

## Improve Your Curb Appeal

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*Leah Betancourt, Staff Writer*

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First impressions are often the only chance you have to shine.

For sellers who are trying to compete in what many are calling a buyers' market, curb appeal could make a house sell that much faster.

Jeanette Fisher, an author in Lake Elsinore, Calif., who teaches college courses on interior design psychology and seminars on real estate investing, said curb appeal should be called curb allure.

She said the outside of a home should be so attractive that it makes buyers want to get out of their car, go up to the front door and want to go in the front door and want to go inside.

"It's really to entice the buyer to see what's inside," Fisher said. "It needs to be more than pretty. It needs to be attractive to draw the home shopper inside."

She said that most people need to get into the mindset that their home is a product and think of buyers as home shoppers or customers.

Some sellers may think sprucing up a home with cosmetic changes is fluff.

Fisher said that homeowners either use curb appeal or another motivation for buyers in selling their house. She said buyers who want an investment property won't pay full price for the home. Fisher offers a free 21-stop action plan online to prepare homes for selling at [JeanetteFisher.com](http://JeanetteFisher.com).

"A home seller, (in order) to get top dollar, needs a buyer who wants to live in the house," she said.

### Make A Plan

Fisher said that first, every home seller needs to make a plan and figure out who their buyer is and tailor the home to that profile.

She said that a first-time home buyers are not picky, and curb appeal may not be as important. But if it's an upscale home, curb appeal is 100 percent important and that a professional should probably be hired if the seller can't do a first-class job.

Other steps in the curb-allure plan are to figure out how to sell it, either with a real estate agent or on his or her own, and find out what the homeowner needs to do to sell it.

### Do Your Research

Before doing anything to the home, Fisher said the seller should run a title search on the home to make sure there are no liens on the property.

Once the title search is complete, start executing the curb appeal plan. She said most of the changes anyone can do on their own home.

"I never recommend that people go into credit card debt because you need good credit to buy the next home," she said. "You don't want to spend more than what you're going to make from the sale."

### Making Changes

She said curb allure requires that the whole property be manicured by removing dead limbs from the yard.

"I like to see lawns that are edged. Mulch is a really important part of a landscape to make it look finished," Fisher said.

She said the curb allure needs to make the home sparkle, to draw the eye toward the front door by doing things such as adding potted plants near the entrance, or in the winter, putting evergreens into colored pots near the door.

### All Eyes On The Front Door

She said sellers should use three to four exterior paint colors and line everything up so it goes to toward the front door, or the door could be the third or fourth color. But there shouldn't be any peeling paint on the exterior.

Why is the front door so important in creating curb allure?

"It's like the exclamation point of the house. When you look at a face, you focus on the eyes. Where the people go in (to the house), it's what is the main focal point," Fisher said.

She stressed that the garage door should be painted to match the sides of the home, otherwise if it is painted another color, it overwhelms the front door and takes away its focus.

### Take It Inside

Don't forget the interior. Curb appeal on the home's inside is called "staging," said Fischer.

The process involves arranging the furniture and other items so that the buyer can connect with the home emotionally.

She said that home staging is getting the interior to look as good as you can. A key component is making the home look like the buyer's future home, not the seller's.

"I think it's really important not to have clutter or accessories on the wall. Every time you have something on the wall, it stops the eye from moving," she said.

She stressed that the seller does not want the home shopper to look at little details.

"They don't want to look at your family pictures on the wall. It doesn't say 'It's my house,'" she said.

She said the first thing buyers do when they enter a home is they cross the threshold, look down and then look up at the wall immediately in front of them. She suggested having a nice entry rug on the floor.

Once inside the home, shoppers spend three to four minutes in each room.

Fisher said the home seller's job is to get the shopper to spend time in each room. That way's there's more opportunity to sell the home.

"The power of smell is our strongest sense. It's like the deepest emotional connection. It's going to make a powerful impression on them," she said.

### Skip Boring White Walls

Interior paint color can also tie into the buyers' emotional connection to the home.

"Don't paint everything white. It doesn't do anything for emotions. I like walls with colors. Model homes don't have walls painted white," she said.

Fisher added that empty nesters and older people don't see some colors well, such as gray. She suggested using colors such as greens, blues and pinks.

She said that when staging the home, sellers should concentrate on the best room in the house first, and that can include the back yard. This depends on the type of home shopper that the seller wants to target, and it's the room that will be the biggest benefit to that type of buyer.

Fischer stressed the importance of the kitchen and updating the cabinets. She said opting for cabinets that look like furniture is popular now. She suggested painting the upper cabinets one color and making the lower cabinets a deeper shade of that same color.

An inexpensive way to update a Formica counter is to use boating paint over it, although Fischer does not recommend that for everyone.

Staging the kitchen also includes making sure all the appliances are working, eliminating clutter on the counters by putting away appliances and fixing any leaky faucets.

### The Rest Of The Home



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In the winter, she suggested adding softness to kitchens and bathrooms with fabric, such as by adding towels and texture.

Fisher said the master bedroom is also an important room in staging the home.

She said to make the bed the main focus and that the room needs to be very intimate, romantic and not cluttered. She recommended taking the TV off the dresser, for instance.

Fisher stressed that curb allure and home staging are imperative in order to sell a home for top dollar. Putting in the extra effort can pay off.

She recalled selling an appealing home in three hours for \$3,000 more than the asking price.

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