom. These are textbook examples of over personalized renovations that will cost thousands to undo and will limit the number of buyers who'll be interested in your house.

It might be too late to reverse some of those big fix-ups, but it isn't too late to refresh the paint job. Ditch those bright, off-beat colours in favour of neutrals. They'll make your house look brighter and cleaner and could go a long way toward helping you sell your home faster and at a better price.

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