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Georgie Huff 691-5000 gkhuff@sbcglobal.net
Nathan Norberg 234-8513 natnorberg@hotmail.com
www.capital-propertiesltd.com

Tips for Creating & Maintaining Curb Appeal

What is Curb Appeal?

Curb appeal is the ability of a home to attract interest from a buyer or passer-by on first glance. It's that quality that makes a positive first impression and compels the viewer to learn more about a home. A home with good curb appeal attracts more attention from buyers during the sales process, often resulting in a higher sales price when the home is sold.

Think Like a Buyer

If you are a homeowner today, chances are good that at one time you were a home buyer. What was it that you were looking for when you first purchased your home? Can you remember the nervousness and anticipation of searching for that "just right" home? Home buying can be a nerve-racking experience and it can also be filled with excitement. You want to present your house in such a way as to minimize the nervousness and create a sense of excitement.

Step back and look at your home with fresh eyes. What are the best features of your home? Where is there room for improvement? No house is perfect but the trick to creating curb appeal is to draw attention to those features of your home that make it special. You want a buyer to focus on the best things about your house first. Now look at the areas in need of improvement. Is it something that can be reasonably fixed or changed? If so, here's your chance to add value. If it is not something that can be changed, you will want to figure out ways to diminish the attention these features get.

Know Your Neighborhood

You may wonder what this has to do with your home. After all, you can only affect the property you own. While this may be true, your neighborhood can have a large impact on the expectations of your future buyer. Taking your neighborhood into account will help guide your decisions about improvements and ensure that the curb appeal you create appeals to the audience of future buyers looking for a home in your neighborhood.

There are two important ways you can do this. The first is to understand the range of home values in your neighborhood. Assuming that the purpose of curb appeal is to maximize the return on the investment you made in your home, your investment is safest when it does not exceed the current market for similar homes in your area. A common mistake is to over-improve. That's not to say you shouldn't do something that you and your family will enjoy for years to come but understand, there may be a limit to the return you receive on that investment. The Northside is a beautiful neighborhood full of modest, older homes.

Your future buyer will come to the neighborhood expecting to find homes that fit into this mold. If you spend lots of money to create a more lavish interior or more square footage than is commonly found in the neighborhood, the effort may be appreciated but it probably won't be compensated.

The other point to stress is that you should know and preserve the architecture of your home. More and more of the buyers we meet in the Northside and other downtown neighborhoods are seeking out these neighborhoods because of the vintage homes that reflect the grace and craftsmanship of the time they were built in. Be proud of this and realize that your unique architecture is one of your neighborhood's greatest assets. Repairs are inevitable, but to the extent you are able to preserve the exterior appearance of your home and many of its original features in tact, you will be rewarded with an excited buyer some day. If you own one of the many Northside homes that have been architecturally altered, selective restoration, especially of the curb-side features of your house may be a wise investment. Re-introducing architecturally appropriate features may be the special touch that sparks the interest of a buyer.

Tips for Creating & Maintaining Curb Appeal

Maintenance

There is nothing that can spoil a good home quicker than inconsistent maintenance. Curb appeal isn't something you should begin to consider two weeks before you prepare to sell your home. It's something that can be preserved and developed over time. Remember that taking good care of what you have is usually cheaper than replacing it later.

Landscaping

A well maintained yard is a major attraction for many buyers. It doesn't need to be complicated either. Work with the space and budget you have with the goal of presenting healthy plants and a clean exterior that compliment the positive features of your home. If you have a lawn, keep it neat with regular mowing and edging. Flower beds and areas around shrubs should be kept weed free. The spring time installation of ground covers like shredded redwood will help protect your plants from losing moisture during the summer months and will naturally reduce (but not eliminate) the growth of weeds .

If you have shrubs, they should be kept trimmed and should be kept away from touching the siding and foundation. Overgrown plantings next to a house can promote pests such as termites and rats that will later lead to expensive repairs. Large shrubs and trees planted too close to a house can also lead to foundation problems later on when root growth and the size of the plant exceeds the size of its space. It's easier to catch these things early than repair them later. Finally, unless a plant is blocking the view of something unsightly like as a gas meter, it is probably working against your curb appeal if it is covering up features of your house. Architectural features such as windows and porches should be accented but not hidden by the plants around them. Remember that your yard is an important feature in its own right but ultimately, its most important job is to present the house behind it.

Paint

Paint makes a big impact on buyers when they look at the exterior of your home. Paint is not only decoration though, it is also part of the regular maintenance of the exterior and

protects your home from the elements. Periodic painting is never a bad investment. If you are painting your home with an eye to selling it in the near future, be somewhat conservative in your color choices but be sure to select as many colors as are needed to accentuate the architectural features of your home. This will vary depending on your style of home. An example of how to accentuate your features is with your windows. If you have wood windows it might be a good idea to pick two complimentary paint colors, one for the window itself and another for the sill and the window casings. Another place you can add trim colors is on the roof fascia boards (for homes with gables) or by painting the front door a stronger color to draw attention to entry. If you don't know where to start, drive around and look at other similar homes in your neighborhood. If you find something that you like, don't be afraid to copy it. Another place to get ideas is your local paint store where they have special brochures showing complimentary paint groupings.

One note about paint: darker colors tend to fade in sunlight, are harder to touch up (because of fading) and will probably require more frequent repainting. There have been many advances with modern paints but this is the general rule of thumb.

Roof

A composition shingle roof generally needs replacement every 25 years or so and if you have a relatively young roof, we don't suggest doing anything for sake of curb appeal. If your roof is in disrepair or may soon need replacing, take a few things into consideration as you select a new roof. The first thing is color. The color you select should be complimentary to the color of your house and the contrast should not be too severe. A charcoal black roof is sharp but when put on a white or beige home, it steals the show. A roof should look clean but shouldn't be the focal point. Pick something in the middle color ranges and it will allow you flexibility when choosing future paint colors. Also, a lighter roof reflects more sunlight during the summer, keeping your house cooler on hot days and potentially adding life to your roof.

A Spanish tile roof typically lasts longer than a composition roof and as long as no one walks on it, it should require less maintenance. Repairs to your tile roof will not involve the same stylistic decisions needed with composition roofs. You can improve the life of your roof and will definitely improve your curb appeal though if you are vigilant about keeping your roof and gutters clean and free of leaves, pine needles and other debris.

Wood shingle and shake roofs are becoming more and more rare in San Jose. They can often last a long time with regular maintenance. As with all other roofs, the key to this is keeping them clean and keeping people off them. Repair split or curled shingles and shakes prior to marketing your home and you should diminish the attention they get. If your roof is older and experiencing significant splitting and curling, consider replacement.

Inspiration

When looking for ways to make your home sparkle, don't be afraid to steal ideas from other places. Model homes in new developments are a perfect place to see how the pros put a house's best face forward. Pay particular attention to the way they handle lighting and color inside and outside the house. There is a reason why their marketing is successful. Also pay attention to your neighbor's homes and the things they have done that work for you. There is no reason you shouldn't benefit from their experience.