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'Price war and a beauty pageant'

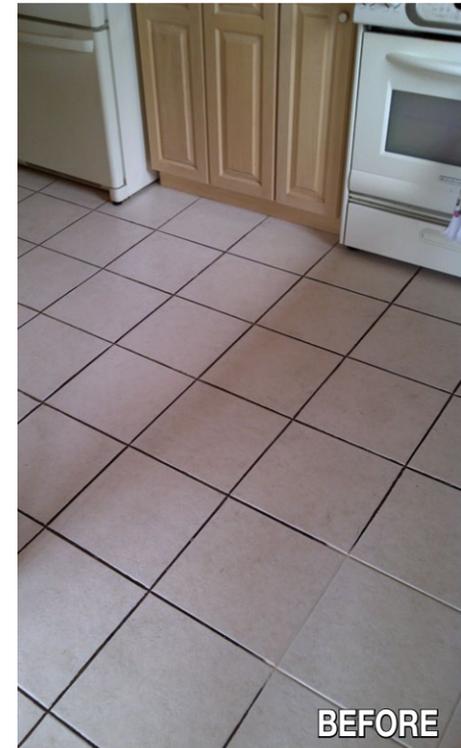
That kitchen update is great, but a home's sales pitch actually starts at the curb, designers say

BY CHERRI GREENO

When Cynthia and John Savu put their Kitchener house up for sale last summer, they had one simple goal – to sell it quickly for a good price.

In fact, they sold their home on Southridge Drive in just one week – for over asking price. "I attribute it all to them," Cynthia says of home stagers and designers Alana Merritt and

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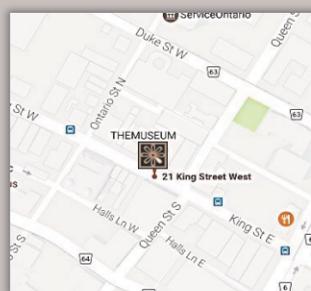
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Heather Cook.

Merritt and Cook, who own Rooms in Bloom, not only recommended updates inside the home, but also to the exterior.

One recommendation surprised the homeowners. They suggested that simply painting the garage door, front door and shutters would transform the home.

So that's what the Savus did. Their dark blue shutters and front door were painted black. The light grey garage door was painted to match.

"I never would have thought about doing that," Cynthia says. "I wish I had done it sooner because it looks so nice. The house just popped."

Merritt and Cook say many homeowners have problems looking at their home objectively. They are attached to their home and blind to what others may or may not see. And that could mean potential buyers simply move on to look at other houses that suit their taste.

"In a hot market, neglecting your home's exterior may not cost you a sale – but it may cost you multiple offers and, as a result, tens of thousands of dollars," says Cliff Rego of Rego Realty Inc., Brokerage.

"Presentation matters now more than ever."

"You only get one chance to make a first impression," says Jim McIntyre of Re/Max Solid Gold Realty.

They say you're not supposed to judge a book by its cover but people do judge, McIntyre says. "People buy with their eyes."

McIntyre says co-ordinating colours, making sure the garden is tidy and de-cluttering toys and garbage bins will do wonders when selling a house.

Merritt and Cook say many younger homebuyers are drawn to updated and professionally staged properties. In fact, they say, these younger buyers are likely to spend between six to 15 per cent more on an updated property.

"It's a price war and a beauty pageant out there," Merritt says. "Homes that show well online and in person have a better chance

of getting buyer interest and solid offers at market value – or above.

"Buyers have what we term 'model home mentality,' wherein they want a home that works for them and their family now – not after they have spent time and money updating it. For them, there is real value in buying a property that meets all their immediate needs, and then some."

And the exterior of your home may be even more important than updating the interior.

"It serves as a snapshot of what people will see on the inside," Merritt says.

Little things such as modernizing your house numbers, defining your flower beds and updating exterior lights, all go a long way in changing the look of a home.

Robert Mansour, an agent on the Call Cleaves team at Keller Williams, points out that today's potential homeowners will look at photos online before even thinking about driving by a house or booking a viewing.

"We are seeing lots of interest from our out-of-town buyers, coming from the (Greater Toronto Area) and beyond, and they are competing with local buyers," Mansour says.

"In most cases, they are making a decision based on photos they see online, with the first photo usually being the front of the house and its curb appeal.

"Sellers who want the big, over-asking offers and a competitive multi-offer sale of their home should consider that without great curb appeal, the out-of-town buyers will look at other properties instead."

Sometimes, adding curb appeal may mean hiring a professional but, Mansour says, the results can be worth any added expense. Good curb appeal will often mean the difference between 10 people coming to an open house or 20, he says.

"Many people spend money on the inside of their home, painting and updating the cupboards, but they underestimate the value of curb appeal to inspire buyers to bring in an offer," he says. ☺



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