

Domain

How to Renovate Your Home for a Quick Sale

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Before and after of a \$20,000 renovation in Lilyfield: Can you improve sale prospects by spending less and thinking smarter? Photo: Finders Keepers.

You don't have to spend a fortune on renovations to have prospective buyers queuing up to buy your home, but you do need to be smart about where you spend the money.

A few years ago when I owned a property renovation business in London, an estate agent called me to take a look at a house she was having trouble selling. It had been on the market for 18 months without an offer.

The owner, Kirstin, had two young children and had recently split up with her husband. She was desperate to sell so that she could move on with her life. The family lived in a large

three-storey, four-bedroom period family home in a popular area of south London. But as I toured the house, it soon became clear why the for sale sign still stood outside.

Every room was full of clutter. Mounds of paperwork and empty coffee cups covered every surface in the living room. The kitchen was dirty and there was a large off-putting damp patch on the wall. Upstairs, toys and piles of clothes littered the bedroom floors. The carpets were stained and the beds were unmade. Kirstin's favourite colour was orange and there were bright orange feature walls in the main rooms. Pictures destined for the walls were still lying on the floor below where they should have been hanging.

However, the biggest obstacle was getting Kirstin to understand that any of this chaos was deterring potential buyers. "Nobody wants to see your unmade bed, dirty dishes in the kitchen, shampoo bottles in the bathroom or clothes on the floor," I explained. "Once someone gets a glimpse of a lifestyle that doesn't appeal to them they are never going to buy your house."

Reluctantly Kirstin agreed to a small-budget renovation and to empty the house of clutter, put personal items away and start cleaning in the hope she could secure a sale for the full asking price. Without it she could not start her new life. I arranged for a skip to be delivered outside her home and encouraged her to throw away anything she hadn't used in the last six months.



Buyer's agent Lisa Bradley says there's a lot you can do on a small budget: "Clean it, tidy it, gap it, paint it and fix it." Photo: Louise Kennerley

The first rule for selling a property quickly without spending large amounts on renovations is decluttering and tidying, agrees Lisa Bradley, a licensed real estate buyers agent from

Finders Keepers in Sydney. "I do a lot of property detailing and low-cost, high-impact renovations myself so I know how important first impressions are," she says.

Bradley says there is a lot the vendor can do to improve their property for sale on a modest budget. "Make it look loved and cared for. Embark on some serious property detailing. Clean bathrooms,

especially the tiles and shower recesses, ovens and cook tops. Let the light in and replace dated blinds and or curtains. Clean it, tidy it, gap it, paint it and fix it," she says.

"Fix anything that comes with the house and is broken, like the front gate or loose paving tiles" says Bradley "If you can paint and do small handy-man jobs yourself then the cost is just your time and materials."

Kirstin's entire renovation budget was just over \$3000 with the bulk of it allocated on painting, repairs and cosmetic updates in the bathroom. A contractor was engaged to do the painting, repairs and tidy up the garden.

However, disagreements soon followed as she protested about painting over her beloved orange walls with neutral paint. "But I love my orange walls," she said. "We need to turn your home into a blank canvas for someone else to project their lifestyle on to," I told her. "Paint the walls and always use neutral colours," agrees Bradley. "Nothing bright that might offend. Nobody ever says 'Oh I hate that white wall.'"

In Kirstin's bathroom and kitchen, broken windows and chipped mirrors and tiles were repaired and the walls were freshly painted.

"A kitchen or bathroom update can make a big difference to a sale," says Bradley. "Think cosmetic not structural. Work to improve what's there. Ugly bathrooms can be greatly improved by detailing. It's cheap and easy to paint the tiles (use proper paint, not wall paint) and replace the toilet, basin, vanity and mirrors."

"Kitchens can be updated with paint too. Paint any dark timber trims with light colours, replace door knobs and handles. Clean and detail it. Take all the kids' drawings and party photos off the fridge.

"The key is not to spend too much on a clearly dated kitchen. Expect the new owners will want to do that themselves. Just ensure that it is good enough for potential buyers to think 'I could live with that until we have the money to replace it'."

In the garden, make sure it is jungle-free, says Bradley. "People look for low maintenance outdoor spaces. Replace dead grass with new grass or pavers. Trim back bushy overgrown trees. If you want to plant new trees or flowers get mature, half-grown ones."

In less than three weeks all the renovation work was completed in Kirstin's house and the property was re-marketed. The real estate agent was impressed. The cosmetic changes revealed a beautiful family home, clean, tidy and ready to move in to. Two weeks later the

property was under offer and sold for the full asking price. Finally, Kirstin and her young family were able to move out and start their new life.