



Chas Everitt



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

2008 has got off to an uncertain start for many people, with rolling blackouts, strange weather patterns and stock exchange volatility all contributing to a general mood of caution. And this is reflected in the property market in the increasing length of time it is taking buyers to make purchasing decisions, and in the higher number of homes they are viewing before they do.

Now much has been said in the light of these market conditions about sellers "getting serious" and being "willing to negotiate" but not nearly enough has been written about the role of the agent - although in the current scenario, everything actually comes down to whether the agent knows his/ her stuff or not.

A good agent, for example, will enable the seller to arrive at the correct asking price before the property is listed for sale. A good agent will have the resources and channels available to be able to market the property well. A good agent will only introduce qualified buyers to the property. And a good agent will negotiate skillfully to bring about a swift sale at the best possible price.

A bad agent will do none of this. Consequently, it is now more important than ever for home sellers to take time and care when choosing which agent to work with, to claim their right to first class service, and to firmly turn their backs on the amateurs who drift in and out of the real estate industry on a whim and whose only motivation is a quick buck.

Your Area Specialist:

Chas Everitt International sales agents have all the latest market information regarding local property values at their fingertips - and are committed to the highest standards of personal service when it comes to selling your home. In addition, the Chas Everitt International property group offers you, the homeowner, the best possible exposure for your property in both national and international markets. So if you are thinking of selling your home, call your nearest Chas Everitt International office today for the name of your local area specialist - or visit www.ChasEveritt.com

Every month the **Property Signpost Newsletter** will be issued to all our subscribers, filled with real estate information to help you make an informed decision, whether you are buying or selling a property.

In This Week's Newsletter:

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Look for the sparkle under the sadness

If you're in the market for a property bargain, don't discount that sad suburban house your agent insists on showing you - it may just be a diamond in the rough waiting to reveal its true potential.

With property prices at historic highs, it's not surprising that many buyers are looking around for value. And older suburbs often offer larger properties at the same price, or even less, than new housing stock.

The trick in finding value is a change in mindset. Bargain-hunters should choose substance over style and look hard at the underlying potential of homes that do not necessarily attract them at first glance. Experienced renovators know that a home that is drab but sound can be redecorated for a relatively small capital outlay, which will not only improve its looks, but also its value.

Dirt and grime are easy and relatively cheap to fix - a bit of scrubbing and a fresh coat of paint can do wonders to improve the whole appearance of a home. Shabby carpets can be easily replaced while worn floor tiles can be carpeted. Wooden floors, even if neglected, are a find - re-sanding and re-varnishing them will restore them to glory at a fraction of the price of new wooden floors or the modern composite wooden flooring now on offer.

Tatty bathroom fixtures can be given a new lease of life with re-enamelling while drab kitchens can be modernised at a reasonable cost by retaining cupboard carcasses and fitting new doors and work surfaces.

Mowing the lawn and pulling up weeds can quickly spruce up neglected gardens. Bare patches in the lawn can be fixed by laying some instant lawn while judicious pruning will tidy overgrown trees and shrubs and go a long way to achieving an overall manicured look.

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Keeping your neighbours sweet

Neighbours are a fact of life - and you can make your own life easier by keeping your neighbours sweet and talking to them "over the fence" instead of through lawyers.

This is especially true if you are planning any renovations that may intrude on your neighbours' right to enjoy their own properties.

In the first instance, it is common courtesy to let your neighbours know what you are planning, how long you expect the project to take and to what degree they will be inconvenienced. It's also a good idea to show them your builders' plans and discuss what impact your renovations will have on them in the long-term - but don't expect them to be accommodating if, for instance, your planned balcony will have a wonderful view of their swimming pool.

To prevent boundary disputes, you should also make sure that your project will not encroach on your neighbour's property. Consult a surveyor if in doubt.

Then once the project is under way, try to limit noise and dust. It is often impossible not to employ noisy power tools, but your neighbours' patience will surely be tested if your work gang powers up at the crack of dawn. Try to limit use of power tools to normal office hours. Rubble is another necessary evil of renovations. You can keep relations cordial by arranging for a skip or a contractor to regularly remove the rubble that piles up on the pavement. Empty cement bags blowing about in the wind are a definite no-no.

Finally, once your renovations are complete, you really should invite your neighbours over for a roof-wetting party to thank them for their patience.

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Open up your living room

Modern homes are getting more compact and while small kitchens, bathrooms and even bedrooms do not seem to bother most people, a spacious living area is highly desirable.

The living area is usually the hub of a home and takes a lot of traffic. It therefore makes sense to put available space to good use or, if possible, enlarge the room. It is even worth considering structural changes if available space is taken up by a finicky little entrance hall, for example, as was the fashion a couple of decades ago.

Alternatively, combining an adjoining living room and dining room by knocking out an internal wall can make it easier to arrange furniture and create an illusion of more space. And installing a buffet bar or large counter between the dining area and kitchen may further enhance the feeling of spaciousness.

A second option is to incorporate a patio or deck into the living space by installing French windows or wide sliding doors leading outside. At the same time, try to eliminate swing doors that take up space when opened and opt for sliding doors where possible.

And thirdly, it might be possible to raise the ceiling, enhancing the feeling of spaciousness by creating more volume vertically.

But even if your structural options are limited, there are several tricks to create an illusion of space, including the use of lightweight, versatile furniture that can easily be moved around to adapt the space to different needs.

Clutter looks worse in small rooms and storage chests that can double up as seating or table space are a good idea. Simple window treatments with clean lines also work better than elaborate swags or heavy drapes.

Lighter colours for walls and furniture will reflect light, making the room appear larger, while reflective surfaces such as large mirrors can visually double the size of a room. And to visually enlarge a room at night, you can use several light sources that create pools of light, instead of a single central light fitting.

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No time to neglect home maintenance

Although the monthly costs of homeownership such as home loan instalments and property taxes are on the rise, this is no time to slack off on maintenance.

Keeping your home in top condition does save you money in the long run, and in the current tight economic conditions the old adage that "a stitch in time saves nine" should be kept in mind. For instance, a leaking roof that is not speedily repaired could lead to other problems such as damaged ceiling boards, paintwork, and even walls - and additional repair costs.

Homeowners should thus aim to take an inventory at least once a year to check for potential problems and list these in order of priority to be rectified. Such a proactive approach will avoid many of the secondary problems that can be caused by faulty plumbing or electrical wiring, and damaged roofs or foundations.

Older homes that have been neglected through the years may initially require more work (and more money), but by starting with the most urgent repairs and gradually fixing more minor faults, owners can eventually bring their maintenance budget down.

Regular maintenance also enables homeowners to derive more enjoyment from their property and of course when the time comes to sell and put the property on show to potential buyers, it will be much easier and cheaper to spruce up a well-maintained home than a long-neglected one.

