
Five key remodeling tips to boost your home's resale value

With home mortgage rates near all time lows, new and existing home sales continue to hover at or near record levels. The 2003 year saw a remodeling surge like this country has never seen. Then, with new home equity loans and lines of credit rising in popularity, all this sums up to one thing. Homeowners and prospective home purchasers are doing all they can to get the most bang for their buck out of their home.

Here are the big questions however; Where can I, as a homeowner, put my remodeling dollars to the best use? Where can I most realize my remodeling efforts to boost my home's value and appeal?

No longer is it good enough just to find and purchase a new home. The pride of home ownership seems to have taken another step forward. More than ever, homeowners are on a remodeling binge. The year 2003 saw record levels of home improvement and 2004 is expected to far surpass that. The key to successful remodeling is to make sure that the improvements you make do indeed increase the value and appeal of your home not only immediately, but in the long run.

Here are five important tips designed to boost the value and resale appeal of your home:

1) The front yard - no longer is it enough to put a large patch of grass and a few bushes and plants in the front yard. More and more, homebuyers are demanding curb appeal for their new home. Many buyers won't even stop as they pass a home for sale if the front landscape is not up to snuff. Simple improvements like footpaths and accent lights can make all the difference. For flowers and plants, make sure you select species that work well in your climate. Don't overdo outdoor furniture as this can give a cluttered look and feel. Instead consider one well placed park bench or chair. It seems as though the fish ponds and water features are *deja vu*, not to mention, they cost a bundle. Bottom line is, a pleasant mixture of green lawn space, pathways and even arches; add to that accent lighting and a garden bench, and you could be in business.

2) The main entryway - Once you have the potential buyer past your front yard, the next thing they see is the entryway (assuming they come through your front door). Think of this as the "curb appeal part 2" if you will. First the floors; whatever you install in the main entryway as far as flooring, doesn't necessarily have to be in the entire home. Think of the entryway as a room in itself, even though it is visually connected with one or more rooms in your home. What works now, doesn't necessarily work in 10 years. Your best bet is to go for the timeless look. Either large tiles (in warmer climates) or quality wood flooring are good choices. Also, having an attractive light fixture in the entryway will do much to invite your potential buyers to look further. Make sure that you maintain the wood flooring by occasionally staining and polishing. If you are unsure of how to do this or haven't done it before, this would be one project that would be best left to the professionals.

3) The home theatre - With the advent of the digital age and high definition TV and DVD players, more buyers are turning to homes that, instead of a living room, are being built with a home theatre. In fact, in a recent survey, 40% of buyers don't care if there is even a living room. Instead, this area is being split into two main living areas, the "great room" or casual area to entertain guests and the media room. Consider this when designing a home to be built where square footage may be limited. However, if you are remodeling an existing room to be your theatre, keep a few things in mind. First, consider good acoustics in your initial design. Technology will continue to change thus making much of the electronics in your system obsolete in 5-10 years, however, the need to project the maximum amount of sound from whatever equipment you happen to be using will remain a constant. Secondly, opt for furniture that is comfortable, not trendy. The expensive theatre seats may look cool, but most often, you will want to be able to stretch out instead on your leather couch. And lastly, have an attractive method to block outside light. Using blackout type curtains are a good idea, though maybe not the most attractive. There are also blackout screens that work well. At any rate, the goal is to be able to get the most luminosity from your screen, whether it be a big screen, plasma or projector. Bottom line is, the theatre room will be the closer to draw in the man when selling the home.

4) The Kitchen - This is typically the woman's first love. If the kitchen isn't right, you could lose the sale. Trends for kitchen designs change frequently, however, some things remain a constant. One very popular item that is being seen in more and more homes is the granite counter. Having the granite count in a slab is preferable to the granite tiles. Several years ago, there wasn't very much available in this area, however, recently, more and more builder have been offering this as part of their package in their standard homes. Thus, the cost has come way down. If you want to give a lifetime appearance in the kitchen, the granite counter is a good start. Also, center islands have made a comeback. Having a

granite slab on the center island with perhaps a bar sink is a popular feature. Even with the price having come down significantly for granite, it is still about twice as expensive as corian, so don't feel the need to put it everywhere. You can mix a quality ceramic tile for example on the backsplash. Then, don't forget the appliances. Ivory refrigerators and stoves just don't cut it. This will be an expensive part of the project, depending on what you buy, but keep in mind that the prices vary widely from brand to brand. Find a good store that carries a large selection of different appliances and name brands and ask a lot of questions. Stainless steel is very popular and goes well with a lot of styles of granite.

5) The Home Office - 10 years ago, when you told someone you work at home, you were probably labeled as a stay at home mom or dad. Today, telecommuting has become commonplace. With large corporations downsizing and technology advancing, it is easier and more practical than ever to set up employees at home. Whether it be for part or full time, working at home is definitely the wave of the future, not to mention a reality today. If you don't already have an extra room to convert into an office, then you will probably have to leave this one alone. However, with the needs of families changing, a 4-bedroom home is not all that essential anymore. In fact, in some areas, a 4-bedroom home is harder to sell than a typical 3-bedroom home. If you already have that 4th bedroom, consider converting it to a home office. Opt for furniture that is neutral and flexible. By flexible, I mean to have the ability to change the design and configuration of the room fairly easily. Different families have different needs. Some use the office exclusively as a work place. Other may share this with the family and combine personal and business tasks in the same area. Make it easily changeable. Next, consider built-ins, such as bookcases, credenzas and cabinets. This accomplishes two things. First, it give the finished appearance that this was always meant as an office and second, can be a great space saver to be able to put other things and keep the room from looking too cluttered. Then, have at least one to three CAT5 network connections available for the office. This would depend on the computing needs for your family, but having at least one connection will insure that you will have internet access. Depending on your knowledge and of course cost budget, consider adding things such as an additional phone line, separate power circuits (for office machinery) and separate work stations. If you operate a full time business at home, it might make sense to add a separate meter for water, gas and electric so that you can easily itemize your expenses at the end of the year.