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Tips for Showing a Small House

by Michele Dawson

With the median size of new homes on the rise, you might worry about trying to sell your home if it's on the small side.

Indeed, the size of the typical new single-family home continues to grow, according to a National Association of Home Builders report titled "The Next Decade for Housing." The median size of a new home today is about 2,100 square feet; in 1970 the median square footage was about 1,400.

Some of today's buyers are using the extra space for guest rooms, but many are incorporating home offices, studies or hobby rooms into their homes, according to NAHB.

Despite the trends, small homes have their own advantages when you're selling. For starters, there's a strong demand for entry-level homes. First-time homeowners comprised 40 percent of the total home purchases (17 million purchases) in 1999, according to the November 2001 U.S. Housing Market Conditions Report, published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

So, if your smallish home is on the market, you'll want to do everything you can to get top dollar for it. Some things to think about when you're preparing your home for showing include:

- **Eliminating the clutter.** Clutter is a downfall for any house, but in a small house, the more clutter the potential buyer sees, the less house he'll see. Keep the kitchen counters clear, eliminate all those knickknacks scattered about the house, and keep your accessories and artwork simple.
- **Curb appeal.** Remember - first impressions are everything. Let your home make a strong impact the moment anyone pulls up alongside the house. Spruce up your landscaping, keep your lawn manicured, plant a few annuals out front, make sure your front door area is free from clutter, bikes, skates, and the like.
- **Letting the light in.** This is a general rule for any home that will be put under the microscope by potential buyers, but is even more applicable for small homes. Open all blinds and curtains, and turn on lights throughout the house if you know real estate agents will be showing the home that day. Blinds that are the same color as the wall give a flowing, roomy feeling.

- Keeping the walls light. Dark-colored walls will make a room appear even smaller than it is. You may want to consider sprucing up your walls with a fresh coat of paint anyway, so stick to a light color. To create the effect of more light, paint the ceiling a color lighter than the walls.
- Paying attention to your furniture. If you have a lot of furniture, put some of it in storage. Then, think about the layout and focal point of the room and decide whether you're trying to accentuate roominess or coziness. If you're going for spaciousness, keep the large pieces against the wall. Furniture color should be similar to the wall and floor color. Too much will look cluttered and will subtract from the spacious feeling you're trying to achieve. If you're striving for a cozy feel, select dark pieces, whether it's fabric or wood. Go for big patterns on one or two pieces, placed away from the wall.
- Mirrors. Strategically placed mirrors can help make a room appear larger.
- Tall lines. Try to choose accessories that are long and narrow. Long, thin lamps and plants can help you achieve a sense of height versus accessories that take up a lot of horizontal space.
- Accentuating your back yard. If you have a decent patio area, present this space as an extension of the limited living space. Display a nice patio table with a patio covering or umbrella, spruce up your landscape, and brighten up the area with some containers filled with colorful annuals. An inviting back yard will stand out as a plus for many home shoppers, particularly in warm-weather states.

In summary, let common sense prevail. Look at the house with fresh eyes and from the perspective of someone who has never seen the house before. With so many first-time homebuyers out there, your biggest job will be making sure your home looks better than others in the same price range.

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