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8 Quick Fixes to Increase Value

To attract buyers, sellers must up the ante to convince them that their property offers what many want most — top value for dollar expended. Here are eight fast fixes:

1. Buff up curb appeal. You've heard it before, but it's critical to get buyers to want to look on the inside. Be objective. View listings from the street. Check the condition of the landscaping, paint, roof, shutters, front door, knocker, windows, house number, and even how window treatments look from the outside. Add something special — such as big flower pots or an antique bench — to help viewers remember house A from B.
2. Enrich with color. Paint's cheap, but forget the adage that it must be white or neutral. Just don't let sellers get too avant-garde with jarring pinks, oranges, and purples. Recommend soft colors that say "welcome," lead the eye from room to room, and flatter skin tones. Think soft yellows and pale greens. Tint ceilings a lighter shade.
3. Upgrade the kitchen and bathroom. These make-or-break rooms can spur a sale. But besides making each squeaky clean and clutter-free, update the pulls, sinks, and faucets. In a kitchen, add one cool appliance, such as an espresso maker. In the bathroom, hang a flat-screen TV to mimic a hotel. Room service, anyone?
4. Add old-world patina. Make Andrea Palladio proud. Install crown molding at least six to nine inches in depth, proportional to the room's size, and architecturally compatible. For ceilings nine feet high or higher, add dentil detailing, small tooth-shaped blocks used as a repeating ornament. It's all in the details, after all.
5. Screen hardwood floors. Buyers favor wood over carpet, but refinishing is costly and time-consuming. Screening cuts dust, time, and expense. What it entails: a light sanding, not a full stripping of color or polyurethane, then a coat of finish.

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6. Clean out, organize closets. Get sorting — organize your piles into “don’t need,” “haven’t worn,” and “keep.” Closets must be only half-full so buyers can visualize fitting their stuff in.

7. Update window treatments. Buyers want light and views, not dated, fancy-schmancy drapes that darken. To diffuse light and add privacy, consider energy-efficient shades and blinds.

8. Hire a home inspector. Do a preemptive strike, since busy home owners seek maintenance-free living. Fix problems before you list the home and then display receipts and wait for buyers to offer kudos to sellers for being so responsible.

Sources: Ernie Roth, Roth Interiors, Los Angeles; Angel Petragallo, abr, Group One, Boise, Idaho; Melissa Galt, Galt Interiors, Atlanta; Steve Kleiman, CEO, Oakington Realty, Houston;

Sid Davis, Sid Davis & Associates, Farmington, Utah, and author of First-Time Homeowners’ Survival Guide (Amacom, 2007); Steve Hochman, Friendly Note Buyers, Roxbury, N.Y.; Margi Kyle, designer and spokesperson for Hunter Douglas.